GENDER STRUGGLES BEHIND THE SCENES: REPRESENTATION AND ROLE OF FEMALE JOURNALISTS IN NEWS PRODUCTION

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ABSTRACT

The journalism profession in Indonesia is still dominated by men, both in terms of editorial leadership and division of labor in the field. This article discusses how female journalists construct their roles and face obstacles in the news production space, as well as how gender representation is reflected in everyday journalistic practices. Using a sociological approach and gender perspective, this article attempts to uncover the power relations, stereotypes, and negotiation strategies experienced by female journalists in navigating a masculine work environment. This study uses a qualitative method with in-depth interview techniques with female journalists from various mass media. The findings show that although women experience marginalization in editorial decision-making and field assignments, they still play an important role in encouraging a more inclusive perspective in the news. This study emphasizes the importance of structural awareness of gender equality in the media industry and the need for a more equitable transformation of journalistic work culture.

Keywords: *female journalists, gender equality, media work, gender sociology.*

1.   INTRODUCTION

The mass media industry is one of the strategic arenas in the formation of public opinion and the construction of social reality. In journalistic practice, news production not only conveys information, but also shapes society's perspective on social issues, including gender issues. However, behind the image of the media as a democratic and inclusive space, the structure and work culture of the newsroom still show clear gender inequality. Women who work as journalists often face structural barriers, stereotypes, and limited access to strategic roles in the news production process (L.A. et al., 2023). This phenomenon is not new in the study of the sociology of work and gender studies. Within the framework of the hegemonic masculinity theory put forward by Connell (2009), the world of work is generally shaped by masculine norms and values that dominate organizational structures, including in the media industry. This causes women to have to fight for equal positions and recognition. North's (2009) research highlights how female journalists often face a "glass ceiling", an invisible barrier that limits their opportunities

to rise to editorial leadership positions. They are also only tasked with "feminine" issues such as family, education, and lifestyle, while issues of politics, crime, and economics are considered the domain of male journalists.

On the other hand, the media also plays a role in creating and reproducing social constructions of gender. Karen Ross (2010) shows that the representation of women in the media is often stereotypical and does not reflect the complexity of their experiences. This is because the editorial structure is not sensitive to gender issues, as well as the lack of involvement of female journalists in the editorial decision-making process. In this context, news production cannot be separated from power relations and broader social structures.

This study attempts to examine more deeply how female journalists play their roles behind the scenes of news production. The main focus is on their experiences in dealing with gender-biased divisions of labor, how they build resistance or negotiation strategies in the world of mass media work, and how they are involved in the process of framing issues and gender representation in news reporting. Within this framework, this paper seeks to highlight that the journalist profession is not a gender-neutral space, but rather a social arena filled with negotiations of identity and power.

Theoretically, this article uses a sociological approach with a gender theory lens. This perspective is useful for understanding the working structure of mass media as a system that regulates social roles based on gender, while also seeing how agents (in this case female journalists) respond to and negotiate their positions in the system. In the context of media sociology, this study also utilizes the idea of representation and production of meaning put forward by Stuart Hall (1997), where news production is seen as a social construction process that reflects the ideological positions of its actors.

To explore this issue, the study was conducted using a qualitative approach, a case study type. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews with female journalists from various mass media (print, online, and television) who work in Medan City and the Special Region of Yogyakarta. The selection of informants was based on the criteria of a minimum of five years of experience in journalism and direct involvement in the editorial process or field coverage. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner with a focus on work experience, dynamics of task division, relationships with superiors and colleagues, and their involvement in editorial decision-making.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques (Braun & Clarke, 2006), with steps that include the coding process, identifying themes, and interpreting the meaning of the experiences expressed by the informants. The analysis was carried out reflectively by paying attention to the social and structural context in which the informants work. This study does not aim to produce universal generalizations, but rather to provide an in-depth and critical understanding of the dynamics of the roles and struggles of female journalists in the news production process in Indonesia. Thus, this article is expected to contribute to enriching studies on gender equality in the professional world of work, especially in the field of mass media. Furthermore, this article seeks to emphasize the importance of structural transformation in the mass media industry in order to create a world of work that is more just, inclusive, and responsive to women's experiences and voices.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study type. This approach was chosen because the study seeks to deeply understand the subjective experiences and social contexts that shape the reality of female journalists in the news production space. Case studies provide space to explore the dynamics of power, resistance, and gender representation within the editorial structure of the mass media in depth and contextually. The research was conducted in two main areas, namely Medan City and the Special Region of Yogyakarta, which are representations of two media areas that are journalistically active and have different cultural backgrounds. The subjects of the study were female journalists who work in various types of media (print, online, and television).

