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# The Lucky Few: Female Graduates of Communication Studies in the Indonesian Media Industry

*Research Paper:*

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## Abstract

For some years, women have been entering Indonesian communications degrees in much larger numbers than men, but only a minority of media workers at present are women. This paper reports on research into the limiting factors, which affect the progress of female communications graduates into professional media work. A case study was used to investigate the gap between the number of women enrolling in communication studies at *Universitas Sebelas Maret* in Solo, Central Java, and those working in television, radio, newspapers, tabloids and journals, public relations and advertising across Indonesia. This paper concludes by describing some of the factors, which contribute to the apparent “mismatch” phenomenon.

## Introduction

For a number of years in Indonesia, women have been entering communications degrees in much larger numbers than men. However, women continue to constitute only a minority of workers in media and communications industries. This paper reports on research conducted on some intransigent problems in the transition of young women from professional training at Sebelas Maret University in Solo, Central Java into media-related work. This paper was developed from a graduate student research project. All interview quotes have been translated from Indonesian or Javanese. The research design used a case study with extensive, multi-method data collection to investigate the gap between the number of young women enrolling in communication studies and women working in television, radio, newspapers, tabloids and journals, public relations and advertising, and online media in Indonesia.

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## Women and media work in Indonesia

Globalisation has increased the demand for high-quality professional media practice at the local and national level (Morgan 2001, 443) in Indonesia. Yet while the evolution of democracy since 1997 has meant an opening up and diversification of the media industries, they remain masculine domains of work and production (Gallagher, 1995; Romano, 1999). However, since work in the media industry is often depicted in the media itself as glamorous, exciting and sophisticated, large numbers of young women are drawn towards it (Sendjaja 1996, 3-4). Yet many aspects of media industry practice are deemed incompatible with ideas about the normative role of women. This remains so even though Indonesian women, out of economic necessity, have moved well beyond the parameters of their assigned cultural role as wives and mothers (Moghadam 1994, 2). Sen's (1998, 35) analysis indicates that the image of the working woman is one of the icons around which Indonesia's position as a modern nation in the global economy is established. Nevertheless, the concept of Indonesian femininity still operates as a powerful inhibiting discourse (Setyawati 2001) on general community attitudes to the involvement of women in media/communications study and work.

This paper claims that female graduates in communication studies in Indonesia and get a job in the media/communications industry are "the lucky few". This is not unique to Indonesia. Previous studies have convincingly established that worldwide young women experience problems in communication studies and then in the media-related work they obtain after graduation (Beasley and Theus 1988; Mariani 1990; Lock 1991; Creedon 1993; Gallagher 1995). Furthermore, like elsewhere in the world, if Indonesian female graduates do succeed in getting a job in the media industry they will probably find themselves segregated in certain program areas - largely absent from technical jobs and from senior management (Gallagher 1987, 13).

Worldwide, women comprised only about 30% of the media work force in 1992 (Creedon 1993, 43), and the proportion in Indonesia remains more or less at that level. Unfortunately, holding a communications degree does not always convince Indonesian media employers to employ a job candidate of either sex (Mariani

1990, 37), since many believe universities do not adequately prepare graduates for professional practice. Female graduates have to battle not only a lack of employer belief in the value of their communications degree, but the conviction held by many (usually male) employers that women cannot, by definition, perform most media jobs properly (Siregar et al. 1999, 19). Indonesia does not have a gender affirmative employment policy. Despite the New Order drive to modernity, and vast improvements in the status and education of women, rigid ideas about appropriate conduct for men and women persist. For example, on the UNDP Gender Empowerment Index (GEM), Indonesia ranked 56<sup>th</sup> out of 116 nations, below neighbouring Malaysia (Blackburn 2001, 270; Wagemann 2000, 303) which is also a Muslim country.

