

Reaching for the dream: A narrative study of skilled women domestic workers

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Abstract Women domestic workers are often associated with females whose only task is completing domestic work. However, this construction has changed along with the development of the labour industry. Currently, they are associated with skilled domestic workers. The relationship between women domestic workers and their employer that was previously based on kinship is supposed to have shifted to a formal relationship, with work and wage agreements. This construction is also strengthened by the presence of social media, as a means for conveying their narrative as skilled workers and not just servants for their employers. This study examines the process of symbolic interactionism in women domestic workers through their narratives as skilled domestic workers. The data was collected qualitatively from four women domestic workers in the Jakarta area as the research participants. As a metropolitan city, Jakarta has the highest number of domestic workers in Indonesia. Based on the data analysis, women domestic workers conceptualised their profession as experienced and versatile individuals in performing various domestic work and are the backbone of their respective families. Therefore, this conceptualisation shows that the participants can break away from the stereotype that domestic workers are lowly and unskilled workers. The interaction between participants and their employer raises non-physical symbols reflecting dedication and loyalty. In addition, the interaction process is a learning tool for subjects to obtain resources that equalise them with other workers in the domestic sector.

Keywords: domestic worker; symbolic interactionism; women; narrative; skilled worker

INTRODUCTION

Domestic workers are a group of workers who have a weak position in society. Weng et al., (2021) explained that this profession is considered dirty, dangerous, and stressful; with long working hours and inadequate pay. According to him, as well as other experts (Lai, 2021), this profession which is mostly engaged by women, makes the position of domestic workers become inferior compared to their employers. The workload of domestic workers is also plentiful, most of them work 24 hours a day in the employer's home, completing household chores as well as attending to the employer's family members.(Tan, 2021).

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Weng et al., (2021) and other expert (Allouache, 2021) explained that an increasing number of women migrating to big cities to work as domestic workers could bring significant economic contributions to their families and their hometown, however, this does not improve their social position in the society. Even so, migration offers opportunities for women domestic workers to undertake social and economic mobility through employment opportunities, material ownership, and even business experience (Parrenas, 2021). This expert and Henderson (2021) explained that when domestic workers enter the labour market, they have to encounter various limitations such as gender, types of work that are categorised as women's work, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic class. Therefore, according to Parreñas (2021) these limitations create inequality, subordination, and absence of space for women domestic workers; so that some of them then empower themselves through various acts of collective activism. (Lee, 2021).

These previous studies showed that the discourse on domestic workers as a profession continues to develop, starting from very demeaning titles, they progressed to be appreciated and being called with the term that emphasises their status as a worker. Even so, domestic workers in Indonesia are still not recognised like other workers in the informal sectors, this is because the relationship between domestic workers and their employers is built upon personal relationships, not professional relationships. In addition, the discourse of domestic workers cannot be separated from their position in Indonesian culture and the history of this profession which places them in a lowly position in Indonesian society.

Initially, in Javanese society, workers who performed various domestic tasks are known as *batur*, *rewang*, or *emban* (Muryanti, 2019). Also, the concept of *ngenger*, known in the Javanese society, refers to leaving an individual to family, relatives, or friends with a better economy to provide better education and help with domestic work in exchange. Although there is no specific term for this concept in the Batak society, in the Bataknese language, the people performing this work are called *parhobas* (Butarbutar et al., 2020).

Local terms such as *ngenger* and *parhobas* which are given to those who help to complete domestic works indicate the closeness between the worker and the employer. On the other hand, that term that puts the employer's position as a parent turns out to have the consequences of unlimited devotion, such as a form of filial piety to parents.

During the colonial era, domestic workers were called *babu*, *jongos*, or *bedinde* a Javanese nickname which associated with servant or helper (A. S. Nugroho & Nurfaizah, 2020). It can be seen that the division of social class in the discourse of domestic workers is a ceaseless study and there is a historical sequence in it. In the colonial era, the status of Dutch citizens referred to the authoritative party and Indonesian workers as the colonised party. Therefore, the gap between

domestic workers and employers was getting substantial. Domestic workers during the colonial era experienced at least two layers of discrimination, firstly they were indigenous, and secondly, they worked only as servants. Along with the progress of the times especially around the 1980s, the term 'assistant' gradually emerged to refer to workers in the household sector. In the 2000s, 'household assistant' (ART) and 'domestic worker' (PRT) were introduced to eliminate the negative meaning attached to the term 'maid.' However, this was an effort for the Indonesian government to ratify the Domestic Workers Bill (K. B. Nugroho, 2016).

The increasing demand for domestic workers developed this sector into an industry. Women domestic workers are not just individuals helping employers to do the housework but are paid to do so (Pelupessy, 2017). This shows the formation of this market, with the formality of working relationships between women domestic workers and employers. Currently, they work based on contracts and wages, not closeness or kinship (van Nederveen Meerkerk, 2019).

The development of information technology media also impacts the changing relationship between women domestic workers and employers. Now, employers can find and employ workers in their homes, alongside view photos and biodata provided by the distribution agents via the internet. Through distribution agents, employers can also obtain various services, such as access to direct interviews, indents, and exchanging domestic workers.

