CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Background of the Study

Modern entertainment industry is heavily dominated by western media. The media, especially television, video, radio and youth magazines, provide alternative objects of admiration to entertain the masses, among them are pop stars. The application of the word 'star' connotes publicly recognized success, and it is often in this manner that the terms 'pop star' or 'rock star' are applied to acclaimed performers of popular music (Bennett et al, 2018, p.1). In Richard Dyer's book *Stars*, first published in 1979, a star is categorized into three areas: the star as a construction, the star as a commodity, and the star as an ideology. The construction of stars is further examined by Marshall (1997) in which he explains that stars are constructed by the industry and the audience. In relation to the involvement of the audience, Su Holmes and Sean Redmond (2006, p. 4) argue 'fandom, and the construction of stars and celebrities, has always involved the "search" for the "authentic" person that lies behind the manufactured mask of fame'. Therefore, various media texts come together to form a particular star image. This image is later presented in a consistent manner to the public eye to create a certain notion or opinion.

In Western media, the image of pop stars is often objectified and hyper-sexualized, especially when it comes to female pop stars. They are primarily the objects and subjects of sexualization, in which their body is perceived to be existing for the

sexual pleasure of others (Karsay & Matthes, 2016, p.2). One expression of this sexualization is a porn-styled aesthetic that fashions hyper-femininity (e.g. stiletto heels, heavy make-up) and hyper-sexuality (e.g. body-exposing and/or clothing emphasizing breast and hips; being perpetually sexually desiring) into a hetero-sexiness (Attwood, 2009; Dobson, 2011; McRobbie, 2009, as cited in Jackson, 2015) through pop music videos, live performances, and appearance in various media outlets. Empirical studies have shown that music videos (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011; Frisby & Aubrey, 2012) and print advertisements (Graff, Murnen, & Krause, 2013; Stankiewicz & Rosselli, 2008) often present women in sexually objectifying ways (Karsay & Matthes, 2016, p. 1). Singers such as Lady Gaga, Miley Cyrus, and Nicki Minaj, who often flaunt their sexual appeal in media are what the public expect to see from female pop stars today. This kind of objectifying presentation is considered particularly problematic from an ethical point of view, as it leads to partial dehumanization (Heflick, Goldenberg, Cooper, & Puvia, 2011; Loughnan et al., 2010; Nussbaum, 1995, as cited in Karsay, 2016), in which there is a notion that being overtly sexual is the only way to gain the media's attention.

It has been pointed out by some feminist thinkers that women in our society are more identified and associated with their bodies than are men, and, to a greater extent than men, they are valued for how they look (Bartky 1990; Bordo 1993, p.143). In order to gain social acceptability, women are under constant pressure to correct their bodies and appearance more generally, and to make them conform to the ideals of feminine appearance of their time, the so-called 'norms of feminine appearance' (the

standards of appearance women feel they should be living up to) (Saul 2003, p.144). Some feminists have argued that, in being preoccupied with their looks, women treat themselves as things to be decorated and gazed upon. Only by resistance from the status quo can a change be achieved. Liberal feminism emphasizes the value of freedom and hold that the just state ensures freedom for women. As with liberalism in general, liberal feminists work within existing institutions in order to accommodate women on an equal basis. Equality, for them, requires that society be gender-free (Potter, 2001, p.62). Liberal feminists understand freedom as personal autonomy—living a life of one's own choosing—and political autonomy—being co-author of the conditions under which one lives. According to Alstott 2004, two key points that are present in liberal feminism that can be applied for this circumstance are: 1) *Having access to options,* and 2) *Being free of the limits set by the patriarchal paternalistic and moralistic laws and policies*. Therefore, women can reconstruct the public's perception of what a female pop star should look like by choosing not to conform to the stereotypes where female pop stars are often portrayed as a sexual object in media through exhibiting behaviors meant to elicit sexual arousal (e.g., lip licking, stroking one's body, pelvic thrusting), and wearing sexually provocative attire in music videos and performances (Frisby & Aubrey, 2012). One artist in particular who is rejecting these stereotypes is Billie Eilish.