In Indonesia more than 50 higher education institutions offer a communications degree. The ratio of female to male communications students remains around 7:3 (see Lock 1991, 10). Yet statistics confirm there are relatively few jobs for women. Taking journalism as an example, *Jawa Pos*, the biggest newspaper in East Java, only recruited 11 female journalists in seven years (1991-1997) compared to 24 men. *Suara Merdeka*, the biggest newspaper in Central Java, had only 12 female journalists of 113 (Siregar et al. 1999, 19). PWI (*Persatuan Wartawan Indonesia*, Association of Indonesian Journalists) had 5,532 members in 1998, of which female journalists numbered only 755 (Soemandoyo 1999, 127).

To some extent, responsibility for such outcomes does not rest entirely with employers. The female graduates, their families, peers and even those who educate them, are often unsure of the suitability of media work for women, especially tasks and job expectations deemed incompatible with traditional Indonesian femininity (see Sulaiman and Gasim 1998, 1). The concept of *kodrat* (female sex role destined by fate), the ideal of *Ibu* (symbolic or actual mother) and the discourse of *peran ganda* (the dual roles of women) constitute Indonesian femininity as passive, gentle, obedient, confined to the home and working outside only to supplement family income (Sullivan, 1994, 133). Women are not expected to be assertive, ambitious and career-oriented. Thus, traditional understandings of the proper role of women limit options for female media workers (Setyawati, 2001), not only through employer prejudices, but also through the understandings young women have about themselves and their future lives. This study found that a significant proportion of final year female communications students never intended to apply for media jobs at all, preferring to seek more traditional “feminine” work.

So why do so many young women enter a communications degree in the first place? The findings of this research confirm that initially they are drawn to the glamorous image of some female media workers, for example, television newsreaders. The idea of writing or working creatively for a living is also appealing. They believe that travel and wealth lie ahead, and a “nice” job with pleasant conditions. Yet, most media work is not like this at all, and the real conditions of jobs in the media industries are at odds with the moral obligation to become devoted wives and mothers. By the end of their degree, it seemed many female graduates were confused rather than confident as they moved into the job market. This may lead some to seek other jobs that better match ideals of traditional femininity. Media work is simply not seen by conservative Indonesian society as a respectable job for a woman.

## Methodology

Data were collected from a range of stakeholders in relevant media education and employment sectors. Cohorts identified were (1) female students of communication studies; (2) parents of female students; (3) female alumni who worked in the media; (4) communication studies teaching staff and (5) media employers. Employing a multi-method approach to data collection (Bryman 2001, 274), a survey (Williams & May 2001, 89) was first devised and administered to 265 female students of communication studies enrolled for the degree at Sebelas Maret University in 2000. Of these, 180 returned the questionnaires, yielding a 68% response rate. Of these, 40 female students were selected, proportional to years of study and SES background, for in-depth interviews to explore key survey questions in more depth (see Minichiello et. al. 1995, 68).

Forty couples of parents of these female students were then interviewed. Interviews were also conducted with 46 female communication studies alumni working in various kinds of media industries in Central Java, and Jakarta. They were drawn from selected media industries: - newspaper (13), radio (9), television (7), public relations (6), on-line media (6) and advertising (5). Fifteen university lecturers from a communications studies department were also interviewed - nine men and six women. Media employers were interviewed at the workplaces where female alumni of communication studies interviewed for this study were employed. Seventeen media employers agreed to be interviewed, comprising newspaper employers (5), radio employers (3), TV employers (4), advertising employers (2), public-relations employer (1) and on-line media employers (2).

Ten parent couples attended a focus group discussion (see Kitzinger & Barbour 1999) to talk about their daughter's study and future career in the media industries. They were selected proportional to the year of the daughter's study, to their own education and occupation, usually that of the father. The second focus group discussion was conducted with 10 female media workers to talk about their career experiences as successful media workers.

Data from all these sources were analysed according to themes, with a view to identifying the factors, which contributed to the gap between the large number of female students studying media and communications, and the relatively small number who took up jobs in the media industries.

