CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Background of the study

In this day and age, with the current technological advancement and the internet, people have the choice to use online platform as their media for communicating with other people (McKenna & Bargh, 2000). People are driven to create their own content to engage with the entire world. Some of the content that people use to express themselves on the internet is memes. Internet memes itself are usually used to express funny jokes or usually to criticize recent social phenomenon using irony, but now due to the internet and social media accessibility for everyone, while giving them the power to stay anonymous, internet users could share their negative opinion through memes and get away with it. One of those negative opinions could be sexism.

Sexism or prejudice/discrimination based on a person's sex or gender (Corcoran & Roberts, 2015), is something that has existed in our society for a long time. Sexism can affect any gender, but women are the ones who're most commonly victimized. Sexism itself can be defined as ones' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, and cultural practices that shows negative impressions of individuals based upon their gender or support unequal status of women and men" (Swim & Hyers, 2009).

It is argued that "Even though we think that we are not sexist, many of our actions are still influenced by gender stereotyping and misconceptions about men and women that have been passed down through the generations" (Firestone, 2016). It prevents us from fully achieving gender equality. Those misconceptions about men and women from early days could lead to benevolent sexism, a type of sexism that is being delivered in a positive disguise, which can normalize gender inequality because those ideas that have long been internalized by them (Hubby, 2020), therefore it is important for everyone to be aware with this problem.

Sexism can come in many different aspects like employment rate, positions in a job, wage, participation in decision-making positions, workshare in the household and childcare (The World Bank, 2011; European Union, 2017). Moreover, sexism not only can affect those social practice aspects, but also affects the English language and the gender's portrayal in media. For example, sexism that exists in english language is the usage of word specific gender stereotype like "secretary" or "executive ", which both words occupied by a specific role for a specific gender (Kennison, S.M., Trofe, J.L, 2003). Sexism also can be seen in social practices, like how women only earn 79 cents for every dollar men make in 2019 (CNBC, 2019).

All of the sexism practices above are caused due to people's shared belief of prescriptive stereotypes which are related to the characteristics that women and men should or shouid not have. (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). Sexism tend to appear because of the shared belief within society, therefore, sometimes people are likely to

react more positive and supportive towards a behavior that is consistent with their given role. The shared belief that people have are that men have Agentic traits (ambitious, assertive) and on the other hand, women are belief to have more of a Communal traits (caring, sensitive) (Eagly & Wood, 2012).

While there are many kinds of sexism exists in our society, it has been argued that online sexism and harassment are everywhere ever since the rise of social media and internet users that helped it spread rapidly. Many research that addresses this topic appears to have decreased and fails to acknowledge the ''power and prevalence of hostility on the Internet, as well as its gendered nature, and its ethical and material implications'' (Jane, 2015). Additionally, in a post feminist era like now, where feminism are positioned as irrelevant (McRobbie, 2008), it is argued that lack of a useful understanding of postfeminism has implications for its use in cultural or media analysis which makes it possible for sexism to appear in new forms masquerading as jokes, irony and humour because any attempt to offer a critique of such remarks is dismissed by references to the critic's presumed stupidity or membership of the 'feminist thought police' (Gill, 2007). A previous study about the related topic is thoroughly explored by Nasrina Siddiqi et al (2018) entitled "Analysing Threads of Sexism in New Age Humour: A Content Analysis of Internet Memes". The journal article discusses how humour in social media increases tolerance towards sexism through a detailed analysis of, both, texts as well as imagery of sexist online memes

by employing social constructionism theory. They found that sexist humour can cultivate tolerance of sexist attitudes by making it seem less offensive.

Initially, the term *meme* is a biologoical metaphore that was coined by Richard Dawkins (1976). Now, Stated by Carlos Mauricio Castaño Díaz (2011) the meaning of meme has evolved into something to describe a unit of information (idea, concept or belief), which replicates by passing on via Internet (e-mail, chat, forum, social networks, etc.) in the shape of a hyper-link, video, image, or phrase (). in The word *meme* was used to label this type of self-replicating cultural information, and it was derived from the Greek word mimema, which means "something imitated".Within today's culture, a meme is simply a unit of cultural transmission, which may represent an aspect of a culture such as language, fashion, songs – things which evolve, change and spread. Moreover, Brodie (1996) stated that "A meme is a unit of information in the mind whose existence influences events such that more copies of itself get created in other minds.". that means that memes are also contagious. Internet memes can now spread from person to person through imitation due to today's technologies. They could share it by e-mail, social media, and other websites. The memes also often take the form of pictures, videos, or other media containing cultural information thathave been deliberately altered by individuals.

One of the popular meme in recent years is *Boys Vs. Girls* internet memes which dated back from mid-2017 (knowyourmeme.com,2019). This meme showcases gender stereotyping issues towards female gender based on comparisons of the

perceived behaviors of boys and girls in various scenarios. It is taking gender stereotypes to a whole new level of absurdity. Everything from boys being violent and ferocious thugs to girls being over-emotional and boy-crazed are displayed on these memes.

