

# Women, Fashion and Social Prejudice

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**Abstract.** This research focuses on women and social prejudice. Visually, we can see how the way Indonesian women dress changes over time, depending on the ruling truth regime. In the last ten years, the discourse that women (especially Muslim women) must dress fully covered has become quite dominant in Indonesia. This research focuses on people's willingness to engage and develop relationships with women who dress in a somewhat open manner. The liberal feminist theory was employed in this research. The theory aims to offer women the right to choose while also making them aware of the implications of their decisions. The main objective of this study is to show the responses that the women get when they choose to express themselves in ways that are different from what society expects. In this study, the survey research approach was employed. The results revealed a relatively high percentage of female respondents, with 48.4 percent of female respondents speaking negatively about women who wore relatively body-exposing clothes, compared to only 20 percent of male respondents. The significant number of women who speak badly about other women suggests that the respondent has the tendency to alienate women who do not conform to society's norms.

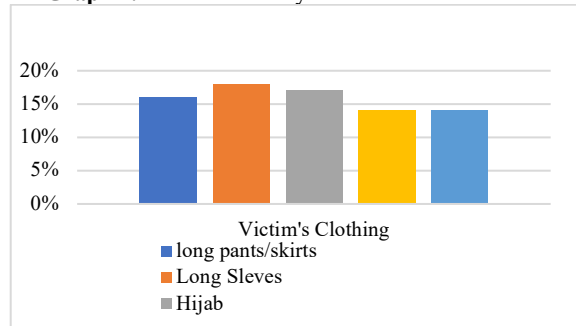
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## 1 Introduction

This study is an attempt to understand how women's clothing relates to prejudice and social distance against women. Women's clothing is often associated with morality, spirituality, and is even considered as the cause of violence against women. A district head in Aceh, for example, stated that women who do not dress according to Islamic Sharia are deserving of being raped [1]. Prejudice, according to Martin and Nakayama [2], is a negative sentiment that includes assigning labels to a group based on insufficient evidence. In the context of the study of communication, the negative sentiments of individuals who have prejudice are articulated through expressions that indicate superiority and threat to different groups or individuals. For example, the statement that women who do not dress according to Islamic law deserve to be raped demonstrates a negative perception, status disparity, and is an expression of prejudice that denotes a social distance created by the way women dress.

Based on previous researches, rape or violence against women has nothing to do with the clothing they wear. The Coalition for Safe Public Spaces (*Koalisi Ruang Publik Aman*) conducted a survey on sexual harassment in public spaces in 2018 and found that victims' clothing had no relevance on the sexual harassment they faced [3].

**Graph 1. Clothes Worn by Sexual Abuse Victim**



According to data, victims of sexual abuse dress in a variety of outfits, including the hijab. As a result, sexual assault may harm anyone, regardless of their clothing. However, in social practice, there are still many prejudices that lead to bullying or threats related to women's clothing. For example, a female student at SMA Negeri 1 Gemolong in Sragen Regency, Central Java Province, was bullied because she did not wear a hijab [4][5]. Because she was distressed by her friend's intolerant conduct in harassing her personal dress choices, the girl who was bullied had to transfer schools to another city.

Prejudice and social distance towards women are examined in relation to the expression of women's fashion in this research. Ideally, diverse society can bring about social harmony and narrow social distance. The choice of relational behaviours, on the other hand, appears to be significantly different from the ideal situation. According to Mariela E. Jaffé et al. [6] research, organizations often claim to embrace diversity, yet their staff is often fairly homogeneous. This illustrates a significant disconnect between ideals and realities. Based on the difference between desirability and feasibility considerations, research by Mariela E. Jaffé et al. [6] provides a psychological argument for the incompatibility. Individuals prefer to establish diverse teams when the task does not need social closeness, according to the studies, since they want to show that they care about diversity socially. On the other hand, Individuals prefer homogenous team members when work involves social intimacy.

Four studies were conducted by Mariela E. Jaffé et al. [6] to examine the different decisions that can arise when jobs are socially distant compared to jobs that require closeness. Working in diverse groups is desirable, but the outcomes are less than ideal, according to Study 1. Study 2 looked at how psychological distance influenced people's decisions about whether to work with people who were different (socially distant) or those who were alike (socially close). Participants in Study 3 formed more heterogeneous teams for others than for themselves. In comparison to individuals who are socially distant, research 4 demonstrates that when it comes to creating workgroups, people prefer to give more attention to successfully completing goals when they are in a group with close acquaintances. The findings suggest that an individual's preference for diversity depends on the social distance of the jobs. When deciding for themselves and the job is socially close, individuals prefer to work with others who are similar. However, when deciding for others and thus becoming socially distant, individuals are more likely to show an increased preference for diversity. The results of the research of Mariela E. Jaffé et al. [6] when associated with women's clothes and social prejudice indicate that the way women dress can lead to a social distance that makes people decide to engage or keep personal distance from the woman. People recognize the need of respecting diversity in general, however

when it comes to directly engaging with others, there is still a tendency to pick those who are "the same" (homogeneous).