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## Findings of the study

### Talking to Female Communications Students and Media Workers

The first conclusion to be drawn from the data analysis was that at least some female students chose to study communications because it seemed an ideal career for them, given a realistic appraisal of their personal talents and aptitudes. For example,

*I had an obvious talent for writing at school, and that's what I've enjoyed by far the most (Sandra, 2<sup>nd</sup> year).*

*I like this program because it will lead to a career where I am connected to many people. So I find it to be a dynamic program of study, not static or boring. I wanted to study communications because I want to be a journalist. As a journalist I can travel to every place in Indonesia, even overseas. It will be fascinating (Nana, 1<sup>st</sup> year).*

Although their dreams may need to be translated into the reality of media work, both writing and traveling around are important aspects of much media work. However, other young women entered the program with far less realistic expectations, the kind that were unlikely ever to be realised, for example,

*Of course working in the media industry is attractive. I want to be like those female television presenters. It is not that different from being a secretary. They do things like writing a report, or they read the news. Sometimes they interview someone. They are elegant, beautiful and attractive. They work in an office. The conditions are excellent! I think it is just right for me (Melani, 1<sup>st</sup> year).*

Girls like Melani were often disappointed by the theoretical content of the subjects they took, they were reluctant to learn the technical skills, and they were often shocked by the reality of practicum (industry placement). For example, as one of the final year students said,

*In media practicum, I was surprised by the scope of my tasks. The practicum demonstrated that work in media/communications requires know-how and a broad perspective (Inayah, 4<sup>th</sup> year).*

On the other hand, girls who chose the communications degree because it matched realistic career goals were likely to persevere and eventually find a position in the media and communications industry. The profile of the successful female media workers interviewed for this project matches the early pragmatic career goal orientation shown in the quotes above from Sandra and Nana. Such young women tended to find the practicum affirmed their career choice,

*My practicum was so interesting. I discovered that journalism was my preferred future profession after all. My original ambition was confirmed by my experience in the work place (Santi, 4<sup>th</sup> year).*

It is hard to believe that after graduation Santi will not put energy into finding a job in journalism. Conversely, for some like Melani and Inayah above, unrealistic initial expectations, followed by disappointment, may negatively affect their career motivation. They will probably be far less than enthusiastic about applying for media jobs.

Data from media employers certainly indicated that fewer women than men apply for advertised positions,

*As far as the quantity of applicants goes, fewer women than men apply. Maybe women are not interested (Mr. Mulhadi, newspaper editor in Solo).*

*It is rare to find women working in this company. But this is because when we recruit, only a small number apply, which means we only appoint a few (Ms. Barina D, account director of an advertising agency).*

Interviews with established female media workers revealed that as new graduates they had avoided applying in an open field for advertised positions, preferring to find media work through peer contacts and alumni networks,

*I found out about this job from Mbak Lanny who already worked here. In the alumni email list she wrote that her newspaper needed reporters, so I applied and got the job (Winnie, newspaper reporter).*

*There are many advantages in belonging to the alumni email list. Not only can I communicate with graduate friends, but some send information about job vacancies - usually from their company or other companies they know about. When we were looking for work, it seemed like the stock exchange of job finding (Indy, TV public relations officer).*

While networking was obviously a source of support, it may have limited the range of jobs they applied for. This may signal a lack of confidence, or perhaps an unwillingness to compete openly with men. Their comments showed that following the lead of older female friends and mentors was certainly a common trend in job seeking. It was also a frequent reason given by the female students surveyed and interviewed as to why they had chosen the communications degree in the first place,

*Some of my older friends from high school enrolled in the communications degree at university. When they came back for the high school reunion they told us what they were studying. They made me think communications is not a bad choice so I chose it too (Melly, 2<sup>nd</sup> year).*

Statements like this imply that some female students did not choose communications because they were greatly drawn to a career in media (either realistically or unrealistically), but for other reasons altogether. For example, parents are often reluctant to allow their daughters to attend a university in another city because of cost, and fears about safety,

*I actually wanted to study psychology, not communication studies, and go to Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta. However, my parents didn't want that. They encouraged me to take a degree here at this university for economic reasons (Yuni, 2<sup>nd</sup> year student).*

As Sebelas Maret University does not offer psychology, Yuni chose communications because some of her friends had chosen it. So Yuni probably began with little knowledge about the communications degree and whether it might suit her as a career. It should be no surprise to find that girls such as Yuni do not end up in media jobs after graduation.