Billie Eilish is an 18-year-old female pop star who is currently taking the pop world by storm (Refinery29, 2019). Born in Los Angeles and homeschooled along with her brother Finneas, Eilish's journey began at 13 years old, when she uploaded a little

tune by the name of "Ocean Eyes" onto SoundCloud (it has now been played more than 17 million times on there alone) before eventually releasing her full-length album in March 2019, When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go? It has been critically acclaimed with top-performing hits such as "Bury Your Friend," about the monster under her bed, and "Bad Guy" (Vogue, 2019). In 2020, she swept 5 Grammy Awards and became the youngest artist to be nominated in the four main categories in the same year. When not on the road, she still lives in her childhood home in Highland Park with her older brother and her parents. Her parents, Maggie Baird and Patrick O'Connell, both actors, follow Billie on tour as much as they can (NME, 2019). Eilish's distinctive look and mannerism set her apart from the majority of female pop stars working today. While hyper-femininity and hyper-sexuality have become integral to the stardom of Western female pop stars, Billie Eilish refuses to follow through with those standards, instead continues to create and perform with no regards to the public's stereotypical expectation of what a female pop star should be like (Billboard, 2019). She reconstructs a star image through sharing parts of her life via social media, particularly pictures and texts that represent her as a female pop star (Macrossan, 2018, p.138), which can be easily accessed by her fans and the public.

One of the social media platforms that Billie Eilish frequently uses is Instagram (@billieeilish), with over 380 posts and followers reaching over 41 million. Instagram is a photo-sharing social networking app that enables users to take pictures and edit them with a selection of digital filters. As of June 2018, the social network reported more than 1 billion monthly active users worldwide and the social media network's

daily active users stood at 500 million with over 120 million active Instagram users (Statista, 2019). On Instagram, photograph-sharing is the primary activity; users share photographs on their Instagram profiles primarily through their mobile phones, and these photographs are often accompanied by textual captions and comments written by other Instagram users. Instagram users are exposed to a plethora of photographs they are interested in and, given that Instagram is so quickly and easily accessed almost exclusively through mobile phones, such exposure is regular and frequent (Marshall et al., 2018, p.5). Seeing as how Instagram is such a big platform, it is no wonder that Billie Eilish chooses to be more active in there since she can build and maintain her audience and fans more easily in a much bigger scale. The variety of uses and types of images posted on Instagram (Hu, Manikonda, & Kambhampati, 2014; Tifentale & Manovich, 2015) means that Instagram functions as "an archive in the process of becoming" (Tifentale & Manovich, 2015, p. 7), as a service "for aesthetic visual communication" that shows snapshots of ordinary lives (Manovich, 2016) also for autobiographical purposes (Fallon, 2014, as cited in Locatelli, 2017). On Billie Eilish's Instagram page, she often posts about her outfits –which consist of bold graphic t-shirts, super-baggy clothes, custom-made clothing pieces, and piles of silver jewelry– and her live performance where she thanks her fans for coming to her shows. All of these elements help her in constructing an image of a female pop star that represents who she is.

Hall explains that representation is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between member of culture (1997, p.21). The

language that refers to signs, objects, and events in Billie Eilish's Instagram posts create an interpretation of what she could possibly represent. Her position gives her a chance to utilize Instagram as a tool to construct her star image through pictures and captions to express her ideal self (Dyer, 1979).

Previous studies related to sexual objectification, representation, and stardom in literary works or media have been conducted by researchers across the globe. In his work *Objectification, Sexualization, and Misrepresentation: Social Media and the College Experience* Davis conducts a textual analysis of the young people's construction of self, especially with regard to gender, sexuality, and identity through social media, in this case two Instagram accounts that are geared toward college students. He finds that these accounts are perpetuating gendered injustices and inequalities through their photo and video posts. Themes indicating this problematic situation were uncovered, they are: objectification of female college students, submissiveness of female college students, and emphasis on a young, white collegiate experience. The differences between the previous study and this study lie on the topic and the corpse.