Clothing is a sort of self that may reveal a wide range of gender identities, faiths, races, nationalities, and organizations. However, in some cases of violence against women, clothing serves as both a method of expression for women and a means of justifying the abuse they are subjected to. Women have various ways to express and communicate their identity through the clothes they wear. Women's self-expression through fashion is frequently a source of prejudice, which is then used to justify bullying, harassment, and sexual assault against women. Liberal feminist theory places emphasis on equal rights for women, including the individual right for self-expressions [7]. The social construction of how to be a woman leads women to control their expressions, including self-expression through the clothes they wear. The way women dress becomes the source of blame when a woman is subjected to sexual violence is evidence of effort to control women. A well-known female healer who has a lot of followers in Indonesia, for example, stated that:

*"The victim of a rape should not hold the perpetrator responsible. Do not blame the person who raped your daughter, ladies and gentlemen! Because the offender is motivated by the violated person's lust."* [8].

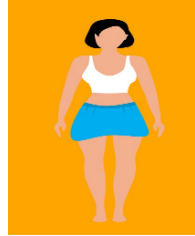
This comment demonstrates how prejudices are embedded in the way women's clothing is expressed. This research looks at how women's clothes is viewed, and how that perception leads to prejudice and social distance towards women.

## **2 Method**

This study is an attempt to integrate quantitative and qualitative methods using two tools of research, surveys and qualitative interviews. The survey method was used to obtain data on perceptions of prejudice and social distance (distance of communication) against women who express their identity through the way they dress. Qualitative interviews were used to obtain data about the informants' interpretations of the way women dress. Individual college students and high school students/equivalent to 325 persons make up the sample in the survey of women and social bias. The data was gathered by using online questionnaires.

## **3 Result and Discussion**

Women's dress is still an element of the social construction that frequently leads to discrimination and social distance. This section describes the results of research related to the research hypothesis that states that there is prejudice and social distance against women who wear clothes that show their body parts or relatively open at the top and/or bottom of their bodies as shown in the picture.



**Fig. 1.** Women Dressed with Relatively Body Exposing

As previously discussed, how women dress is indeed method of expressing their individuality. The dress codes encode identify because its create symbolic meaning related women’s identities (religion, race, life styles, ethnicity, etc.). Women's clothing is frequently understood in terms of cultural identity, which, according to Samovar [9], is usually interpreted at three levels; personal, relational, and communal identity. The focus of the discussions will be on how the respondent perceived the identity of women who dress in a relatively open manner. The article also addresses how the meaning of this personal identity affects the relational identity that emerges as a result of the respondents' prejudice and social distance produced by their perceptions of women's clothing. As a result, this study looks at how women's outerwear contributes to prejudice, as indicated by ambiguous or indirect communication expressions, as well as prejudices that are conveyed explicitly or openly [9]. Social prejudice can also lead to social distance, which is a feeling of closeness, the possibility of a relationship being developed with a certain group, or in this study the possibility to interact and build a relationship with a woman who dress in a relatively open manner [10].

Interaction is the essence of communication activities. The initial stage in communicating is to engage interaction, which opens up opportunities for building relations. When meeting someone for the first time, bias is sometimes sparked by her looks or the way she dresses. The process of initiating the act of communication will be affected by fashion that differs from what is expected. The willingness to start interaction with women wearing relatively exposing clothes is shown in the table 1.

**Table 1.** Cross Tabulation of Gender and Initiation of Interaction

		Initiation of Interaction		Total
		No	Yes	
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Male</b>	7 9,3%	68 90,7%	75 100,0%
	<b>Female</b>	34 13,6%	216 86,4%	250 100,0%
<b>Total</b>		41 12,6%	284 87,4%	325 100,0%

The data indicates that 13 percent of female respondents are not willing to initiate interaction with women who wear relatively revealing clothes whereas for male respondents around 9.3 percent refuse to initiate interaction. This situation shows that the way women dress can hinder the initiation process of interaction. Prejudice based on how women dress appears to be the factor limiting the first stages of contact and dialogue with women who are seen to be wearing particularly exposing clothing. The initial bias that emerges during the earliest stages of

conversation might progress to the point where persons with different appearances are negatively addressed. The tendency to avoid communicating with persons who appear to be different demonstrates ethnocentrism in communication.

