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## **An Exploration of the ‘Gendered’ Dimensions of Women’s Success in Ghana’s Media/ Communication Industry**

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### **Abstract**

Ghana’s return to democracy and a liberalised business environment in 1992 ushered the country into a period characterised by an ever-growing media/communication industry. From journalism, through public relations to advertising, there has been an upsurge in activity and, consequently, in competition. In the midst of this competitive environment, some women have made visible gains, having attained different levels of success evidenced by various awards they and the organisations they lead have won. This is in spite of the numerous challenges that women have been known to face in media-related industries (see for instance Okpara 2006; Steiner 2002). This paper reports findings from interviews with three such women that delved into their career journeys to explore whether there are gender implications for their success.

**Key Words:** journalism, public relations, advertising, women in decision-making, socialisation, gendering advantage

### **Résumé**

Avec le retour à la démocratie et un environnement des affaires libéralisé en 1992, le Ghana est entré dans une période marquée par une industrie des médias/de la communication en pleine expansion. Du journalisme à la publicité, en passant par les relations publiques, il y a eu un regain d’activité et par conséquent, de concurrence. Au milieu

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de cet environnement concurrentiel, certaines femmes ont réalisé des gains visibles, ayant atteint différents niveaux de réussite attestés par divers prix remportés par elles et par les organisations qu'elles dirigent. Et cela, malgré les nombreux défis auxquels elles ont été confrontées dans les industries liées aux médias (voir par exemple Okpara 2006 ; Steiner 2002). Cet article présente les résultats d'entretiens avec trois de ces femmes qui ont plongé dans leurs parcours professionnels pour déterminer si leurs réussites ont des incidences sexospécifiques.

**Mots clés :** journalisme, relations publiques, Publicités, les femmes dans la prise de décisions, socialisation, prise en compte du genre dans les avantages.

### **Introduction and background**

The media and communication industry is generally perceived as a gendered professional frame in which male and female practitioners are treated differently and show signs of doing their work differently (WACC 2010; Thompson 2009; Broyles and Grow 2008). Often, these differences are underpinned by inequalities and disadvantages of which women are the victims. In spite of these inequalities, however, the industry continues to see an influx of women. In a few cases, some of these women are rising to leadership positions.

In Ghana, the last two decades have seen the media landscape experiencing a boom that perhaps only compares to the latter days of the colonial era where political activists and independence advocates used the press to build support for and to argue for self governance. The Fourth Republican Constitution in 1992 has resulted in a very buoyant media and communication landscape. As at the end of the second quarter of 2012, there were 228 radio stations and 28 TV stations operating in the country (NCA 2012). Newspapers seem to be as varied as there are varied issues and political positions to champion.

Alongside these developments in the main media, other communication and media-related industries, such as advertising and public relations, have also seen an increase in activity. Given that the industry in Ghana also shows signs of being gendered with evidence of the existence of a glass ceiling for women's progress in some cases (Byerly 2011), it is no surprise that the boom that the industry has received appears to favour men when it comes to leadership and management. From media organisations through communication agencies to communication departments of corporate organisations, men outnumber women in leadership/management positions (Byerly 2011). In spite of this, however, a few women have managed to rise to top positions in the industry and are

heading organisations that have received industry recognition. Indeed, the women themselves have been the object of industry recognition too.

The question that this paper sought to examine was whether, in the lived experiences of such women, their gender has had any implications for their journeys up the industry ladder. More importantly, we sought an exploration of the possible ways in which their gender may be thought of as having facilitated their success. We pose such a question, informed by the understanding that people are social beings and products of their socialisation. Much as the foundation for a person's identity may be traced to genetic formation (nature), it is difficult to conceive of life without influences from the environment and what is learnt from it. For the purposes of this study, the authors take the view that this learning from the environment (whether in the work environment or in others) may have implications for a person's output. Where the conditions learnt/internalised from the environment are gendered, the implication is that their consequences for men and women's behaviour would be differently felt and expressed.

As social beings, men and women undergo socialization processes that have been known to be carried into the work frame. Discussing this within the context of what she calls 'socialisation for work', Cohen-Scali (2003:239) refers to the tendency, within the family setting, to transmit notions, attitudes and representations about work. According to her, gender, as well as other factors (including values), is at play in this process of socialisation for work. This study sought an examination of how such socialisation, together with Cohen-Scali's (2003:242) 'socialisation by work' (the re-orientation men and women have to go through in order to fit in the workplace), can be drawn on, by women, for career success.

