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## **Religious People Beetwen Fashion Androgini and Nonbinary Gender**

**Tressa Risdianti**

Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Kerinci, Jambi, Indonesia

*tressarisdianti01@gmail.com*

**Ahmad Jamin**

Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Kerinci, Jambi, Indonesia

*ahmadjamin81@gmail.com*

**Albertos Damni**

Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Kerinci, Jambi, Indonesia

*damnialbertos@gmail.com*

### **Abstract**

Androgynous fashion trends incorporate men's and women's clothing elements and are often embraced by individuals who challenge traditional gender norms. This research project aims to explore the reactions of religious individuals to non-binary people wearing androgynous clothing in everyday life. Using a narrative inquiry approach, this research collects interview data to analyze critical issues from the informants' points of view. Informants were selected through an Outcome-based sampling method from Muslim-majority communities and Islamic college. Examining the responses of community members and students is essential to understand their attitudes toward critical issues better. Research analysis involves two distinct stages. *First*, it is essential to identify patterns in the data obtained from the two groups of informants based on the derived themes. *Second*, these patterns must be thoroughly compared with theoretical perspectives to ensure that comprehensive and holistic

data is produced. Research indicates that religious individuals and students often share different perspectives regarding non-binary individuals who opt for an androgynous appearance.

**Keywords:** *Androgynous Fashion, Islamic College, Islamic Society, Nonbinary.*

## A. Introduction

Have you ever ventured into the realm of androgynous fashion? It's a fascinating concept that fuses the best elements of men's and women's styles. The clothing choices, colors, hairstyles, and makeup can be blended to challenge traditional gender roles. And this trend isn't only for individuals who identify as male or female—it has gained traction among those who do not strictly fit into either category. It's a unique and exciting trend currently shaking up the fashion industry<sup>1</sup>.

This group of trendsetters boldly rejects conventional gender norms and fearlessly embraces a style that transcends traditional gender boundaries, such as name<sup>2</sup>, posture,<sup>3</sup> and fashion<sup>4</sup>. Their distinctive fashion choices boldly challenge societal expectations and push the limits of acceptable behavior. For example, some men may confidently adorn themselves in feminine dresses, while some women

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<sup>1</sup>Indranil Saha, Akanksha, and Diotima Basu, "Androgynous Fashion from the Concept to Consumers: an Empirical Study BT—Design for Tomorrow—Volume 1," *International Conference on Research into Design*, ed. Amaresh Chakrabarti, et al. (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2021), 727–37; Sri G.M. Ranathunga and S.R UralagamageLanka, "International Conference on Business Research an Investigative Study of the Androgynous Fashion Concept and Its Impact on the Sri Lankan Fashion Market Fashion Design and Product Development Degree Course, Department of Textile and Clothing Technology," *International Conference on Business Research* (Moratuwa: University of Moratuwa, Moratuwa, Sri Lanka, 2019).

<sup>2</sup>Charles Seguin, Chris Julien, and Yongjun Zhang, "The Stability of Androgynous Names: Dynamics of Gendered Naming Practices in the United States 1880–2016," *Poetics* 85, No. 2 (2021): 101–501. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2020.101501>.

<sup>3</sup>M. Paz Galupo, Claire E. Cusack, and Ezra R. Morris, "Having a Non-Normative Body for Me Is about Survival: Androgynous Body Ideal among Trans and Nonbinary Individuals," *Body Image* 39, No. 2 (2021): 68–76. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2021.06.003>.

<sup>4</sup>Benilde Reis, et al., "Genderless Clothing Issues in Fashion," *Textiles, Identity, and Innovation: Design the Future* (New York: CRC Press, 2018), 255–60.

may confidently sport a more masculine look with jackets and pants.

The narrow boundaries between male and female dress styles have resulted in deviations that some consider normal<sup>5</sup>. One such deviation is the emergence of non-binary individuals who do not identify with either gender. These individuals may identify as bigender, genderfluid, or agender. It is essential to recognize and respect the diversity of gender identities and expressions regarding social life and religion<sup>6</sup>. It is imperative to adhere to the established guidelines and norms following their intended meaning. It is essential to maintain the integrity of these principles without altering their significance in any way.