According to some experts (Uy-Tioco & Cabañes, 2021; Wahyudi, 2019; Babis, 2021; Mansour-Ille, 2019), Social media has several advantages for women domestic workers; first, they can communicate and interact regularly with their friends and family back home and no longer feel separated from their family. Second, social media is a medium for movements pertaining to activism and coordinated by non-governmental organisations which actively defend the rights of domestic workers. Third, social media is the main source of information and learning medium to deepen their knowledge about religion.

Besides, the internet is also being used to increase the knowledge of their profession as domestic workers. There are various social networking sites to connect and empower themselves. For example, *Dunia PRT Group* exists on Facebook. This group facilitates communication between domestic workers and is a means of sharing jobs and vacancy references. They also create WhatsApp groups to facilitate communication. This group is useful as a means of interaction and a support system for its members to share the same experiences (Vidyarini, 2020). This development shows that women domestic workers are currently in a different position from before, where they were known as maids that only served their employers. Based on this condition, domestic work is now a job performed by skilled workers.

Although many community members have not comprehended this concept, others have recognised that woman domestic workers as skilled

workers. The media played a significant role. Several television shows construct women, domestic workers, as main characters who look attractive, unlike the old depiction. However, social media played the most significant role in changing the representation of women domestic workers. Through social media, women domestic workers can convey their narrative as workers that are equal with other workers in domestic informal sectors (Tan, 2021).

Many studies show that the existing construction in Indonesian society still positions women domestic workers as family members (Muryanti, 2019; Pelupessy, 2017). This condition shows the difficult position of women as workers and the closest parties that provide emotional support to employers (Sinha & Kumar, 2018). Apart from that, previous studies show that women domestic workers are still identified as poor and unprofessional workers (Jordhus-Lier, 2017; Pelupessy, 2017; Ortuzar, 2018; Muryanti, 2019).

These previous studies argue that there is a clear power relationship exists in the discourse of women domestic workers. The employers are in a dominant position, while the women domestic workers, regardless of the narrative, are subordinates. This study argues that along with the times and development of technology, women domestic workers can no longer be seen as subordinate parties. The reason is that they possess expertise in domestic work and are the backbone of their families' (de Villiers & Taylor, 2019; Bhattacharjee & Goswami, 2020; Choi, 2019)

Therefore, this study analyses the emerging narrative of women who work as domestic workers, who are skilled in various domestic tasks. Narratives can be used to understand the meaning constructed by women domestic workers. Through narratives, individuals communicate and give meaning to their lives and experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The concept of women domestic workers as skilled workers resulted from interactions among the representations displayed in the media, including the mainstream and social media, along with interactions with their families, fellow workers, employers, and the environment. Hence, these interactions form the self-concept of women domestic workers as skilled workers, and this is conveyed through their narratives.

In Indonesia, the highest number of domestic workers are in several provinces, including Jakarta Metropolitan Special Region. In Jakarta, there is a tendency of increasing live-out domestic workers and decrease live-in domestic workers. Women who work as live-out domestic workers have a higher bargaining position and are more independent; they are also more expressive in conveying their narratives (Aryanto, 2017).

These various studies showed that the use of the term worker to refer to the domestic worker cannot be separated from the discourse in society, the media, as well as employers, also the environment in which the domestic worker lives, including the women domestic worker herself.

Modern life in the big city demands women domestic workers to improve their skills according to employers' expectations; also, media technology has encouraged women, domestic workers, to be able to change their 'fate', live up to the demands of society to be considered as experienced workers. Changes in perspective on women domestic workers do not occur instantly, but through a series of narratives, and long interactions. This phenomenon is interesting to be analysed.

Thus, the research question is how women domestic workers construct the narrative of their lives. In a sense, how they are able to empower themselves and construct themselves more independently. Comprehending the narrative that is interacted between women domestic workers, their immediate environment and society is the goal of this research.

Consequently, this study uses the theory of symbolic interactionism with three basic concepts, namely mind, self, and society. In addition, this study uses a narrative approach, which is a powerful way to understand women's life experiences and the strategies of resistance they employ.

The perspective of symbolic interactionism theory has a fundamental idea that humans are born without knowing who they are. Their self-concept appears and is influenced through the process of social interaction. In social interactions, individual thoughts and behaviour are shaped by a family member, friends, society, media, and the social environment in which the individual lived. Thus, an individual was viewed as a product of interaction (Dillon, 2019; Housley, 2021).

Symbolic interactionism implies that humans are rational individuals, always adjusting their behaviour based on the context of the situation and the interactions they have with different people. While a symbol represents meaning for individuals. Symbols, the meaning of symbols, and social interactions are the main study in the symbolic interactionism (N. Wang et al., 2019).

There are three main concepts that are being exchanged in the process of symbolic interactionism, namely- mind, self, and society. Mind also known as consciousness is a concept or thought in which individuals assign meaning to significant symbols, and use those symbols in social interaction with others (Fink, 2015; Inglis & Thorpe, 2019). Meanwhile, the concept of self is a reflexivity process from the dialectic combination between "I" and "Me" which gives rise to self. "I" is the spontaneous part that promotes new aspects, is unpredictable, and disorganised, while "Me" is an object and self-image observed through the reflection of others (Willis Hepp et al., 2019; Dillon, 2019). Society could be defined as the aggregate of the actions and interactions of people which is created and maintained through utilization of significant symbols in social interactions (Willis Hepp et al., 2019).