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## Talking to the parents of female students studying communications

In the parent interviews and focus group it was usually the father who spoke, reflecting the traditional role of women in the family. The general agreement was that their daughters had chosen communications studies by themselves. For most low-income parents, pride in their daughter's achievement of getting to university far outweighed the significance of degree choice. For example, when asked about

the communications degree, one parent referred only to the status of reaching higher education,

*I am just so proud that my daughter got to university. You know I just graduated from SMA (High school) and my wife only from SMP (junior high school), yet our daughter is going to university! For us as parents this shows how much we have succeeded in educating our children (Mr. Tedjo).*

Parents with more education spoke more authoritatively about the degree, but still maintained it was basically their daughter's choice, for example,

*I just agreed when my daughter wanted to choose communication studies. As a girl, I think it would be unwise for her to take a degree like engineering. It would be too difficult for her. It seems appropriate that she chose communication studies. It is a simple program and a reasonable choice on her part (Mr. Bani).*

His wife expanded on this, arguing for the compatibility of communications studies with femininity,

*Yes, why should a girl study for a degree that is too demanding? I am convinced that not long after graduation, she will get married. I'm glad she found a degree that is not so complicated and can be finished quickly (Mrs. Bani).*

These parents tended to think the communications degree was an appropriate choice for their daughter in part because it was "simple", unlike degrees usually chosen by men. Also, there were so many young women enrolled that this showed it was appropriate. They denied putting any pressure on their daughters. However, pressure from parents was identified in some of the student accounts,

*My parents encouraged me to study here because it's not far from the town where they live. They didn't want me to move away. So I chose communications because I liked the subjects and so my parents didn't feel so worried about me (Sandra, 2<sup>nd</sup> year).*

This quote indicates a common pattern in Indonesian tertiary education of parents preferring daughters to study close to home. In Sandra's case it was not so much the degree as the university location, which was a priority for her parents in making a decision about her tertiary education. Much of the data obtained from parents suggested that they did not take their daughter's future career very seriously, in terms of specific degree choice, but did support a daughter's tertiary study in a general sense.

In fact, parents often had little idea at all about the communication studies program, especially those from limited educational backgrounds, for example,

*I have only limited knowledge about communication studies and the jobs you can get. I just know that all university courses are good, and my daughter was clever enough to get in (Mr. Tedjo).*

*I am not a university graduate. I did not even finish secondary school. So if you are asking me about degrees and outcomes, I can honestly tell you that I know nothing. I am only grateful that my daughter got to university (Mr. Hasan).*

Some thought they knew what kind of work media/communications jobs entailed, but actually expressed similar unrealistic expectations to those of their daughters,

*My daughter chose communication studies because she has seen women who have successful careers. They are her role models. If I ask her what she wants to be, she says she just wants to be like Desi Anwar, Zaza Yusharyahya etc, all successful TV news presenters (Mr. Budiman).*

At least one father seemed convinced that media work – as he understood it - was most compatible with traditional femininity,

*Look at Desi Anwar! She is working in a communications kind of job. How beautiful and charming she is on TV. She is really feminine and so is the job. When she is reading news, or interviewing a famous person – so smooth. It would be awkward, clumsy, and weird if that interviewing was done by a man (laughs) (Mr.Darmono).*

Once their daughters had advanced to later years of the communications degree, however, parents found much to complain about, for example,

*I can't understand my daughter Anisah's decision to work in television media after graduation. Why would she want to be a journalist? Will she be proud of herself coming home late or hanging around the street all day? Better if she chooses a job like orang kantoran (a white collar worker) than a journalist. It's just not suitable for her as a woman (Mr.Khairy).*

Some implied that they might actively discourage their daughters from some kinds of media jobs,