Informants were selected by purposive sampling with the following criteria: Women who have worked as journalists for at least five years, Actively involved in news production either as field reporters or as part of the editorial team, Have experienced directly or have critical views on the issue of gender inequality in the media structure. The number of informants is adjusted to the principle of information sufficiency (data saturation).

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Division of Labor and Gender Stereotypes in the Newsroom

In the media work structure, the division of reporting tasks not only reflects professionalism but is also influenced by social constructions of gender. The results of this study show that female journalists tend to experience limitations in the types of coverage they handle. Assignments are often based on assumptions about women's "suitability" for certain issues, such as family, education, health, lifestyle, and topics that are considered light or not high risk. In contrast, issues that are political, legal, economic, investigative, conflict-based, or require intensive fieldwork are more often entrusted to male journalists (Döring & Walter, 2024; Kartikasari et al., 2020; L.A. et al., 2023). This division of labor reproduces gender divisions in the media workforce, where women are indirectly constructed as figures who are not strong enough, not flexible enough, or not ready enough to handle issues that are considered "heavy" or strategic. In many editorial offices, this division is even considered something normal or natural, without considering that placement based on gender alone actually reinforces structural inequality.

The division of labor based on gender stereotypes has a major impact on the professional development of female journalists. They have limited access to the types of coverage that are of high value in a journalistic career, such as investigative or political reporting, which are often used as benchmarks for a journalist's credibility and competence. As a result, the opportunity to advance to a strategic editorial position becomes smaller, because they do not have a portfolio of coverage that is considered "strong" or "weighty" according to applicable editorial standards.

Furthermore, this division of labor is not only a matter of technical coverage, but also concerns the process of representation in the public sphere. When strategic issues are dominated by male journalists, the perspectives that color the news tend to be masculine. Women as journalists do not have much space to convey narratives that originate from women's experiences or perspectives, especially on issues that are structurally related to gender inequality. As a result, the mass media is at risk of continuing to reproduce bias in

the presentation of information, due to the lack of diversity of views reflected in the news production team (Mukarom, 2019; Yang, 2013).

This shows that the issue of division of labor cannot be separated from the power structure in the newsroom. Behind assignment decisions is a gendered social logic, namely a logic that places gender as the main consideration, not professional capacity or individual desires. In many cases, this logic is justified by normative reasons such as "protection of women", "women's domestic roles", or "limited mobility". In fact, narratives like this actually strengthen the subordination of women and perpetuate existing inequalities.

In addition, the influence of patriarchal culture is still strongly felt in the dynamics of daily work. For example, in editorial meetings or the preparation of coverage schedules, women's voices often do not get enough space. They are considered less able to take risks or are not suitable to lead field coverage. Even in some editorial offices, there is an implicit division that women are more suitable as anchors or news readers, while in-depth reporting work is the domain of men. Thus, the editorial room is not only a professional space, but also an arena of symbolic domination that reflects the power relations between men and women (Romero-Abrio et al., 2019). This inequality is also reinforced by the absence of editorial policies that explicitly support gender equality in the division of labor. In interviews with informants, no internal guidelines or regulations were found that guarantee equal access for women in obtaining diverse coverage opportunities. In the absence of affirmative rules or a fair evaluation system, the tendency for gender bias in assignments will continue unconsciously.

However, it should be noted that the gender division of labor is not entirely explicit or formal. It works through subtle social mechanisms, through assumptions, habits, and unwritten norms that are carried out continuously in work practices. This is what makes it difficult to recognize as a form of discrimination, because it takes place in a space that is considered neutral and professional. In fact, if examined sociologically, these practices indicate the existence of power relations and symbolic domination in the world of journalistic work (Yang, 2013). Overall, these results show that female journalists face structural challenges in terms of access to strategic roles in news production. They are not only limited quantitatively in number, but also qualitatively in the types of work they can access. This condition requires critical awareness and policy changes from media institutions to create a more just and equal world of work. Without structural transformation efforts, the gender-based division of labor will continue to be a major obstacle to the creation of media representation with a gender justice perspective.