In the process of social interaction, two parties affect the individual, namely: significant other and generalised other (Tiwari et al., 2020). Significant other is the primary, most important agent that

influences the individual sense of self; and generalised other can be defined as the collective community also the social environment in which the individual lives. In Generalised other, people learned about the role and expectation of society towards them (Willis Hepp et al., 2019).

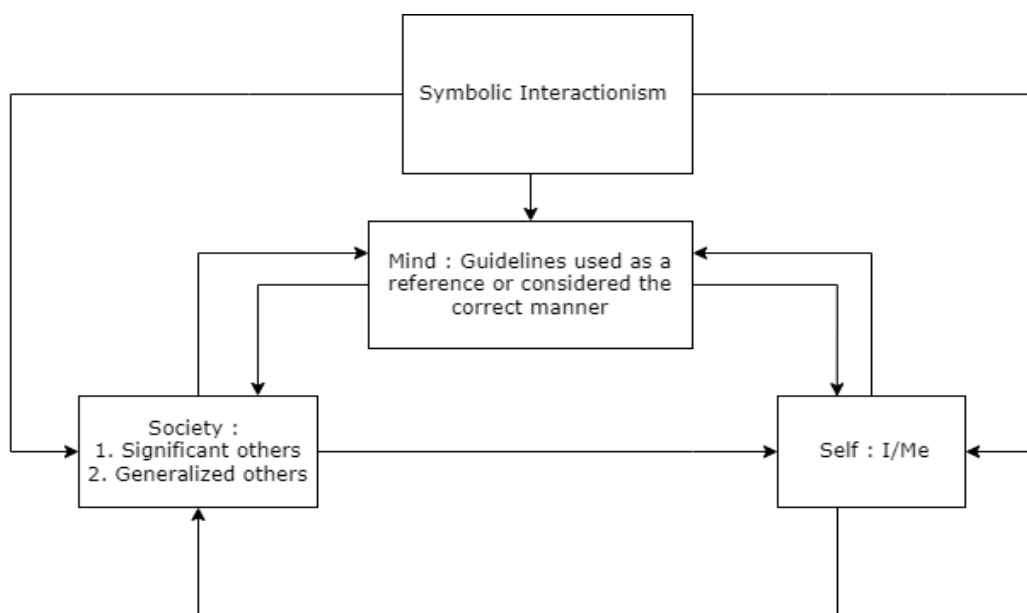
Women domestic workers are classified into two groups, namely live-in workers, and live-out workers. Women who work as live-out domestic workers attempted to modernise their relationship with employers into a formal one and building autonomy over their work (Lui et al., 2021). Meanwhile, live-in domestic workers are known as "lifelong work," meaning they start working for the employers from a very young age and live with them for the rest of their lives. Therefore, they often have close family ties with employers (Elias, 2018).

In interacting with their employers, women domestic workers often use symbols showing their work skills. These symbols show that they can do housework perfectly or even better than their employers (Galvaan et al., 2015; Ortuzar, 2018). Through this, women domestic workers show their self-concept as skilled workers (Parrenas, 2021) and framed a new meaning to their profession, as workers who have expertise and skills in completing various domestic works.

The similarity from the various studies showed that the position and role attached to women domestic workers cannot be separated from the history of the existence of women domestic workers and the discourse that exists in the media, society, and people who interact with them. The narration conveyed by women domestic workers examines how interactions between women domestic workers, their families, and their employers can reveal various meanings, symbols, and constructions previously unseen and unheard in society.

The conceptual framework for this research is available on Figure 1:

Figure 1 : Conceptual Framework



Source: research data 2020

Symbolic interactionism is a process of exchanging symbols, where these symbols are used to understand, interpret and adapt to other people and the social environment. In this study, the process of symbolic interactionism occurs between women domestic workers and their employers and their families. *Mind* is a guidance that is believed to be the truth. Mind connects symbols with certain objects which are the basis for interpretation and determination of meaning for individuals. In this study, the mind is the conceptualisation of women domestic workers towards their profession. *Self* is the embodiment of the existence of an individual that arises from the process of social interaction. There are two parts of the self, namely "I" and "Me." "I" refers to the ability of individuals to place themselves as subjects and "Me" is the placement of individuals as objects. This study will look at how women domestic workers show their self-concept in social interactions. *Society* can be interpreted as patterns, relationships, and various roles which people present when they gather at certain activities both on a small and large scale. A society is formed based on the exchange of symbols. In this study, society will be seen through two parties, namely the significant other and the generalised other.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a constructivist paradigm to explore the understanding and experience of women domestic workers who are skilled in various domestic tasks. In the constructivist paradigm, social reality is formed by individuals based on interactions, the context of the situation, and the environment where they are located (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). A qualitative approach was used to gain knowledge, understanding, and experiences from research participants about their realities, including the formation of subjective meanings related to their professions, based on their interactions with others (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study used a narrative research strategy that allows marginalised individuals to open various aspects of their lives. Additionally, this is relevant in obtaining data from the participants because it provides space for neglected voices from the community (C. C. Wang & Geale, 2015). By using this strategy, this study gains a lot of information and a deep understanding of the participants because the story told by the participants forms an appropriate means to communicate reality from their point of view (van den Hoonaard, 2013).