## **Gender and Work**

Literature examining the relationship between gender and work output, delivery styles, leadership and success is expansive, with the academic interest in these relationships coming from various disciplinary orientations. Given the study's wide scope in terms of relevant concepts, this section contains a broad presentation of what is known about the various concepts and their relationships. The concepts discussed include socialisation, gender and work, gender and media practice, and gender and leadership.

Socialization is seen to be a major platform by which boys and girls learn to become men and women. These orientations influence behaviour as they serve as the organising basis for such behaviour in different

contexts, including the workplace. Evidence from Ghana indicates that as early as around 12 years, boys have internalised the roles they should play as boys and men in society, particularly with reference to the domestic setting and in their relations with girls (Adomako Ampofo and Boateng 2007). On the one hand, such data enable an understanding of what cues boys and girls may be receiving on the domestic front. On the other hand (and particularly of interest to this study), such literature presents the contexts in which girls learn to grow into women, to enable an analysis of any skills developed therein that they may leverage for career success.

Steady (2011) alludes to a tendency for the domestic socialisation to be carried over to the work frame. She argues, for instance, that motherhood (in this case the learning of how to be a mother) was a strong and positive attribute in women's leadership. By implication, women may bring their motherhood skills and abilities to bear on what they do at work and as leaders, and the relationship fostering attributes of motherhood could then yield benefits. Again, by implication, what has been known in the literature to characterise women's 'transformational' leadership could actually be a leveraging of socialised skills.

Steady (2011) therefore, argues that the socio-cultural context/climate, and institutional environment in which female leadership emerges and is enacted, have to be taken into account in understanding how females work and lead. This study draws inspiration from this position and argues that more attention needs to go into examining what the socio-cultural environment and its influence on men and women imply for the workplace.

However, men and women's work and career success cannot be discussed from a gender perspective with a blind eye turned to the organisational environment itself. For, whereas gendering precedes the work environment, it may continue in it. Thus, workplace interactions (networks) and communication could also inform the identities that men and women develop which by extension may then serve to impact their journeys along the career ladder.

According to Kanter (1977), men and women, depending on their proportional sizes as categories within organisation, develop a consciousness of their states that then inform their behaviour and, in turn, may affect their success within the organisation. Where women find themselves as a minority category relative to men (for instance, women in management or male dominated roles), they become tokens in the midst of dominants, and are highly visible (by virtue of their proportional

scarcity). Also, they may have their differences with men exaggerated to retain the status quo and are more likely to be judged with group characteristics rather than individual characteristics. Together, these conditions put pressure on tokens (the women) and may become the driving force for their behaviour. Kanter reported that women in token positions, in trying to negotiate the pressures of tokenism, exhibited two characteristics: they either tended to overachieve and to try to draw attention to their work as equally good and comparable to men's work or they sought a low profile (Kanter 1977). Either way, their behaviour as tokens could have implications for how high and how fast they could rise along the career ladder.

Closely related to Kanter's work in discussing the possible ways in which one's gender could impact career growth is research that has looked at employee networks and their implications for output success and job satisfaction. According to Ibarra (1993), networks are the storehouses of a variety of instrumental resources that are critical for career advancement. Who an employee bonds with and gets the opportunity to move with within the organisation could be a platform for access to various advantages and disadvantages. Limited network access could mean multiple disadvantages, including restricted access to information and resources critical for career advancement and success. For instance, Baroudi and Igarria (1993) have suggested that exclusion from informal social networks could be disadvantageous to minorities who are unable to influence any organisational actions and the implications of such actions for their careers.

It is insightful to note that network formation is not neutral, as there are dynamics at play. Employees tend to bond with those they share task proximity as well as similarities in interests and characteristics with (Brass 1985). Thus, where women find themselves as tokens (either numerically or in power) with no/few others like themselves, they may be excluded from critical networks. This means that they may be unlikely to receive supervisory/peer coaching, mentoring and counselling and will be likely to experience different career outcomes relative to their male counterparts (Baroudi and Igarria 1993).

In addition to networks and the implications of tokenism, research into the gendered nature of the very roles men and women play within the workforce is also important for a discussion on the factors (from a gender perspective) that can affect women's success in the communication industry. Subtle organisational conditions may ascribe certain roles and ranks to men and others to women that can result in differentiated identities

and benefits (salary levels, promotions with their resultant effect on job satisfaction levels) (see, for instance, Alvesson 1998). These are often a result of standard images of some roles, which are constructed based on stereotypes that favour masculine traits (Meyerson and Fletcher 1999). Such conditions may make female practitioners (having internalised them) follow the norm, not seeking to consciously affect the flow of things, which then could result in the continued existence of a 'glass ceiling effect'. Perhaps this is one way of explaining the tendency for gendering in the media/communication industry.