*If I were to suggest a future job for my daughter, it would not be journalism. I admit I don't know much about what journalists do - I have no friends or family who are journalists. But the way it is regarded by society! I know that job is not suitable for my daughter (Mr Abadi).*

This parental attitudes in later years of the degree could affect their daughter's career aspirations, who might decide it would be better to seek other jobs, using generalist skills picked up in the degree, rather than risk family conflict. Also, less informed parents did not seem to distinguish between journalism and other kinds of media industry jobs. They claimed all media jobs demanded "hard work", "high mobility - 24 hours", and "high levels of rationality", a lifestyle and responsibilities suitable only for men based on the normative notion of a journalist. Indeed "the Indonesian word for journalist *wartawan* translates literally as "news man" (Romano 1999, 168). In the public rhetoric, women are supposed to be "docile wives and mothers and dutiful daughters" – dependent and home-centered (Wieringa 1993, 26). So Indonesian women journalists have to endure an undesirable stigma because their work involves traveling and spending nights away from home – things that women are not meant to do. A female journalist in Indonesia is likely to be regarded as a "bad" woman (Romano 1999, 185-186) - often the case in developing countries. In Uganda, for example, female journalists are not infrequently classed socially with women who provide sexual services (Pandian 1999).

## Talking to communications lecturers about their female students

Interviews with communications lecturing staff indicated that female students were treated quite differently to men. In some cases it appeared they were not being given the chance to develop an appropriate range of technical skills. Some lecturers implied a gendered “theory vs practice” divide among students, in which female students were perceived to be less technically competent,

*In theory subjects female students grasp the material more quickly. They are diligent. They take notes and submit assignments on time. However in practical activities that use technology, for example in radio production, male students show far more mastery than females in operating equipment and creating the product (Mr. Sabadyo, communications lecturer).*

It is possible that Mr Sabadyo is confusing mastery with confidence. In any case this gender divide around subjects in the degree may affect the understanding that female students have of their own professional capabilities, and also undermine ambitions they might have for certain media jobs that involve technology. Yet media work is becoming more technological all the time. Following a circular logic – a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy - another lecturer argued that since women were, as a matter of course, not as competent in handling technology, they were not interested in media jobs,

*In examining the problem of our graduate female students finding jobs, we must look at the problem clearly. Do their problems really have to do with gender? Do they have difficulty finding a job because they are not given the same opportunities as men? Or are women themselves the problem? Is it because of their limited skills in media technology? Maybe they are not interested in media jobs (Mr. Achmad, communications lecturer).*

The gendered division of labour was echoed in the way some communications lecturers constructed the aspirations of (all) female media students, for example,

*If you ask female students what they want to be after finishing their study, most of them would answer: I want to be a TV presenter, an MC, a DJ or a film director. None of them want to be a reporter or a cameraman or those kinds of jobs (Mr Achmad, communications lecturer).*

However, nearly all the successful female media workers interviewed in the case study actually were undertaking non-traditional tasks in their media jobs and handling them well. It may be that the lecturers themselves were out of touch with industry trends. Certainly the students were aware of archaic gender stereotyping by lecturers,

*I think not only male students underestimate us, but some of the lecturers too. They sometimes give us segregated tasks. In journalism, for example, we can only choose topics that are related to women’s areas. I hate this! Why does it have to be different for us? (Yunni, 2<sup>nd</sup> year).*

In fact, at least one female student was actively trying to improve her practical skills, but her parents' archaic ideas about the role of women meant she got little support from home,

*I asked my parents to buy some photographic equipment but they didn't want to. The reason is (in their perception) no woman can be a photographer. It's a job for a man. So they couldn't see the point. My parents don't like me doing anything like this. They think I should be spending time at home, which to me is wrong! So I never asked them again. I'm learning more about photo-journalism using the department's equipment (Dina, 2<sup>nd</sup> year).*

The age of some lecturers indicated that they belonged to a previous generation with little experience of contemporary media industries. Rakow (1993) warned that one of the major problems with professional training for media industries is that university degrees are invariably slow or even "passive in response to the pressing need for global change" (155). Lecturing staff often simply do not keep up effectively with the professional field. Some of the lecturers interviewed here probably taught communications according to a habitual formula – "simply repetitive drill in old ways of doing things" (Morgan, 2001, p. 436). Unfortunately for their female students, the "old ways of doing things" included reproducing the gender division of labour in relation to media work.