Subsequently, the research participants were determined purposively, and the depth of information required the selection of individuals willing to be interviewed and convey their reflections as domestic workers. Access to the participants was obtained from the employers, as the workers were unwilling to be involved in the study without their employer's permission. The criteria for determining the subject are women of at least 25 years old, willing to be interviewed, alongside working as a domestic worker for more than five (5) years with the same employer in the Jakarta area. Through these criteria, an

interview was successfully conducted with four female domestic workers. Table 1 presents the description of the research participants and their working environment, as follows:

Table 1: Description of the Research Participants and Their Work Environment

Participants	Age	Employer	Working Location	Atmosphere in the work environment
1	38	Women, 60-year-old, retired civil servant, currently living with her children after her husband died 10 years ago	Upper middle settlement	The atmosphere tends to be quiet, the distance between one house and another is quite far, therefore there is no socialisation with neighbours.
2	46	Male in his 60s, retired and living with his only daughter	Upper middle settlement	Although the atmosphere is quite crowded, they rarely interact with neighbours.
3	43	Married couple in their 40s, both work as employees with two and expecting their third child	Public housing complex	The atmosphere is crowded and the relationship between employer and neighbours is quite close. Domestic workers in housing complexes often socialise.
4	36	Women, 40-year-old lives with her elderly parents	Public housing complex	The atmosphere is quite crowded, the employer often interacts with neighbours, but only a few houses employ domestic workers in this complex.

Source: processed data from the 2020-2021

Considering the diversity of the research participants' conditions is important in qualitative studies because obtaining the breadth of data related to the individuals observed is recommended (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The data collection is initially performed with participants 1 and 2 through the access provided by the employer. However, participants with different working conditions and environments from participants 1 and 2 were added as the study progresses, making the obtained data was more diverse. Although access to participants 3 and 4 was obtained through their employer, they were free to convey their narratives. The data collection was performed within ten months. However, because this research was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic, the time given to conduct face-to-face interviews was very limited. Most of the employers only allowed 1-1,5 hour for researcher to do the interviews. Therefore, time required for data collection became longer. Researcher had to meet the participants several times to collect the necessary data, including observing their activities at the worksite, and observing the relationships with their

employers. As supporting data, in-depth interviews were performed with the employers, and a literature study on various studies and documents that raised issues regarding domestic workers was conducted.

A thematic analysis was used to categorise the subject narrative into themes, based on the symbolic interactionism theory. The data obtained were also reviewed to recognise other themes that emerged from the interviews with the subject. This analysis was considered appropriate to gain a complete understanding of the participants' narratives. This study used the triangulation process for the validity of the study. The triangulation of sources was performed by comparing the interview results with the research participants, alongside obtaining field notes from the observations. Then, the results of the research participants and their employers are compared.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Subject Profile

Participant 1

Participant 1 has worked as a domestic worker since the age of 14. Initially, she worked as a live-in domestic worker but stopped and became a live-out worker after receiving the violence from her former employer. Apart from working as a domestic worker, she also offers shuttle services for her neighbours. She decided to work as a domestic worker at a young age because of unfair treatment by her parents and she has worked for eight years with her current employer.

Participant 2

Participant 2 has worked as a domestic worker since age 17 and has been with the same employer for approximately 29 years. Her profession started with an invitation from her friend to work as a domestic worker. After receiving blessings from her parents, she left to work as a domestic worker in Jakarta. Initially, she worked as a live-in domestic worker for about a year but chose to become a live-out domestic worker after marriage to have time to care for her family. The similarity of cultural background between participant 2 and her employer makes her feel comfortable at work, hence, after working for more than 20 years, she has no desire to change jobs.

Participant 3

Participant 3 worked as a domestic worker for approximately six years. Currently, she has a variety of professions as a housewife, a domestic worker, and a snack trader. Therefore, her daily routine is quite dense because she must work in the homes of her employer, prepare the snacks to be sold, and complete various domestic works in her own home. As a domestic worker, the task given is quite heavy because she performs jobs such as washing, cleaning the house, and cooking, and still must take care of the two children of the employer.

Participant 4

Participant 4 worked as a domestic worker for approximately seven years. She got her job through her close friend and was desperate to get a job, so she went to work in Jakarta even without her parents' permission. She went with her daughter, who was three years old at the time. Her first job was as a live-out domestic worker but because she must provide for her two children, she decided to work as a live-in domestic worker. This condition prevented her from spending additional money for accommodation, transportation, and consumption needs. Unfortunately, she was being a victim of sexual harassment by the employer while working and this incident made her return to being a live-out domestic worker.

Participant Self-Concept: Skilled Workers in Domestic Affairs

If the formation of self-concept is associated with the influence of others, namely significant other and generalised other; the data obtained revealed that the participants conceptualised themselves as skilled workers in completing various domestic tasks. Subsequently, family and employer were revealed as the parties with the most influence on the formation of the participant's self-concept or 'significant other.' The participant's self-concept was also formed by general thoughts from the community or 'generalised other.' This is in accordance with the result of the study from Fink (2015), Zhao (2015), and Tiwari et al., (2020) which stated that the interaction that an individual makes with others is a means of forming an individual's self-concept.