Within the industry, research evidence reports male and female practitioners to be concentrated in different ranks doing different things. In 2004, the Annenberg Public Policy Center asserted that the glass ceiling still exists in the US communication industry across the professional streams (Falk and Grizard 2004). More recently, data from Ghana indicated that men outnumbered women in the media companies and that women were 'strikingly absent in governance (28%) and top management (15.8%)' where major company decisions and policies were made (Byerly 2011:93).

Public Relations has been reported as increasingly becoming feminised (Dozier, Grunig and Grunig 1995). Where this feminisation has been observed, the general understanding has been that it does not seem to correspond to an increase of women in managerial roles, however. Thus, even though women practitioners may be in the majority and as such could be beneficiaries of the payoffs from numerical strength, their absence in managerial roles could mean that they remain marginalised.

Within the field of advertising, research evidence points to a gendered distribution of practitioners across the various units. For instance, Broyles and Grow (2008) have commented on the tendency for the creative and management positions in ad agencies to manifest a concentration of men, while women are concentrated in those positions that deal with client interfacing. Alvesson (1998) has also looked at gender in the ad agency and reported a concentration of females in client service work such that male practitioners engaged in client interface tend to experience some strain on their gender identity.

Such evidence of gendering is important, considering that gendered industries hold different promises for different people, depending on where they stand in the continuum. For instance, Baroudi and Igbaria (1993) have argued that work that is segregated as 'women's work' tends to have lower status, lower earnings and limited advancement opportunities.

The literature on gender and work has also looked at leadership. How men and women lead, in terms of the differences in styles and leadership orientation, has received attention in the effort to explain the factors impacting women's success at work. Two major leadership styles that have been studied are the transactional and transformational styles. Transactional (authoritative) leadership is characterised by certainty, clear direction, personal oversight, and formalised exchanges between leaders and the subordinates (Cruz, Henningsen, and Smith 1999). Transformational or charismatic leadership, on the other hand, is characterized by risk taking, goal articulation, high expectations, and emphasis on collective identity, self-assertion, and vision (Ehrhart and Klein 2001; McWhinney 1997).

These styles of leadership are also seen along gendered lines as men are perceived to project transactional leadership traits while women are associated with transformational leadership styles (Aldoory and Toth 2004; Ehrhart and Klein 2001). Other descriptors attributed to males and females are as follows: male – structure, autocratic, instruction giving and business-oriented and females – consideration, participative, socio-expressive and people-oriented (Appelbaum, Audet and Miller 2003:48).

It has been argued that the sex difference in leadership can be related to gender socialisation in which individuals portray stereotypes that do not easily change. Women and men are therefore influenced by gendered roles they expect of themselves and which their colleagues, superiors and subordinates expect of them (Aldoory and Toth 2004). This means that the socialised selves that women and men bring from home may actually become the basis on which they and others enact and evaluate their leadership.

From the literature reviewed above, there seems to be a connection between socialisation (whether from the home or at work) and the way men and women work. However, very little attention seems to have focused on whether, and how, women's gender (identity and socialisation) serves as a facilitator for their career growth.

### **Some Methodological Considerations**

This study adopted a qualitative approach in which we conducted three interviews with three women who head organisations in Ghana's media/communications industry. The interviewees, Esther Cobbah, Norkor Duah and Afia Ansa Ampene, were purposively selected on the basis of their gender, work as media/communication practitioners, current positions as leaders of media/communications organisations and the fact that they have

all been recipients of various industry (and other) awards in recognition of their work and success. At the time of data collection, all three were middle aged and had raised biological children during the course of their careers. Both Duah and Cobbah were married while Ampene was not and had raised her children as a single parent. Duah and Cobbah also had professional training in communication (having attained a Bachelor's degree and a Master's degree respectively). Ampene, on the other hand, was a trained teacher.

Interviewees were contacted by phone, introduced to the study and asked for an appointment. Following this, the researchers visited their homes (Duah and Cobbah) and office (Ampene) where the interviews, lasting an average of two hours, were conducted in English.