There are several previous studies that explore sexism on of them is a study entitled "Old jokes, new media –Online sexism and constructions of gender in Internet" By Drakett Jessica et al (2018). The study explores a uniquely technologically-bound type of humour by adopting a feminist, social-constructionist approach to examine the content of popular Internet memes since online sexism and harassment are often reframed as ''acceptable'' by constructing them as a form of humour. They found that, the image macros status as humorous objects works to permit or sanitise their content. They also found that, whilst image macros analysed reproduce many well-worn discourses concerning gender, they mobilise these discourses in a new medium in order for heteronormative, masculinised identities to claim rightful ownership of this medium and the spaces in which it presents itself.

Another study discussing sexism is in an article entitled "What Did He Mean by that? Humor Decreases Attributions of Sexism and Confrontation of Sexist Jokes" by Robyn K. Mallett et al (2016). The study investigated whether delivering a sexist remark as a joke, makes it harder to determine if someone saying sometihng sexist or not. They uses 2 kinds of experiments to see how women actually responded to the sexist remark and coded for confrontation. The method they used is bootstrapping

procedures described by Preacher and Hayes (2004) to determine if the effect of sexist comment on participants' assertive responses to their partner was mediated by how sexist the partner was perceived to be. In conclusion to their study, they found out that humor decreased perceptions that the speaker was sexist. It also decreases the amount of confrontation because humor can make sexist messages more dangerous and difficult to confront than serious remarks.

Some researcher has also studied internet memes similar to *Boys Vs. Girls* memes in the journal article written by Dewi Rahmi Surya et al (2017) entitled "Internet Memes : Representation of Indonesian Political Culture in Jakarta Gubernatorial Election 2017". The author of this journal analyzed three Jakarta Gubernational Election 2017 internet memes on Instagram using semiotic analysis theory by Roland Barthes to reveal the form of political culture which developed during the Jakarta Gubernatorial Election in Indonesia in 2017. The study found that the political culture of memes has evolved into a form of critisism towards indonesian society.

Furthermore, in 2018, a research by Kavitha.G (2018) titled "A Study of Memes using Semiotics" explores 3 samples which are image macro memes from Tamil the Hindu newspaper and WhatsApp Palakkad page using semiotic analysis theory by Roland Barthes with the aim to know how the memes are created and how the reality or social phenomena is represented in the memes. The author of this journal found that the relationship between signifier and the signified helps to decode

the message properly, the author also found that the social phenomenon happening in the society is represented through the memes.

In addition, a research related to memes also conducted by L. Grundlingh (2017) titled "Memes as speech acts", The research argues that memes are successfully used for communication purposes because certain memes (specifically image macros) are essentially speech acts and that is why we are able to understand them and communicate with each other using them. The author of this research uses the concept of multimodality by Michael Halliday and Semiotic resources by Van Leeuwen. This research found that not all of the memes mentioned in their research can fulfil the criteria for all the categories of speech acts, but it is entirely possible that memes can be created for the purpose of fulfilling specific illocutionary acts.

From the explanation above, many researchers have done research about internet memes. However, the amount of studies that uses *Boys Vs. Girls* memes as its corpus are still scrace, therefore the researcher intends to use *Boys Vs. Girls* meme as its corpus. On the other hand, the researcher intends to focus on finding out the sexism representation in *Boys Vs. Girls* memes due to the reason that sexist behaviour are indicated within *Boys Vs. Girls* memes, like stereotyping certain gender behaviour in various situation such as depicting Girls behaviour in the locker room as feminine as possible Vs, Boys behaviour in the locker room which usually being depicted with an absurd and inappropriate behaviour.

This Research will focus on giving an in-depth analysis of the Sexist related symbols and implications within the *Boys Vs. Girls* memes using Kress and Van Leeuwen theory of metafunctions to explore how the picture represents their idea (Representational metafunction), how the picture addresses their viewers (Interpersonal metafunction), and how the picture is composed to convey the meaning (Compositional metafunction). Meanwhile to analyze the written text, the researcher is going to use Haliday's theory of transitivity and nominal group.

1.2   Research Question

Based on the background of the study above, the problem of the study is formulated as follows:

How is sexism portrayed in *Boys Vs. Girls* memes?

1.3   Objective of the study

Based on the research problems above, the objective of the study is presented below:

To describe the sexism portrayed in *Boys Vs. Girls* memes.

1.4   Significances of the study

In accordance with the background and the objectives of the study, it is expected that the result of the study will contribute a great significance to the media and culture field of study, especially regarding the issue of sexism on the internet. Furthermore, the study may also be useful as a reference for other researchers when they conduct research about internet memes as well as providing awareness to readers of this study about the existence of sexism in the digital world.