The participant's self-concept as a skilled worker is illustrated through the following participants' narratives:

The participant is a versatile worker in domestic affairs

The self-concept narrated by these participants appears related to their experiences while working as domestic workers, including the interactions with their employer. Moreover, the four participants agree that versatility in various household matters is the main requirement. This versatile concept is interpreted as the ability to learn new and various household matters and also care for the employer's family members. This included being skilled at cooking the employer's favourite food and caring for the children and parents of the employer. Therefore, they were not just doing ordinary domestic works such as cleaning the house or washing clothes. The participants' self-concept as versatile workers in domestic affairs arose from the habit of the public to assign various tasks to domestic workers.

Furthermore, the interaction between the participants and the employers also showed the expectation of the employer, as they were able and skilled to complete all domestic works. For participants 1 and 2, the demands given by the employers were cooking skills, though they were never assigned these jobs by their parents due to their young ages at that time. However, they were suddenly assigned to cooking a variety

of their employer's favourite food after arriving at their house. Therefore, participants 1 and 2 struggled to learn various kinds of recipes and are now skilled at cooking due to the expectations.

This struggle is conveyed by subject 2 as follows:

"When I was in the village, I always clean (the house). My mother always cooked and sold food. However, I can't cook. Right here, I was just given a book. I learned to cook using the book, read it, tried everything individually until I was able to cook" (Subject 2, 15 December 2020).

Meanwhile, participants 3 and 4 were required to take care of the family members of the employers. Participant 3 was assigned to take care of the two children of the employer while their parents worked. Participant 3 only has experience in caring for her children and educates them to be independent and complete their school assignments by themselves. However, she now must accompany and assist the employer's children in completing their school assignments which were difficult for her, as she had only received education up to primary school. Hence, she tried her best to help in completing the school assignments properly. The same situation was experienced by participant 4 who was required to take care of the elderly parents of the employer. She did not have experience caring for the elderly before, as both of her parents in the village were still at their productive age. Although she attempted self-learning by trying to remember various routines and things that her employer's parents like, this situation was not easy because she works in a housing complex where not all families have domestic workers. Therefore, she could not ask for help from fellow domestic workers. Furthermore, she was on standby continuously because tasks were constantly assigned to her by the employer.

The following is the narrative of participant 4:

"Actually, my agreement is only to take care of Grandpa but, I also take care of the house. I take care of Grandpa's meal, changing diapers, everything. I do all the housework too." (Subject 4, 8 March 2021).

The conditions experienced by these participants show that versatile workers had to accept various additional domestic tasks assigned to them. In fact, employers can employ a chef, elderly nurse, or babysitter to meet their needs and care of their family members. However, they choose to delegate these tasks to the participants, then the participants struggled to meet the expectations by studying and doing all the tasks given. In completing these tasks, they build self-concepts as versatile domestic workers. They have new skills and knowledge that contribute to their bargaining position as domestic workers. This result is similar to the study conducted by Platt et al.,(2016); Ortuzar (2018); and Wareing (2017) which stated that domestic workers continue to strive to improve their work skills and

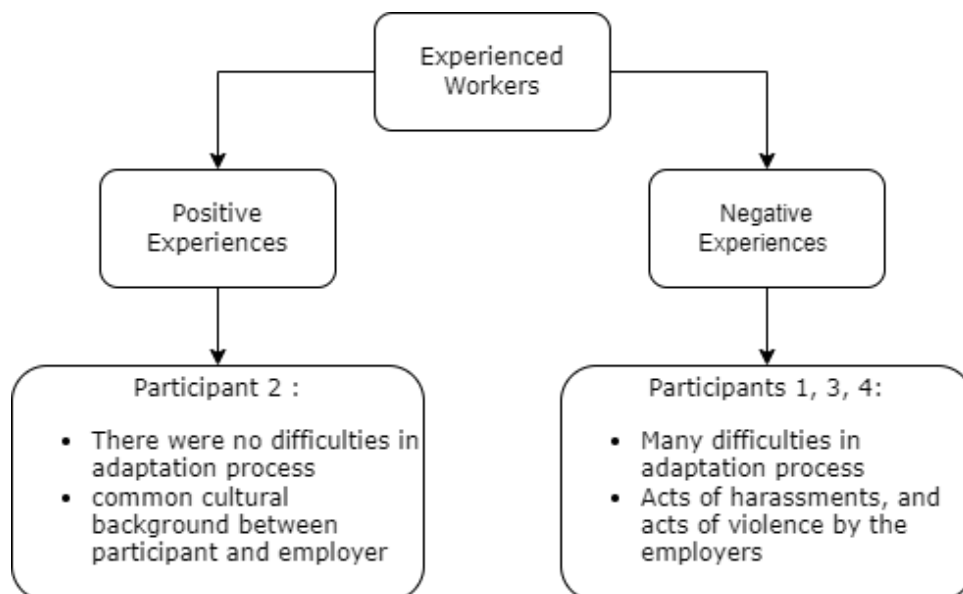
increase their experience so they can get jobs with higher salaries and also, proving that they are different from domestic workers in general.

Participants are experienced workers

The concept of experienced workers emerged from the employer's expectations and the general public's perception of the participants' performance as domestic workers (Ladegaard, 2018; Dillon, 2019). Moreover, most employers and the public still expect domestic workers to have work experience, therefore they do not need to spend time teaching them in completing domestic work. They are also expected to dedicate all their time to doing all domestic work assigned by the employers. As a worker, the participants try to meet these expectations, but from past experiences, the participants adapt them to their current condition. In this study, the participant's work experience is categorised into two, namely positive and negative.