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## Media employers' views

Tangible obstacles to female graduates entering media industries were clearly identified in data collected from interviews with employers. It was often admitted that women workers were not treated equally. Some employers actively discriminated against women in mainstream job appointments (Lafky 1993, 88) meaning that female graduates often compete for only a small number of feminine "niche" jobs (Siregar et al. 1995, 165). Women workers were also downgraded once they marry and have children, so this may motivate some to look for other jobs.

Several employers were reluctant to employ women as journalists at all,

*It is a job that demands working outside the home for unlimited hours and taking a lot of risks. It is difficult for women to do this given their limitations (Mr. Abdi D, radio coordinator and reporter).*

*If deadlines are due the volume of work increases one hundred percent. It means we have to stay working all night until it's finished. This is a daily reality for media workers. Physically, it is too difficult for women (Mr. Mulhadi, newspaper editor in Solo).*

Other employers claimed that women were not reliable long-term workers,

*We choose workers for their skills not their sex. However, in my experience, men survive better than women in these jobs. Women quit far more easily (Mr. Budhisantoso, director of a private radio station in Solo).*

Many comments implied that women could not develop successful media careers and were likely to quit because of finding a new job or getting married. However,

sometimes pressure to resign in these circumstances came from media employers. In the interview with Mr Budhisantoso he explained that there was an “unwritten policy” in his radio station about female employees marrying or having a family. As soon as they got married, women were shifted from the frontline - radio DJ or programmer - to support positions (see Beasley and Theus 1988). Married women were given clerical tasks and pulled out of decision-making. So in this media organisation women were obstructed in their career development once they got married. This might well be a reason for them to resign and seek another job.

Of course, even though media and communications are considered “masculine” domains of work, for some jobs women are preferred (Romano 1999), for example,

*In dealing with difficult sources of information, women reporters are tougher than men. They don't despair or give up so easily. Even if the source does not want to give information or ignores them, women reporters persevere. They beg, bargain and use any means to get sources to give information (Mr.Wawan, on-line media editor).*

However, frequently what media employers regarded as virtues of female media workers were not professional capacities, but assets such as physical attractiveness, patience, social skills or vocal quality.

Most employers mentioned that female media workers have trouble balancing their career and family responsibilities,

*The worst situation I find is when, in the middle of a work project, women have problems related to their marriage or family, and they just resign from the job (Ms. Barina D, account director of an advertising agency).*

The female media workers who were married also mentioned this problem of balance, for example,

*Sometimes my husband is cranky if I came home late or I have to deal with clients at night outside the home. He suggested I should avoid bringing work home. But that's very hard for me to do, because sometimes I work overtime due to meetings or client appointments. In the first years of our marriage, my husband accepted my job. However, now because we have a child, he blames me if I come home late. He thinks I'm not taking responsibility for our child (Agung, advertising account manager).*

In summary, media working environments are designed to accommodate male needs and priorities (Gallagher 1995, 53). Within media institutions women are judged by male standards and performance criteria, which put them at a disadvantage (Lafky 1993). Even employers with positive attitudes admitted they were sometimes anxious about employing women in certain jobs.