All the interviews were recorded, the data transcribed and typed out before analysis was conducted. Our main mode of analysis was phenomenological, by which we sought to draw out, using the lived experiences of the interviewees, the ways in which their identities as women may have facilitated their journeys up the career ladder.

### **Career Histories of Interviewees**

In the section below, we present the career journeys of each of our interviewees. As might be clear by the end of the section, all three have achieved appreciable levels of success, justifying their inclusion in the study.

#### ***Norkor Duah***

Norkor Duah currently heads Ghana's oldest advertising agency, Lintas (also known as Lowe Accra due to its affiliation to Lowe Worldwide). She is one of the most respected names in the advertising business in Ghana. In 2008, she was selected Marketing Woman of the Year by the Chartered Institute of Marketing, Ghana and was, at the time of the interview, serving as the first woman president of the Advertising Association of Ghana (AAG).

Her first contact with the industry was in the 1970s when she joined the agency for a holiday job after her secondary education. Following the interest she developed, she studied advertising at Watford College in the UK and returned to take up a job with the agency as an Account Executive. Around this time, she also got married and raised her family of two boys and a girl. As is characteristic of the industry, she often had to stay up late, working and trying to meet client deadlines.



Also equally challenging was the office environment she found herself in. In the 1970s when she joined the industry, advertising was almost completely male dominated at the professional staff level. Her agency had only one other female professional member of staff. All other females were secretaries or models. Most of her professional colleagues, therefore, were males who had different interests from hers, forcing her to associate with the non-professional female staff most of the time. The lone woman professional she met in the company when she joined as a holiday intern made no effort to bond with Duah. The situation was not different on the client side either. According to her, this situation of male dominance across the agency and client base made her strive to show no visible signs of competition with her male colleagues. But beneath this attitude, she turned the male dominance into a catalyst for her journey up. She worked extra hard to show her merit and to gain legitimacy.

Duah rose through the ranks and became Deputy Managing Director, a position she held for eight years until 2001 when she became Managing Director. As a leader, she is still faced with the male dominance syndrome, as her colleague heads of other agencies and the client organisations she serves are still predominantly male. But she believes, as a mother figure, she has some advantages over her male colleagues that have implications for her leadership success. She focuses on achieving results but with a 'heart'. She is also convinced that the industry today is more favourable to women than in times past. Indeed, in her agency, she says she is surrounded by female practitioners.<sup>1</sup>

### ***Esther Cobbah***

Esther Amba Numaba Cobbah is the CEO of Strategic Communications Africa Ltd (Stratcomm Africa), a communication consultancy in Ghana. She is also chairperson of the local chapter of the International Public Relations Association. She was recently awarded the Best Entrepreneur in Media Communication in Ghana, 2011. Cobbah's real entry into Ghana's media/communications industry was in 1980 when she studied at the School of Mass Communication (now the School of Communication Studies) of the University of Ghana for a postgraduate diploma. This was in the pursuit of her childhood interest in the creation of understanding between people. At the School, she found all the courses in the programme really enjoyable and recalls that she could deal with them, without much effort.

Upon completion, she took up an internship at the United States Information Service (USIS) offices in Accra, following which she joined

the then Ghana Industrial Holdings Company (GIHOC) as the person in charge of communication for the 26 companies under the holding company. She held this position for two years before going to Cornell University for a Masters Degree in Communication for Developing Countries. She returned to take up an appointment with the Ghana National Petroleum Corporation (GNPC) as the person responsible for the management of investor relations and later, public affairs. She was at GNPC for ten years.

Being in the male-dominated oil industry meant that she was one of few women. However, unlike the other women, her responsibilities required her to be visible, often in contexts where she was the only woman present. But in such situations, she constantly reminded herself that it was as much a woman's world as it was a man's world.

While at GNPC, she got the opportunity to manage communications for the West African Gas Pipeline Project for two years, from where she moved to start her own consultancy – Strategic Africa Communication Limited in 1994. With the exception of her internship at the USIS, Cobbah's appointments have all placed her in positions where she reported directly to the CEOs. She asserts that the communications industry presents a lot of advantages to women that she has sought to leverage in her journey up the professional ladder. These include the industry's need for practitioners to, sometimes, play 'servant roles', a requirement which women's socialisation as care givers makes them better suited to meet.