**Table 2.** Cross Tabulation between Gender and Negative Remark

		Negative Remark		Total
		No	Yes	
Gender	Male	60 80,0%	15 20,0%	75 100,0%
	Female	129 51,6%	121 48,4%	250 100,0%
Total		189 58,2%	136 41,8%	325 100,0%

The results showed a relatively high percentage of female respondents, 48.4 percent of the respondents who spoke negatively about women wearing open clothes, while male respondents were at 20 percent. The high percentage of women who speak negatively about other women who wear revealing clothes indicates that these respondents are in a position to alienate women who look different from the standard of normality in society. The internalization of the dominant ideology about how women should look is already distancing those who are different, as seen by how women discipline other women by talking negatively behind their backs. Giving a negative nickname or labelling is the next degree of disengagement after speaking badly. The following is a cross-tabulation of data between related to giving negative labels to women who dress openly.

**Table 3.** Cross Tabulation between the Sexes and Giving Label

		Giving Label		Total
		No	Yes	
Gender	Male	62 82,7%	13 17,3%	75 100,0%
	Female	217 86,8%	33 13,2%	250 100,0%
Total		279 85,8%	46 14,2%	325 100,0%

Male respondents have a higher percentage of giving nicknames to women who dress relatively openly than female respondents. This means that men have a higher tendency to give negative nicknames/labelling to women who wear revealing clothes. Giving negative labels shows the level of prejudice that has placed particular people in different categories. Negative nicknames are frequently associated with specific actions that are considered to be carried out by women that fall into the category of "bad women." The woman is typically seen inadequate to be a future bride, and when she is subjected to violence or sexual harassment, the negative label serves to legitimize the abuse.

Social prejudice leads to avoidance behaviour, which contributes to seclusion of individuals who are different, in addition to negative nicknames. Prejudice has led a person to avoid interacting with others who are different, as shown by the avoidance behaviour.

**Table 4.** Cross Tabulation between Gender and Avoidance

		Avoidance		Total
		No	Yes	
Gender	Male	63 84,0%	12 16,0%	75 100,0%
	Female	208 83,2%	42 16,8%	250 100,0%
Total		271 83,4%	54 16,6%	325 100,0%

According to the data, the percentage numbers on avoidance behaviour toward women who wear exposing clothing are almost the same for male and female respondents, at around 12%. Even if prejudice hasn't been expressed publicly, avoidance behaviour indicates how it has led to actions of isolation. Avoidance is a subtle action that implies a lack of desire to connect. The willingness to form social relationships is another characteristic that demonstrates the presence of social bias. The inability to form connectedness is an indicator of how social bias contributes to the development of social distance. The social distance generated will cause someone to avoid certain associations with others who hold opposing viewpoints or are indifferent [10]. The willingness to be neighbours with women who wear exposing clothing is one of the interactions that might reflect social distance.

**Table 5.** Cross Tabulation between Gender and Willing to be Neighbors

		Being Neighbors		Total
		No	Yes	
Gender	Male	9 12,0%	66 88,0%	75 100,0%
	Female	31 12,4%	219 87,6%	250 100,0%
Total		40 12,3%	285 87,7%	325 100,0%

The findings revealed that the number of male and female respondents who were unwilling to live next to women who were perceived to be wearing exposed clothing was almost the same, at 12 percent. The unwillingness to live next door to individuals who are seen to be different is a visible embodiment of a preference to exclusively live near people who share the same perspectives.

The desire for an exclusive environment can also be a sign of a limited tolerance for diversity. Several countries have used the politics of discrimination on the segregation of the place of life for certain groups. Of obviously, this situation is hardly conducive to societal cohesion and tolerance. The group will become more unwilling to accept differences and will make every attempt to protect the group's "purity" by occupying an exclusive living environment inhabited solely by people who share the same point of view. Of course, this is problematic if the people are from such a multi-cultural country like Indonesia. A willingness to work together in a work team, in addition to the immediate surrounding contexts, is another essential factor in demonstrating social distance.

**Table 6.** Cross Tabulation between Gender and Willing to work in a team

		Working in a Team		Total
		No	Yes	
Gender	Male	10	65	75

	<b>Working in a Team</b>		<b>Total</b>
	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>	
	13,3%	86,7%	100,0%
<b>Female</b>	31	219	250
	12,4%	87,6%	100,0%
<b>Total</b>	41	284	325
	12,6%	87,4%	100,0%

According to the statistics, 13.3% of males are reluctant to work in a team with women who are perceived to be wearing exposing clothing, while 12.4 percent of female respondents are unwilling. The unwillingness to work in a team with women who dress openly implies professional prejudice towards women who do not dress according to society's prevalent norms. Because of many regulations and conventions that must be obeyed in order to thrive and be acknowledged professionally, women are frequently unable to express themselves freely [7]. The way women dress can have an impact on the development of personal connections in addition to having a professional impact. According to Samovar, a person's identity, especially women's, has aspects of personal identity and relational identity, thus how they express their personal identity will influence how their relationship identity is formed [9]. For women, friendship is a crucial bond. Friendship is a close personal relationship characterized by a high level of emotional understanding.