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## The challenges for women in media training and careers

A substantial finding of the case study was that, in addition to the lack of encouragement they received from significant others, young women themselves, throughout their communications study and after graduation, struggled with the dual

role of women in Indonesian society. Even as students they were asking themselves how compatible media jobs would be with their future roles as wives and mothers,

*The most important thing in a future media job is that it should not make heavy demands on me. As long as I can carry out my work duties and fulfil my home responsibilities at the same time, it will be OK. But if it interferes with my family life in the future, I will quit. Taking care of the family is more important than work (Zahry, 2<sup>nd</sup> year).*

Another student echoed this view,

*I am not sure about the future after graduation. It depends what I am going to do when I finish the degree. If I am just to be an ordinary housewife, then I'll just get an ordinary job, not in media (Yani, 2<sup>nd</sup> year student).*

One young female media worker seemed to think her marriage prospects had significantly dimmed because of her job,

*With my lifestyle at the moment in this job, a husband would divorce me as soon as possible. Yeah. I mean I always come home late - in the middle of the night - not like someone in a normal job. And my husband would already be asleep when I came in, or waiting up for me with a sad face. So how could I be a proper wife to him? I mean sexually? (Tina, tabloid reporter).*

In Indonesia the primary gender identity for adult women is as a wife and mother (Blackburn 2001). Certainly the work and lifestyle of a media/communications professional is demanding. Even though the employment of servants is *de rigueur* for families with middle-class incomes and this allows married women to work, as wives and mothers they are still expected to be at home outside normal working hours. One employer claimed that married women often do not pursue career development options because they will not put in the extra time,

*All employees here have the same professional development opportunities. They can attend seminars, language courses, or even get involved in overseas projects. However, usually only single women take those opportunities. Married women usually don't. They regard professional development as taking up time needed for taking care of their family (Ms. Aninta, chief editor of a women's tabloid).*

A further challenge for some female media workers was dealing with sexual harassment in the male-dominated workplace. They claimed some men showed "discriminatory" attitudes to women, whistling at them, hugging them, squeezing their waist or buttocks. Some female media workers thought such behaviour was *keisengan* (just for fun) - not worthy of attention. Those who felt harassed, on the other hand, took overt action,

*If we say nothing, they will keep doing it. I tell them off. I don't care if they regard me as judes (vicious), cerewet (sharp-tongued) or even a nenek sibir (witch) because I always scold them if they act in that ill-bred way (Shinta, newspaper reporter).*

Female media workers adopted a number of different strategies for working in environments dominated by men (Katila & Merilainen 2002, 339). Some found it necessary to fit into the dominant culture by silencing their complaints, surrendering

their identities and adopting the masculinist culture to gain legitimacy (Holmer-Nadesan 1996, 58) - consciously re-inventing themselves as more like men,

*As a woman journalist I downplay femininity. Work demands lead to me to be more masculine. In chasing news stories for example, I must be quick off the mark – take risks. If I went at it klemar-klemer (slowly and modestly), I would be left behind and get no stories (Rita, newspaper reporter).*

Further to this claim, one interviewee claimed that a colleague had become a *tomboi*. In her daily work she always dressed like a man; cut her hair short, wore jeans and T-shirt, sports shoes and a jeans jacket. It seems ironic. Despite the conviction of parents and some undergraduate students that a female job in the media means glamour and beauty, identity shift towards a less “feminine” persona is the more common story for women in the media workforce,

*In my job, I don't fuss with my appearance. You know for make up I just use thin powder - no lipstick. Sometimes the information sources are reluctant to tell you something if you look menor (gaudy) - over-dressed or wearing too much make-up. I think they expect reporters - usually men – to be untidy, even dekil (caked with dirt), even nyentrik (eccentric)! (Linda, newspaper reporter).*

Successful female media workers, (especially journalists) said they had to be ready to meet constant challenges and pressure in the masculine domain of their work. For example, they had to learn to deal with heated arguments calmly and rationally, as one interviewee described it,

*Comradeship with male colleagues (reporters or editors) taught me to take the noise and pressure, the rough language, especially in the meeting room, without getting upset. I learned not to break down in tears under the strain of rough criticism. I learned I must do my own work, asking no help and making no excuses (Nany, newspaper reporter).*

The tough reality of newspaper journalism is certainly a far cry from the genteel career as television newsreader or variety show host envisaged by some parents of female communications students for their daughters, and of course by quite a few of the girls themselves, according to survey responses. Indeed, many of the stories from successful female media workers describe them working in exactly the kinds of “tough” situations that parents in the focus group agreed they were worried about.