In spite of these benefits that she believes women's gender gives them in the industry, however, she maintains that gender also presents some challenges to career growth in the industry. Some of the challenges that she experienced include women's difficulty in creating personal space and time for their careers. In addition, the uncertain hours that practitioners often have to work can have negative implications for women's career success, as it is difficult combining their domestic expectations/responsibilities with such schedules. In her case, she sought to negotiate these challenges by investing in technology (washing machine, blenders etc.) and people (house helps) that facilitated her domestic duties to ensure that she could free up more time for her career.

Currently, as a leader, Cobbah says she is results-driven but also tends to put emphasis on relationships. She believes that while delivering results is important, the people behind the results must be treated with a human face and a motherly heart.<sup>2</sup>

### *Afia Ansa Ampene*

Afia Ansa Ampene is the producer, director and hostess of *Mmaa Nkomo*, the longest running independently-produced TV Women's talk show programme in Ghana and the owner of 3As Production Company. Her career in the media/communication industry in Ghana started in the late 1980s when she was invited to host a radio teaching session on cultural studies for junior secondary schools with a text she had co-authored for the new educational system.

Being a professional Twi (a local Ghanaian language) teacher and totally new to broadcasting, she relied on the programme's producers to be taught script development and other rudiments of on-air teaching. The success of the first broadcast, coupled with her natural flair for broadcasting, led to her being invited to take up the television Twi teaching programme targeted at secondary school students. Around the same time, she also took up an opportunity to host the Akan edition of *Adult Education*, a local language television talk programme that sought to educate the populace on a variety of issues that affect their lives. All this while, she was also a full-time teacher at the Tema Secondary School where she taught Twi until she voluntarily retired from teaching in 2006.

As a part-time broadcaster handling three programmes across television and radio, negative sentiments soon started flowing from the full-time employees of the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation. She was taken off *Adult Education* but returned soon after, since her replacement failed to be as successful as she had been on the programme. Following her return to the screen, her broadcasting career suffered another jolt when the director for television decided to take local language programmes off air. This was greeted with audience disapproval, as people kept calling asking for her and the programme to be reinstated. The director invited her to his office at which meeting he asked her to create her own TV programme and this saw the birth of *Mmaa Nkomo*, a programme she has produced and hosted for the last 13 years. The programme currently airs on three local TV stations. She has travelled across the world to give Ghanaians in the Diaspora the opportunity to highlight issues of interest to them.

Ampene's decision to develop a programme targeting women was borne out of her experience and observation of TV content at the time, which she says completely lacked programmes dedicated to issues of importance to women. She therefore sought to develop a programme to create a platform to discuss such issues and in so doing mainstream them into public discourse. She says doing this has been the basis of her career success as it meant that she dealt with issues that directly affected

lives. As a result, it has brought her local and international exposure and recognition, and made her an icon of women's empowerment in Ghana. She says she has received a lot of encouragement and support from women entrepreneurs who (having faced the gendered challenges in the business environment) urge her to 'fight on and never to give in'. Both she and the programme (*Mmaa Nkomo*) have received several awards in and outside Ghana, the biggest of which was the Millennium Excellence Award in 2005 for Women Empowerment.<sup>3</sup>

### **Discussion and Synthesis of Issues Arising**

This study set out to explore whether there is any possibility that women's gender (not sex) had any positive implications for their growth in Ghana's media/communication industry. It was premised on the fact that while a lot of attention has been paid to the ways in which women's gender disadvantages them in the industry, there has been little discussion on whether the gender factor ever presents any advantages that may be leveraged by women.

Our aim was not an experimental analysis of causes and effects, rather, we sought a broad understanding of the question, drawing from the lived experiences of three successful practitioners in the industry.

The study found that, indeed, women's gender and the orientations that build up into this identity may be turned into catalysts for professional growth and success. We discuss these orientations under two main themes: the domestic gendering advantage (drawn from their socialisation to be mothers and wives) and the workplace gendering advantage (drawn from learning to live as women in the workplace).

The findings presented in this discussion represent a synthesis of information gathered across the interviews rather than a conscious labelling by the interviewees. Even though the possibility of relationships between gender and career success could be gleaned from their lived experiences, in many instances, the interviewees themselves did not label it as such. It appears that even when such advantages have been leveraged by the interviewees, the experience is so latent that they fail to connect it to their gender.