**Table 7.** Gender and Willing to be close friends

		<b>Being Close Friends</b>		<b>Total</b>
		<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>	
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Male</b>	7	68	75
		9,3%	90,7%	100,0%
	<b>Female</b>	48	202	250
		19,2%	80,8%	100,0%
<b>Total</b>		55	70	325
		16,9%	83,1%	100,0%

According to the findings, 9.3% of males are willing to be friends with open-dressed women, while 19.2% of women are not. The low number of males choosing to be friends is due to the belief that the proper connection between men and women is not friendship but rather a romantic one. Another factor is the negative stigma that is sometimes associated to women who dress in more exposing ways. The consequence of the unfavourable label may also be observed in men's willingness to build a family with or marry women who dress differently than the prevalent societal norm.

**Table 8.** Cross Tabulation between Gender and Willing to Marry or have a Family Relationship

		<b>Being Close Friends</b>		<b>Total</b>
		<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>	
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Male</b>	28	47	75
		37,3%	62,7%	100,0%
	<b>Female</b>	83	167	250
		33,2%	66,8%	100,0%
<b>Total</b>		111	214	325
		34,2%	65,8%	100,0%

According to the data, 37.3 percent of male respondents said they would not marry a woman who wore exposing clothing, while 33.2 percent of female respondents said they would not have a familial relationship with such a woman. This instance demonstrates how assumptions and biases about how women dress has influenced whether or not a woman is appropriate to be a wife or a family member.

The results signify that women's clothing that does not conform to society's prevalent norms have enhanced the negative stigma attached to those who choose to wear them. The negative label also demonstrates how people of different appearances are sometimes misinterpreted based on prevalent stereotypes without making any attempt to comprehend their perspectives or hear their voices. The findings show how existing women's conditions fall short of the ideal liberal feminist ideology, which promotes equal rights for women, particularly the freedom to self-expression [7]. The results of this study indicate the importance of understanding how women's strategies are questioned because of their social position because of the clothes they wear. These women often apply certain strategies to survive in society. Such is the case with research conducted by Kawtar Najib and Peter Hopkins [11] which shows how survivors of women who wear the veil experience pressure around employing and embrace particular techniques to avoid possible prejudice. The study focuses on thirty-three interviews conducted involving young women who wear hijab to identify the primary targets of Islamophobia and give an understanding of various spatial tactics. First, oppressed women avoid locations in main, prestigious, and populous neighbourhoods, particularly if they are alone or with their kids, limiting their mobility. Second, oppression has altered the embodied tactics of veiled women, who now feel compelled to be either powerful and integrated or more discreet and less apparent, particularly via their clothing. Finally, in reaction to geopolitical issues, veiled Muslim women reinvent new mobility and embodied behaviours; these activist techniques illustrate Muslim women's sophisticated responses in the perspective of feminist geopolitics and the politicization of their religious faith. The ability of women to come up with these survival techniques is an important issue for further research because women's expression through fashion often becomes an arena for oppression and abuse of women.

## **4 Conclusion**

The majority of the respondents, both male and female, responded negatively to women who wore exposing clothes, indicating that there is social prejudice against women's expression in fashion. The significance of women's clothing expressions in the context of prejudice and social distance demonstrates that biases still exist, resulting in discrimination against women who dress differently from the dominant group. This negative connotation also creates a social barrier for women who prefer to dress in ways that deviate from what society considers normal. Relationship constraints and social biases based on how women dress demonstrate that women do not yet have complete control over their bodies or the freedom to establish identities based on subjectivity or the self they desire.

In terms of the liberal feminist, concept of freedom of expression [7], the findings suggest that women's expressions are nonetheless constrained by dominant social structures. The results of this study show that biases and social distances are still generated by the way women dress. This circumstance raises concerns about prejudices and cultural assumptions sharpening into discrimination in the form of more open acts, perhaps causing physical and mental harm to women who dress differently than society considers normal. Further research is needed on



openly practiced forms of discrimination and prejudice, such as bullying, exclusion, and other types of physical and mental abuse. In addition to examining various forms of violence linked to prejudice and social distance, it's also important to explore further into the logic of truth employed by perpetrators of discrimination or violence against women in order for them to feel justified in their acts.

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