The previous study entitled *Sexually Objectifying Pop Music Videos, Young Women's Self-Objectification, and Selective Exposure: A Moderated Mediation Model* by Karsay & Matthes examines whether exposure to sexually objectifying pop music videos leads to a higher level of young women's state self-objectification in comparison with young women who were exposed to non-sexually objectifying pop music videos. After exposure, all participants are prompted to answer a questionnaire in order to

assess their individual level of state self-objectification. Their findings show that women who saw this kind of objectifying content tended to describe themselves with more body-related statements in comparison with women who did not see these videos. This finding is in line with existing theoretical and empirical research (Aubrey et al., 2009; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, as cited in Karsay & Matthes, 2016). The differences between the previous study and this study lie on the data collection, the use of theory, and the corpse.

Relating to stardom, the previous study entitled *"Reality Goes Pop!" Reality TV, Popular Music, and Narratives of Stardom in Pop Idol* conducted by Holmes uses stardom theory by Richard Dyer and John Ellis to explore the power politics of interactivity in reality TV with the primary focus on a reality pop programs in the UK called *Popstars*. This research reveals the explicit connection of economic and power relations between audience and star popularity: while the media construct the public visibility of the star (proposes them for election), it is the audience that determines their degree of success (the electors) through voting. The differences between the previous study and this study lie on the issue, the use of theory, and the data collection.

In previous study entitled *Studying Celebrity Practices on Twitter Using a Framework for Measuring Media Richness,* Tanupabrungsun & Hemsley (2018) gathered tweets of different celebrities to examine how different types of celebrity (pop stars, athletes, and scientists) use different groupings of Twitter's affordances through the theoretical lens of media richness. The researchers find that different types of celebrities emphasize different richness dimensions: informational, interactional, and

contextual. Scientists scored significantly higher than others in informational richness, indicating scientists place a higher priority in creating more complete, less ambiguous text. However, athletes and pop stars tend to have similar richness scores across richness dimensions: high interactional and contextual richness scores suggesting they are skilled at performing a kind of personal interaction broadcast using casual sentence structure and hashtags to indicate inclusiveness with their fans. The differences with this study lie on the corpus and the data collection.

Hereby, this study is conducted because previous studies rarely focus on the representation aspect of a female artist's star image through their Instagram posts. Moreover, the corpse of this study is 8 posts and captions from Billie Eilish's Instagram page, which will be analysed using a qualitative method and descriptive analytical interpretative study approach. Kress & van Leeuwen's social semiotics approach is employed for visual texts (picture, text) by using three metafunctions: representational metafunction, interpersonal metafunction, and compositional metafunction. Halliday's Systemic-Functional Linguistics (SFL) is used to analyze the written texts (captions) of 8 photos from Billie Eilish's Instagram posts using three metafunction; ideational metafunction, interpersonal metafunction, and textual metafunction. These analyses of both visual and written texts will be integrated with feminist theory as the analytical theory to show the representation of a female pop star in social media reflected in Billie Eilish's Instagram posts.

1.2   Research Question

1) How do Billie Eilish's 8 Instagram posts (photos and captions) represent a female pop star?

1.3   Purpose of the Study

This study purposes to dismantle how the languages in Billie Eilish's 8 Instagram photos and captions (visual and written languages) are used to represent Billie Eilish as a female pop star.

1.4.   Scope of the Study

The study focuses on Billie Eilish's 8 Instagram posts from 2018 until 2020, which is a highlighted period of her career. This study is conducted through a qualitative method and descriptive analytical interpretative study approach, and the data of the study are employed through purposeful sampling technique, where the data gathered are related to Billie Eilish's case of representation of a female pop star.

1.5.   Significance of the Study

This study is hoped to be used as an additional reference related to star studies, feminist studies, and representation of female pop star for future researchers. The result of this research is aimed to dismantle the process of representation on Instagram, and find its relation to the feminist view of a female pop star.