### **The 'Domestic Gendering' Advantage**

One of the most influential settings for socialisation and the consequent gendering of boys and girls is the domestic setting from where based on what tasks they are assigned, where they are allowed to go, how they are

told to behave and how they are told to relate to the opposite sex boys are taught to be boys (men) and girls to be girls (women). Adomako Ampofo and Boateng (2007) have reported how as early as the teenage years, Ghanaian boys have internalised notions of what boys and girls should do or not do in the expression of their appropriate gender roles as relates to the home. Often, the expectation of the women was in relation to domestic chores and taking care of the family, while those of the men bordered more on financial and leadership roles. Indeed, where boys did housework, they deemed it only to be 'helping' and 'doing a favour or a kindness to a woman' (Adomako Ampofo and Boateng 2007:53). In this context, it is possible to see how Ghanaian girls are saddled with most of the responsibilities for housework, a situation that could yield the development of skills for multitasking and for serving others.

We present this context as a basis for the development of skills by girls that could be appropriated to serve their interest in the world of work, particularly in those fields in the industry where practitioners keep busy schedules, trying to meet client deadlines and needs. Once they enter the professional fields in the media/communication industry, particularly those such as advertising and public relations where emphasis is on constantly strategising and implementing multiple activities to meet all stakeholder needs, such skills appear to become platforms which women can leverage to ensure that they move faster up the professional ladder.

As a child, Cobbah's mother consciously sought to instil in her the ability to multitask, a skill she has come to appreciate as very useful for her success in public relations practice. Her career story is replete with anecdotes of how under various conditions she drew on her multitasking skills for success. For instance, while at GIHOC, her schedule as communication officer covered 26 companies, requiring that she was constantly evolving and implementing communication strategies to cater for each of the companies. In spite of this busy schedule, she managed to be responsive to the needs of each of the companies, drawing on her multitasking skills. Such was her ability to combine all her responsibilities that she describes her work as being 'so exciting that there was never enough for me' (Cobbah, interview on 15 April 2012). It was with a similar approach to her work that she travelled her career journey, leading to her current position as CEO of Stratcomm Africa. In this position, she oversees the management of public relations and communication activities for various clients. Between the management of such clients, strategising to meet their needs, supervising work to be done for them, managing her employees and managing her home, Cobbah continues to

draw on her multitasking skills to keep things together and successful. According to her:

...Women are socialised to multitask... For me, just the opportunity to deal with different situations, manage my children, multitask, deal with different stakeholders and meet their needs at the same time has helped me because that is what this industry is about (Cobbah, interview on 15 April 2012).

Ampene's career story also demonstrates a similar ability to multitask. For more than 10 years after entering broadcasting, she combined teaching with hosting two radio programmes and one TV talk show. This was besides the fact that she was single-handedly raising two children.

I was teaching and doing this at the same time. I worked hard. As soon as I closed from classes, I prepared my GBC work and I prepared my teaching material too... I was broadcasting on radio, TV and teaching (Ampene, interview on 10 April 2012).

Clearly, the demands on her were substantial, but she managed to efficiently deliver on all, to the extent that her independently produced programme *Mmaa Nkomo* has been so successful as to have won her 22 local and international awards in 13 years. From these stories, it appears that women's socialisation to meet multiple demands can serve as a catalyst for their career success. While we do not assume a causal relationship between socialisation and multitasking (some research connects women's ability for multitasking to cognitive factors; see for instance Ren, Zhou and Fu 2009; Zaidi 2010), we believe the link cannot be completely discounted.

Another aspect of domestic gendering which was found to have played a role in the success of the interviewees was the service orientation which manifests in their ability to better manage conditions that required them to act as 'servants' or to 'reduce' their status in order to rise. While the socialisation of girls as the ones to serve the family and be subordinate to boys/men may be controversial, even detrimental to the collective worldview and wellbeing of women (Steady 2011), it appears that women may turn this orientation to their advantage. This is particularly so in service industries such as in the communication industry, which often requires practitioners to satisfy clients and other stakeholders. According to Cobbah:

In this industry (PR), women have a peculiar advantage because women are socialised to take care of people and this is a taking-care-of-people industry. Because men have been socialised to be served, they are more

intolerant of being asked to do things for people. It tends to be more difficult for them (Esther Cobbah, interview on 15 April 2012).

Cobbah, therefore, used this orientation to her advantage. Where conditions required that she went the extra mile to satisfy the needs of her clients and other people, Cobbah easily called on this service orientation. She believes that males under those same conditions, would, due to their socialisation, have had more difficulty doing the same. Also, working in a male dominated environment where her 'presence in certain contexts created discomfort', she often would bend over backward and 'make people feel comfortable' with her (Esther Cobbah, interview on 15 April 2012).