Positive work experience is attributed to the minimal obstacles experienced by the participants when adapting to their work and the habits of the employers. Meanwhile, negative work experience is related to the many obstacles experienced in adapting, including acts of harassment, and acts of violence by the employers. The data obtained showed that participant 2 has a positive work experience. Although she finds some difficulties in working, the same cultural background as her employer makes it easy to adapt to her working conditions. Meanwhile, participants 1, 3, and 4 had negative work experiences. Figure 2 describes the variety of experiences experienced by research participants:

Figure 2. Experienced Worker from Participant's Narratives



Source: processed data from 2020-2021

Participant 1 has worked as a live-in domestic worker without getting food for two months. She also not getting paid for her work. This condition causes participant 1 to run away and stay at her friend's house. Participants 3 and 4 have experienced various acts of violence. Participant 3 experienced verbal violence from her employer. Her employer also often carried out verbal violence towards her family members. Participant 4 has likewise gone through the heartbreaking condition is also this painful situation as a survivor of sexual harassment.

The poor treatment of the employer on participant 4 is illustrated by the narrative as below:

"I have ever worked with someone; he was rude then I quit my job. My mother told me to become a live-in domestic worker. Renting a house just wastes my money. My employer is not polite. I even once molested in my room. Consequently, I cried for a week. Madam asked me why I was crying, but I didn't dare say anything. However, Madam was curious and suspicious. I was asked to be honest. Finally, I dared to tell the truth that when she wasn't at home, her husband asked me to go to his room to do something inappropriate. Ultimately, the madam permitted for me to quit which was not allowed at first". (Subject 4, 1 April 2021).

The negative work experiences experienced by participants 1, 3, and 4 made them more careful in their work. They did not fully comply with the requests of their employers because from their experience, they felt that total compliance with their employers can lead to acts of harassment and violence. These positive and negative work experiences are then interpreted by the participants as a provision to build their self-concept as experienced domestic workers. Then, this becomes one of the basics of the participant's request for a clear job description and work agreement with the employers. Also, participants frankly express their rejection of many inappropriate tasks. These rejections are conveyed to the employers in the expectation that the employers will renegotiate the task. Work experiences also made the participants know the criteria for the ideal domestic workers expected by the employers. There are differences in the performance shown by experienced domestic workers and other inexperienced ones.

Participant 1 conveys narratives as follows:

"Now, people use cell phones. Other domestic workers are sometimes lazy, leaving their jobs to engage with their mobile phone. I'm not like that. As soon as I arrive, I immediately do my work and operate my mobile phone when all is completed. Sometimes my employer likes to remind me when my mobile phone rings. I even say that I will take care of it later". (Subject 1, 20 November 2020)

The narrative conveyed by participant 1 shows that as an experienced domestic worker, she is dedicated to her work and has good work performance as expected by her employer.

The participants are the trusted people of the employers

The participants' next concept is employer trust which makes them become the right hand of the employer. This concept arises from interactions and general habits prevailing in the community where the employers entrust household management to women domestic workers. In addition, women domestic workers are trusted to select the employer's guests and convey various important messages to the family members or other parties. Besides, they also often get the task of guarding the valuables owned by their employers. This condition then raises the participant's narrative in which they are the parties who are more familiar with the conditions and habits of their employers. This is presented in the participants' actions in selecting and determining the various household needs of the employers, ranging from the completeness of household utensils to the daily menu. Furthermore, the closeness with the employers also makes them the most trusted person to take care of the employer's family members, and this is illustrated by the narrative conveyed by participant 2, she chooses to keep working even though one of her employers had died. This is because the late employer-mandated her to continue to work and take care of the employer's children.

The following is an explanation of participant 2:

"I'm confused, I can't leave *Mbak* (the employer's daughter). At that time, my employer told me that if she died, I should continue to work here" (Subject 2, 15 December 2020).

This condition shows that the trust given by the employer to the participant is very large, hence she feels responsible for keeping the trust given by the employer to her. In the interaction between the participants and the employers, the participants can balance the "I" and "Me" aspects. The participants' self-narrative related to mastery of various work skills, shows that they try to present themselves through the reflection of the employers about the ideal figure of domestic workers. Therefore, the "Me" aspect looks more prominent. However, the subjects also show the "I" aspect when narrating the self-concept related to work professionalism and their position as trusted people of their employers. This shows a change in self-concept in the interaction of the subjects under the construction of the 'generalised other.'

The results of the study indicate that in symbolic interactions perspective, which initially assumed that people interacting in the interaction process were equal; showed symbols of inequality between domestic workers, employers, and society. However, these symbols being exchanged in the social interaction process were dynamic. In this

research, women domestic shifted their minds, changed their self-concept, and how they interact with society.

At the beginning of the working period, the "Me" aspect dominates the self-concept interacted by the participants with the employers. At that time, they are new and inexperienced domestic workers. Hence, the participants showed themselves as individuals who follow all the employers' orders and avoid conflict. However, the more work experiences the participants had, the more they understood the concept of domestic workers as professional workers. This is in accordance with the explanation from Zhao (2015), Redmond (2015), and Dillon (2019) which stated that A person's self-concept is dynamic, a person will adjust their self-concept and self-presentation according to the social environment and other parties with whom they interact.