Gender Representation in News Production

News production does not only involve technical activities of reporting and writing, but is also a symbolic process that forms the social construction of reality. In this case, gender representation in news reporting is an important element that reflects and reinforces the power relations that exist in society. This study found that female journalists have a special concern for how women are represented in the news, especially in issues related to violence, discrimination, or domestic roles. However, the space for them to voice these perspectives is often limited by the editorial structure and dominant values that apply in the media where they work (Martin, 2021; Mukarom, 2019).

One of the main problems that arises is the tendency for news framing to be biased against women. In many cases, victims of sexual violence or domestic violence (KDRT) are represented in a way that corners, blames, or reduces the victim's experience. For example, news that highlights the victim's clothing, the location of the incident, or their personal decisions is often more prominent than the structural context of the violence itself. This shows that mainstream journalism is not yet fully sensitive to gender issues, and still contains patriarchal bias in its narratives.

Female journalists who were informants in this study were aware of this tendency and tried to intervene, either through the choice of sources, writing style, or framing of issues. However, these interventions often run into editorial limitations, especially when it comes to issues that are considered "controversial" or contrary to the dominant values of the media. In many cases, they do not have full authority to determine the angle of the news, because the final decision remains in the hands of the editors, who are mostly male. This situation illustrates how the process of gender representation in the media is greatly influenced by the internal power structure of the editorial team. Furthermore, challenges in representation also include the selection of sources and the way issues related to women are covered. Female journalists tend to have higher sensitivity in choosing female sources, or in exploring perspectives that originate from women's experiences. However, these narratives are often considered "too emotional", "not neutral", or "not objective" by the dominant journalism standards that have so far been constructed based on masculine logic—rational, firm, and avoiding excessive empathy. This critique of "emotionality" is a symbolic form of the exclusion of women's perspectives in news construction (Döring & Walter, 2024; Martin, 2021; Suprun et al., 2022).

In this context, Stuart Hall (1997) states that representation is a process that is full of meaning and power. What is included and excluded from news narratives reflects the ideological positions of the producers, as well as the social structures in which they are located. In other words, when female journalists do not have full power over news production, the representation of women in the media will tend to follow the dominant narrative that is masculine, biased, and often detrimental to women.

This also has an impact on how women's issues are interpreted by the public. When the media tends to blame victims, avoid structural perspectives, or cover up the dynamics of power in cases of gender-based violence, the public's understanding of the issue will also be distorted. This shows that news production is not only a reflection of reality, but also an active agent in shaping public opinion that can strengthen or weaken the struggle for gender equality.

In practice, female journalists navigate these limitations through subtle strategies. Some insert gender perspectives implicitly, feature alternative sources, or use special columns to discuss women's issues. Although not always successful in changing editorial policies directly, these efforts indicate a form of symbolic resistance to the masculine and biased structure of news production. Overall, these results reveal that female journalists not only play a role as technical implementers of coverage, but also as cultural actors who try to fight for fairer and more inclusive representation in the media. However, structural limitations in the newsroom make this struggle not easy. Change does not depend solely on individuals, but requires institutional transformation that encourages greater participation and authority for women in the editorial process. Without such change, the

media will continue to be a space that only partially reflects the complexity of women's experiences in society (Swindle, 2023).

Resistance and Negotiation Strategy

Gender inequality experienced by female journalists in the newsroom is not always faced with a passive attitude or absolute acceptance. Instead, informants in this study showed that they developed various forms of resistance and negotiation in response to gender-biased work structures. This resistance is not always in a confrontational form, but is more often present symbolically and strategically in daily work practices.

One of the main strategies carried out is self-proof through work quality. Female journalists try to show that they are capable of completing heavy coverage, presenting quality news, and have investigative abilities that are equal to male journalists. In this context, resistance is carried out through professional performance, as a way to challenge stereotypes about women's limitations in journalism. This strategy is in line with the form of individual agency, where actors try to overcome structural obstacles through consistent personal efforts (Dasgupta, 2024).