Duah also uses this subordination orientation to her advantage. Working in a male-dominated environment (both at the office and on the client side), one of the ways in which she tried to cope without courting antagonism to herself was to subordinate herself to the males:

I made them feel like: 'I'm looking up to you to mentor me'. I made them not feel intimidated; that this is a woman trying to... (Duah, interview on 7 April 2012).

Ampene has used a similar approach to work with her male dominated crew since the birth of her independently produced programme (Mmaa Nkomo). This way, she is able to draw from their expertise for the success of her programme without appearing bossy or intimidating. She asserts that:

If you come and see us as a crew, you would not know I am the leader. Because they all have their posts at GBC – cameramen, executive directors, sound men. So, if they are eager to work with you and you are too strict, you won't get them (Ampene, interview on 10 April 2012).

The implication we draw from these stories is that aspects of what women learn from the home in their preparation as caregivers may be leveraged for success. For, where the ability to subordinate or to multitask is a determinant for career success, women may have an advantage because of their socialisation. This finding agrees with Steady's (2011) argument that women's socialisation to become mothers could be seen as presenting them with advantages to survive and succeed in the world of work.

Another domestic socialisation element that becomes an advantage to women is in being taught to become mothers and to draw on their hearts and emotions. Especially in Africa, a girl's socialisation process is geared towards making her a good woman and mother. These require skills in nurturing, care giving, empathy, compassion and people

centeredness etc. (Steady 2011). It is important to note the possible relationship between this socialisation and the leadership traits that have been documented in the literature as being associated with women: consideration, socio-expressive, participative and people-oriented (Appelbaum, Audet and Miller 2003:48). Indeed, Aldoory and Toth (2004) have suggested that women exhibit these characteristics because they and those around them are conscious of their (women's) socialisation to be mothers and expect them to live up to it. Thus, showing these characteristics at work and as leaders is women's way of living up to the expectations set for them. Our data shows that these motherhood/feminine characteristics could provide the impetus for women's upward mobility in their career. Duah, for instance, draws on this motherly attitude and combines it with her leadership flair to create an atmosphere that works to her advantage and in the interest of her company's success. In her own words:

... I needed to bring out the woman in me... to make people feel that it will be well even if there are challenges. It is a people business and it needs a heart. It will not run on software. If you're not a people person, you cannot work in this industry. I usually put on two hats: my leadership hat and my motherhood hat (Duah, interview on 7 April 2012).

Cobbah also draws on this motherliness trait in her relations with her colleagues and employees:

I feel that the people who would achieve the results (employees) are human beings and they have relationship needs... You have to have a relationship with them (Esther Cobbah, interview on 15 April 2012).

For Ampene, her people centeredness comes to play in her relationship with her employees as that 'thing' that helps her to get the work done:

When we travel, I go into the rooms of the other ladies, we converse late into the night before going to sleep. They call me always and I call them always (Ampene, interview on 10 April 2012).

From all three interviewees, these characteristics (motherliness, people centeredness and leadership with a heart) seem to have really manifested after the interviewees took up their leadership positions. While these do not indicate how the women leveraged the traits in their journey up, they are still relevant to the study as they are being leveraged for the women's success as leaders in the industry.



## The Workplace Gendering Advantage

The processes of socialisation are not restricted to the domestic environment. Other agents of socialisation, such as the school, can also shape boys' and girls' identities (Cohen-Scali 2003). The workplace has also been cited as a place for socialisation (Alvesson 1998). It appears that the conditions under which the interviewees found themselves also led to the formation of certain consciousness that then translated into catalysts for career success.

For Duah, her consciousness as the only woman (professional) in the organisation pushed her to put in 'extra effort' and to do 'something unusual':

In my journey, I needed to make an extra effort because... I was a woman and I felt that there was no one around me (professional) who was a woman. Because my colleagues (genderwise) in the office were secretaries, I needed to make sure that I did something unusual (Duah, interview on 7 April 2012).

Without doubt, her effort to do the 'unusual' in the discharge of her duties had implications for how high and fast she could rise.

It is important to juxtapose this with her projected outlook of not being in competition with her male colleagues (alluded to earlier under 'domestic gendering advantage'). It appears that while on the surface she projected one image, at the personal level, she so internalised the prevailing conditions at the office that it became a reason for her seeking success.