This is also in line with the development of the domestic labour industry, where the relationship between the employers and domestic workers is determined based on a formal working relationship. Then, after becoming experienced domestic workers, the subjects can display the "I" aspect and balance it with the "Me" aspect. Several previous studies also have the same result. Women domestic workers with vast knowledge about domestic work, experience in doing domestic work and owning multiple skills in the various domestic tasks are having higher bargaining positions as a worker, which enabled them to negotiate their working conditions and present themselves to the employers.

The "I" aspect related to the spontaneous, impulsive, and creative part of the self, is shown through various rejections and limitations conveyed by the participants to their employers. This is made to adjust the work assigned with the existing work agreement. For participants with a close relationship with their employers, the "I" aspect is shown directly, and participants feel that with this closeness, their employers understand their point of view. Meanwhile, for participants with an unfavourable relationship with their employers, the "I" aspect is shown covertly to avoid conflicts harming their position as workers.

Self-Concept of the Participants: The Backbone of the Family

Meanwhile, the self-concept of the backbone of the family is related to the participant's position in the family. Most of the women domestic workers come from poor families and their work has a major contribution to the economic condition of their families. Therefore, the participants in this research narrated that they work to support their entire family, both nuclear and extended. Moreover, their hard work is expected to build a better future. The family as the 'significant other' has high expectations by allowing the participants to work as domestic workers. These impacted the participants' self-concept as the backbone of the family, following the expectations imposed by their family. The participants also obey the values in society, where individuals who have advantages in economic terms should help their families in need.

Furthermore, the participants in this study admit that they do not have savings. Besides paying for their daily lives, they also support the lives of their parents or family in the village. For participant 1, her closest family currently is her siblings. They often ask her for help to meet their needs and she always tries to fulfil her siblings' requests with the expectation that one day when she is old, she can return to her village and live with her family. However, participant 1 still has concerns described below:

“I want to grow old in the village. There are no relatives here. But I’m worried if my family told me that because I can't work and then go home hence, I bother people. I have such thoughts”. (Subject 1, 20 November 2020).

Participant 1's narrative shows that she still has doubts about her siblings' affection, even though she has been struggling to support them all this time. However, she chooses to harbour this concern and focus on her work. Meanwhile, participants 2 and 3 still routinely send money to their parents in their hometown, although, they are the backbone of their respective nuclear families. Husbands of participants 2 and 3 had odd jobs whose income is uncertain. Therefore, their family is completely dependent on the participants. Participant 4 is in a similar situation, as she is responsible for her two children and parents in her hometown after her husband died in a work accident.

This condition then makes them struggle to find additional income. Participant 2 often chooses to work overtime, 7 days a week. Participant 3 tries to earn extra money by selling snacks on the sideliners of her break. Meanwhile, participant 4 takes a job as a daily domestic worker every weekend. Their struggles show that they are responsible for carrying out their role as the backbone of the family. For them, all these sacrifices are a devotion to the family. However, this busy work makes the participants' relationship with their children distant. Their educational background is lower than their children and their lack of time to gather with them, make are one of the difficulties in getting closer to their children. This is illustrated by the narrative delivered by participant 2 as follows:

“My son is difficult to be asked for a conversation. He is angry when I approach him and asked him what he is doing. He avoided me and forbids me to look at his mobile phone. He asks me not to be nosy” (Subject 2, 11 January 2021).

Meanwhile, participants 3 and 4 explain that sometimes they have difficulty meeting the demands of their children. This then makes them feel guilty because even though they have worked hard while leaving the children at home, they were still not able to provide the best. Even so, they still try to make her family happy because they want her family to have a good life. By doing this they gain happiness and satisfaction.

The data show that when interacting with the family which is a "significant other", the "Me" aspect of the participants is very dominant. Although they act as the main provider for their family, they always obey their family and try to fulfil their wishes. In this case, the participants do not show the "I" aspect. They carry out their role as the backbone of the family with full responsibility.

Interaction between Participants and Their Employers

The interaction between the participants and their employers in the context of work was performed based on the shared meaning that women domestic workers are skilled workers at their jobs. This interaction raises non-physical symbols, including dedication and loyalty. Dedication to work is shown through their efforts to meet the expectations of their employers and this attitude fosters the trust of the employers towards the participants. After gaining trust, the participants feel valued and slowly begin to open to their employers and grow loyalty. The participants' loyalty is seen through the narrative revealing their lack of desire to change jobs. They are also no longer concerned about the wages as they feel that the appreciation and trust given by their employers cannot be equated with a fee.