In addition, informants also mentioned the importance of building a solidarity network among female journalists. This network not only functions as a space for sharing experiences, but also becomes a basis for collective strength to voice aspirations in the newsroom. In some cases, this solidarity is manifested through collaboration in reporting projects that raise women's issues, providing support to each other in situations of harassment or discrimination, and encouraging changes in the narrative in reporting. This practice of solidarity shows a collective dimension in resistance, where women create a safe space to strengthen their position socially and professionally (Gujarati & Porter, 2010; L.A. et al., 2023; Orisadare, 2019).

Negotiations are also carried out through strategies to adapt to the existing system. For example, female journalists get around assignments that are less in line with their interests or expertise by taking the initiative to write additional coverage outside of their main assignments. Some even proactively propose topics that are considered important but rarely receive editorial attention, such as violence against women, the role of single mothers, or reproductive health issues. Although these topics are not necessarily easily accepted, this step shows a form of symbolic intervention into the prevailing discourse structure.

In some cases, resistance strategies also appear in the form of "infiltration of meaning" into news narratives. Female journalists subtly insert gender perspectives into general reporting, without having to drastically change the structure of the news. This is done to avoid resistance from superiors or colleagues who are not sensitive to gender issues. For example, in political or economic news, they insert female sources, highlight the impact of policies on women, or emphasize aspects of social justice in the analysis. This reflects cultural intelligence in negotiating with unequal work structures (Swindle, 2023).

However, this resistance and negotiation do not always succeed in substantially changing the structure. The absence of institutional support, low gender sensitivity among editors-in-chief, and the strong patriarchal work culture are the main obstacles to broader transformation. In many situations, individual resistance efforts remain within narrow boundaries, and are unable to address the structural roots of gender inequality in the newsroom.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that these forms of resistance and negotiation have important value in the dynamics of social change. In agency-structure theory, the actions of agents—although within a space limited by structure—can create gaps for change. In this context, female journalists are not only victims of unequal gender structures, but also actors who actively seek change, no matter how small their efforts. In other words, their struggles cannot be reduced to passive responses, but must be seen as a form of cultural practice that reflects power relations in the modern world of work.

Furthermore, symbolic resistance carried out by female journalists can be seen as a form of everyday resistance, namely small practices that are carried out continuously and are not always visible to the naked eye, but can shake the established dominance in the long term (Scott, 1985). These practices build collective awareness and open up the possibility for the formation of larger structural changes, either through internal advocacy, changes in editorial policies, or the preparation of a more inclusive journalistic code of ethics. Thus, this section shows that the struggle of female journalists in the media world lies not only in efforts to achieve a higher formal position, but also in how they actively reconstruct meaning, expand narrative space, and build solidarity in the midst of an unequal work structure. The resistance and negotiations they carry out are an integral part of the transformation process towards a more gender-equitable media.

Structural Barriers in Career Paths

Gender inequality in the media industry is not only seen in the biased division of labor, but is also evident in the career development process. Although the number of female journalists has increased quantitatively, their access to strategic positions in the editorial structure—such as editor-in-chief, managing editor, or senior editor—is still very limited. The results of this study indicate that female journalists face a number of structural barriers that limit their vertical mobility in the mass media workforce.

One of the main barriers is the existence of traditional gender norms and values that are still strong in the organizational culture of the mass media. Women are often associated with domestic roles, household responsibilities, and time constraints, which are considered to interfere with professionalism in the world of work that demands high flexibility. In this context, women are considered less able to work under deadline pressure, attend night coverage, or undertake long and intensive business trips. This perception, although not always stated explicitly, systematically influences management decisions regarding the promotion or placement of female journalists to strategic positions.

This condition is exacerbated by the absence of institutional mechanisms that ensure gender equality in job promotions. The majority of informants stated that promotions were more determined by informal considerations, such as closeness to superiors, perceived loyalty, and subjective assessments of "leadership ability," which implicitly tended to favor male journalists. Not a few also experienced situations where their promotions were delayed or ignored because of their status as wives or mothers, with the assumption that household responsibilities would interfere with professional performance.