Cobbah also shows signs of 'socialising' herself to her position as a 'token' and turning this consciousness to her advantage. Finding herself working in the oil industry, which was (and remains) male dominated, meant that sometimes her 'presence created discomfort'. Rather than let this consciousness become a hindrance, she constantly reminded herself that as a woman, she was equally competent to achieve success in that environment:

When I realised that I was in a male dominated industry, I reminded myself that it's a woman's world as well and that, at the workplace, we are here to work (Esther Cobbah, interview on 15 April 2012).

And so, she focused on working hard and this has seen her rise to head her own consultancy.

Ms Ampene also had work-related realities that served as the basis for aspects of her career success. Although these realities did not specifically pose disadvantages to her nor arise from her gender, her consciousness

of them and her effort to correct them became the very basis for her success story. When she ventured into television, she was not a lone woman, since other women had preceded her. However, opportunities for discoursing on issues that directly affected women's lives were still limited. Actually, only one such programme existed and this was a magazine programme that changed name but not content over time *Women's Digest*. It covered various issues, including cooking, fashion and expert interviews on domestic issues. Such issues were deemed to be of interest to women and reflected the gendered nature of programming at the time (Akrofi-Quarcoo, interview on 1 February 2013). To some extent, the programme and the issues it covered were 'tokens' in the midst of the more 'dominant' issues, such as politics, and it was Ampene's consciousness of this imbalance and her desire to correct it that led to the birth of *Mmaa Nkomo*:

I said that 'anytime there is something for women on TV, it is about cooking; why can't I do something to cover women and children?' So I piled up issues concerning women and children as well as how to solve them (Ampene, interview on 10 April 2012).

Kanter (1977) alludes to a tendency on the part of tokens to want to do something about their condition. Though in this instance women's talk show programmes (tokens) could not have themselves sought to change things, we see Ampene's interest in doing this as important, considering that she would have been a beneficiary had such programmes existed. To some extent, therefore, she assumed the token position of women's programmes and sought to do something about their state.

Both Duah and Cobbah share this consciousness of the need to do something to correct the disadvantaged position of women in their work environments. Both said they have consciously employed a lot of women so that they can pass on their lessons to them.

## **Conclusions and Suggestions for Future Research**

This study has attempted an exploration of the possible ways in which women's gender may present them with benefits that they could draw on as they seek career success in the media/communication industry. Evidence of such gender facilitation could be deduced from the interviews although it appeared to be operating at very latent levels, to the extent that even the persons whose life stories are used in the analysis do not label them as such. The interviews reveal that women's socialisation in the domestic setting may be leveraged for developing multi-tasking

abilities and service orientations in them. In addition, the gendered environment of the workplace could also be internalised, a situation that may cause women to behave in certain ways which may then inure them to the benefit of their career growth.

While these three interviews have yielded some insights into how women in top management negotiate their success, it is by no means an end in itself. Further studies are needed on the lives of other women leaders in the industry. In addition, as this study focused solely on the personal narratives of women leaders, it would be interesting to find out whether subordinates (both male and female) and indeed colleagues of these women leaders perceive and/or experience the 'gender facilitating' elements identified in this study. Also, a study of this nature, with a sample across various professional ranks, may yield very interesting insights.

Admittedly, we sought to investigate a very complex phenomenon with interviews, using a very small sample. We, thus, miss the opportunity to generalise the findings, but we believe that this can be a useful beginning in developing knowledge on the subject of how gender can facilitate, rather than militate against, career progression in the communication/media industry.

## Notes

1. Norkor Duah was interviewed at her residence in Cantonments, Accra, Ghana where the serenity of the environment and the fact that it was a non-working day allowed for a very free-flowing conversation in which interviewers felt free to delve into issues of interest. It lasted about 1 hour and 45 minutes.
2. We interviewed Esther Cobbah at her residence in Cantonments, Accra, Ghana. The relaxed atmosphere allowed for a very informal discussion in which interviewers felt free to delve into issues of relevance as they came up. The interview lasted for approximately two hours.
3. AfiaAnsaAmpene was interviewed in her office at Community one in Tema, Ghana. Though this was an office environment, Ampene was kind enough to hold all appointments and interferences to enable a conducive atmosphere for the interview. The discussions were open and frank, and lasted for approximately 2 hours and 15 minutes.
4. Sarah Akrofi-Quarcoo is a researcher and lecturer at the School of Communication Studies, with general research interest and expertise on women's engagement with radio in Ghana. We interviewed her in her office at the School of Communication Studies on February 1st 2013. The interview lasted for about 30 minutes.

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