It was heartening to find that while female media workers certainly seemed to encounter many of the job challenges and difficulties described by interviewees elsewhere in the case study, they were dealing with them quite professionally. Morgan (1995) writes about the need for aspiring media professionals to be “worldly-wise” as part of their general professional capacity, and the female graduates who had found media jobs seemed to be demonstrating that capacity. We might conclude that the central challenge for female graduates who want media careers is to develop confidence in their own professional capacities and problem solving abilities. However, they should not be expected to do this on their own. It must be part of their professional training.

## Conclusion

Female communications graduates in this case study who obtained media jobs certainly were the “lucky few”, considering how many were enrolled in the degree, and how few jobs were available. The communications degree was definitely attractive to first year female students and their parents, although for a variety of reasons as it turned out. However, approaching graduation, parents became increasingly anxious about, their daughters working in media jobs, especially as journalists. Some actively discouraged their daughters from applying as they thought such jobs were not suitable for women.

According to the survey, and to some interviews, during practicum (or maybe even before) many girls decided that certain kinds of media work were not for them. While some found the work interesting and challenging (Abar 1998, 238), it was demanding and usually far from glamorous. Furthermore, it probably became obvious to less motivated girls that most media jobs challenged the very foundations of traditional femininity. Interviews with female media workers confirm that this is the case. While highly motivated female graduates were prepared to put effort into finding a job in their chosen area of media work, others actively sought work in more traditional occupations. They became receptionists, sales assistants and clerical workers. However, even highly motivated female graduates often worked mainly through friends to find media work positions, which suited them, rather than compete for advertised positions. This does indicate a certain lack of confidence.

Employers were frequently reluctant to employ female graduates because they believed they were inherently not suitable for the job, or because they would not be reliable employees. Some employers said they needed to employ women because of the special qualities brought by women to the job, but often this had little to do with professional skills and capacities. Once they obtained media jobs, women employees faced a range of challenges, from discrimination and harassment, to pressure from families to prioritise domestic duties over career. It also emerged that the communications degree program itself had not adequately addressed their specific needs as future female media workers, especially development of necessary procedural knowledge and professional capacity (Morgan 1995). Female students' apparent lack of confidence and competence in the technically-oriented subjects should be an issue of great concern since the technological evolution of the media is accelerating in Indonesia, and female graduates may find their job disadvantage increasing even further as this evolution proceeds.

The findings of this research suggest that Indonesian female communications students need to build an awareness of media job realities before and during their years as students. They should gain accurate information about the reality of positions occupied by men and women, and of gendered practices in media organizations. This might encourage them to make realistic long-range plans for effective careers. Educators at secondary school, university, faculty, and department levels have to take responsibility to make sure that all female students interested in media study and careers have relevant and up-to-date information. They should certainly not operate discriminatory practices against them that compound existing gender disadvantage. It is suggested that a module of gender studies could be introduced into the communications curriculum, together with a more equitable

approach to the performance of women students in professional studies programs (Morgan 1995).

Other data from this study indicated that high grades in skill-based subjects were needed for graduates of both sexes to find favour with employers, and this has gendered implications. If female students routinely do not achieve as high grades as male students in technical and applied subjects (for whatever reason), then perhaps other relevant competencies could be added. Mastery of a foreign language (English, Mandarin, Japanese) or other specialised subjects like visual arts, would give female graduates something of substance to report on in job applications.

It is vital that more women get involved as media professionals in Indonesia. As media industries in all countries become more fully integrated into the global order, there is a necessity for appropriate professional training of media workers so that the media workforce in every country reflects cultural richness and diversity. That is why it is so important that talented young people of both sexes in Indonesia enter university programs to study media/communications according to current best practice standards, then move confidently into jobs in the media industries that reflect their talents and interests. However, if gender, rather than talent and interest, determines this journey, then the media industries themselves will be the poorer.

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