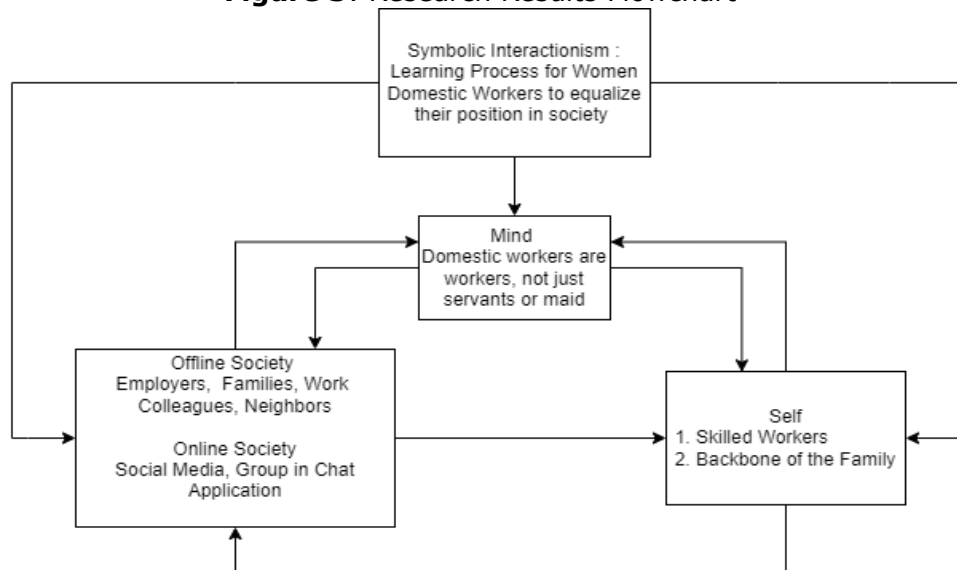
The findings show that the participants' dedication and loyalty are not shown with an inferior attitude, as they always obey the desires of their employers. Also dedicated and loyal workers express their opinions to their employers but do not gossip about them, even though sometimes they have conflicts.

In this study, two participants work in housing complexes, while the other two do not. There are several patterns of interaction that constitute the findings of this study. The interaction is more moderate in participants working in a housing complex, as their employers allow the participants to use cell phones while working and hang out with fellow domestic workers in the complex. This happens because their neighbours are 'significant others,' who play important roles in the interaction of participants and their employers. For participants working outside the housing complex, interactions with employers tend to be more conservative. Flexibility is obtained through the choice of participants to be live-out domestic workers, not from the employers, who still expect the participants to keep a hierarchical working relationship. The result of the study is presented by Figure 3.

Symbolic interactionism is a learning process for the participants. They learn the behaviour patterns of their employers and the outcomes are a resource to equalise their position with other higher parties. They realise that the resources they have are weak, and they only use them if they are familiar with the context of the situation, culture, and habits of their employers. The participants' understanding of this situation also explains the changes between mind, self, and society in the theory of symbolic interactionism. This study shows that these three aspects are inseparable and a part of various individual interactions with other

parties. Through the interaction process, the individual learns the situation context and knows the behaviour patterns of the other party.

Figure 3: Research Results Flowchart



Source: research data, 2021

This is a resource causing individuals to sort out and adapt to the context faced and also display the "I" or the "Me" side of themselves. They present themselves as subjects or objects alternately depending on the situation. This strategy is easily performed by the participants because they know the character and personal life of their employers (Ueno, 2009). In this study, the participants conceptualised their minds as a worker, not just maids or servants. Therefore, they presented themselves accordingly. When interacting with employers, participants will present their self-concept as skilled workers. Meanwhile, when they are interacting with their families, the participants will display their self-concept as the backbone of the family.

This situation is also affected by society, which in this study is known into two categories, namely offline communities, and online communities. Offline society is formed through direct communication and face-to-face contact. However, nowadays the process of symbolic interactionism is also heavily influenced by online society, including the network of friends that participants have on social media. Both played an important role in the formation of the self-concept of the participants.

CONCLUSION

Domestic work was originally a profession neglected by the community because it involves jobs that are considered simple and the obligations of women. However, with the development of media information and the labour industry, women domestic workers are positioned as skilled workers. Therefore, the changes in this profession's construction are presented through the designation given to women domestic workers. The terms *babu* and maid are now being replaced by assistants and

workers while the mention of domestic workers is symbolic of a profession that is equal to others. This change also rose to various symbols and meanings that have not been understood by most Indonesians. Hence, the meanings and symbols built by women domestic workers are very significant to strengthen the construction of this profession. Consequently, this study obtains several conclusions. The interaction shows that domestic workers understand the expectations of their performance by the employers. Hence, the "Me" aspect of domestic workers is more dominantly displayed than "I". Meanwhile, some exceptions occur in the case of domestic workers who have close relationships with their employers. Here, the "I" and "Me" aspects are displayed alternately according to the situation context. The participants' self-presentation is narrated with dedication and loyalty, which are the main interaction symbols. Their dedication is demonstrated by their struggle to meet the expectations of their employers. Meanwhile, loyalty is demonstrated through narratives that reveal their lack of desire to change jobs and their avoidance of discussing the wages they receive. The interaction process between both parties has become a means of learning and understanding the context, where the participants learn the patterns and habits of their employers that become their resources. Hence, the resources are used to balance the relationship between domestic workers and their employers.

The results of this study show that the perspective of symbolic interactionism theory must also examine the concept of power because there is inequality that emerged from the social interaction process. Some people have the power, while the rest are being marginalised. The member of marginalised groups is forced to use symbols dictated by the people with power. Therefore, to equalise their position, the marginalised group member then uses the process of social interaction as a learning tool where they can use a variety of new and different symbols.

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