Another obstacle is the lack of representation of women in decision-making positions, which creates a vicious circle of structural inequality. When the majority of the editorial

structure is occupied by men, the perspectives used in assessing competence, determining policies, and designing work structures will tend to reflect masculine values. This creates a situation where women have to work twice as hard to prove themselves, but are still considered not to meet the "ideal" criteria of an editor-in-chief that has been formed by masculine norms such as being firm, rational, and able to deal with pressure "coolly."

In addition, a competitive and hierarchical work environment often places women in a dilemma. On the one hand, they are required to demonstrate leadership and professionalism skills equal to those of men. On the other hand, if they are too assertive or vocal, they can be considered unfeminine or too ambitious, which actually creates resistance from colleagues and superiors. This condition illustrates the gender paradox faced by women in the professional workplace, where double standards apply and limit their space for movement socially and structurally (Joseph, 2021). Several informants also revealed that leadership training or mentoring is rarely available for female journalists. The absence of career development programs oriented towards gender equality shows that mass media companies have not made this issue an important agenda in human resource policies. Even in mass media that have a progressive and inclusive image in the public space, the issue of gender equality in their internal structure is not necessarily a primary concern. This strengthens the finding that changes in external representation are not always accompanied by substantive internal transformation.

From a sociological perspective, these barriers are a form of unequal opportunity structure, where access to resources, opportunities, and recognition is not equally open to all actors. This structure does not stand alone, but is reinforced by established gender ideologies, biased managerial practices, and the absence of regulations that guarantee fairness in promotion and performance evaluation. As a result, many female journalists choose to remain in middle positions, stop pursuing promotions, or even leave journalism because they feel there is no room for growth (Gujarati & Porter, 2010; Peter Aggleton, Rob Cover, Carmen H. Logie, 2010; Suprun et al., 2022).

However, there are also collective efforts by female journalists to fight for change, although they are still limited in scale. Several communities of female journalists have begun to build advocacy networks and voice the importance of gender equality in media structures. However, the success of these efforts depends heavily on the openness of media institutions to accept criticism and their commitment to structural reform.

Thus, structural barriers in career paths are not only individual challenges, but are a broader social problem. Gender inequality in promotion and leadership reflects how modern work systems still reproduce patriarchal dominance, even in spaces considered progressive such as the media. Therefore, a comprehensive approach is needed to address this issue, starting from changing organizational culture, updating institutional policies, to supporting the strengthening of the capacity of female journalists at all levels.

4. CONCLUSION

This study shows that female journalists play an important role in the dynamics of news production in Indonesia, but they still face various forms of systemic structural inequality. This inequality is reflected in the gender-biased division of labor, limitations in influencing news representation, and obstacles in accessing higher career levels. The division of labor based on gender role stereotypes has limited female journalists' room to

move in covering strategic issues, which has resulted in their low involvement in shaping the main news narrative. In addition, although female journalists show concern and efforts to intervene in narratives that are biased against women in the news, their position in the editorial structure is often not strong enough to encourage significant change. However, this study also shows that female journalists are not simply victims of an unequal work structure. They develop various forms of resistance and negotiation, both through proving their professionalism, infiltrating alternative narratives into the news, and building solidarity among fellow female journalists. These strategies demonstrate the existence of agency in responding to the patriarchal structure that dominates the world of mass media work. However, these efforts have not been able to fully penetrate rigid institutional walls, because most mass media do not yet have internal policies that explicitly support gender equality.

In this context, structural reforms are needed in the mass media environment to ensure a fair division of labor, equal career opportunities, and inclusive representation in reporting. The mass media must begin to formulate internal policies that support gender equality, including guidelines for reporting that are sensitive to women's issues and a promotion system that is free from gender bias. In addition, gender-perspective journalism education and training need to be championed, both in mass media institutions and journalism education institutions, so that awareness is evenly distributed across all levels. Increasing the representation of women in strategic positions is also crucial, because without their involvement in decision-making, narratives about gender justice will have difficulty finding a place in the mainstream media.

No less important, support for the formation of solidarity networks between female journalists needs to be strengthened as a shared space to share experiences, build collective strength, and fight for institutional change. Further research on gender and media issues must also continue to be developed to oversee the transformation process towards a more equal world of journalistic work. Ultimately, gender equality in the newsroom is not only about justice for female journalists, but also a prerequisite for the birth of ethical, inclusive and democratic journalistic practices in serving the public interest fairly.

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