It is essential to understand that the principles of the Islamic religion are not set in stone and can be interpreted and applied differently depending on the context and time<sup>7</sup>. While the core values remain unchanged, their implementation can vary based on cultural, social, and scientific changes. It is crucial to note that Muslims have different views and responses to change. While some may be conservative and reluctant to change<sup>8</sup>, others may be more open to adaptation and progress that aligns with Islamic values<sup>9</sup>. Many Muslim societies worldwide encounter and accept various change forms, including technological, economic, educational, and social challenges.

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<sup>5</sup>Aurore Bardey, Judith Achumba-Wöllenstein, and Pak Chiu, "Exploring the Third Gender in Fashion: From Consumers' Behavior to Designers' Approach towards Unisex Clothing," *Fashion Practice* 12, No. 3 (2020): 421–39. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17569370.2020.1816317>; Giorgia Miotto and Sandra Vilajoana-Alejandre, "Gender Equality: a Tool for Legitimacy in the Fast Fashion Industry," *Harvard Deusto Business Research* 8, No. 2 (2019): 134–47. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3926/hdbr.244>.

<sup>6</sup>Nicole M. Elias and Gwendolyn Saffran, "Non-Binary Gender Identity," *Ethics for Contemporary Bureaucrats: Navigating Constitutional Crossroads* (2020).

<sup>7</sup>E. Moosa and A.A. Mian, "Islam," *Encyclopedia of Applied Ethics* (2012): 769–76. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-373932-2.00234-9>.

<sup>8</sup>Irman G. Lanti and Windy Dermawan, "Examining the Growth of Islamic Conservatism in Indonesia: the Case of West Java," *Rising Islamic Conservatism in Indonesia* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 54–79.

<sup>9</sup>Yunita Aristyasari, "Synergizing Progressive Values and Social, Emotional, Spiritual Intelligence in Islamic Education in the Digital Era," *Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Sustainable Innovation 2019: Humanity, Education and Social Sciences*, Volume 353 (New York: Atlantis Press, 2019), 437–43. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2991/icosihess-19.2019.75>.

Islam provides a framework of ethics and principles that guide Muslims in addressing change, allowing them to develop solutions suitable for their context while adhering to religious principles.

However, it is felt that this new androgynous trend is sufficient to stir public excitement with the rise of androgynous appearances in the mass media. This research was conducted to determine how the readiness and understanding of Muslim religious communities and students face this new trend. This study uses a qualitative method with a narrative inquiry approach to explain, describe, and provide an understanding of the issues under study<sup>10</sup>. This research was conducted in one of the districts in Jambi province, where most of the population adheres to Islam and Islamic tertiary institutions. Then the research focused on two groups: people classified as people who understand religion, such as ustaz, ustazah, religious leaders, and ordinary people who do not understand religion. Informants were selected through the Outcome-based sampling method from Muslim-majority communities and Islamic Universities. Research analysis involves two distinct stages. *First*, they identified patterns in the data obtained from the two groups of informants based on the derived themes. *Second*, these patterns are thoroughly compared from a theoretical perspective to ensure that comprehensive and holistic data is produced.

## **B. Discussion**

### **1. How Does the Religious Community Respond to Androgynous and Non-Binary Fashion? Is Their Attitude towards It Accepting or Resistant?**

The study revealed two groups of almost the same opinions regarding the use of androgynous clothing and the recognition of

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<sup>10</sup>D.J. Clandinin and J. Huber, "Narrative Inquiry," *International Encyclopedia of Education* (New York: Elsevier, 2010).

non-binary genders. However, one group strongly criticizes and rejects the idea of androgynous fashion and non-binary gender identification in daily life.

One informant, an ustadzah aged 40, stated that people may have different views on things, including the use of androgynous clothing and the recognition of non-binary genders. Nevertheless, androgynous clothing cannot be normalized in everyday life as it violates several aspects. Androgynous clothing is known for its lack of restrictions in creating ways of dressing, making it difficult to identify someone's gender. The recognition of non-binary genders is also not tolerated in the research area and all regions of Indonesia, where only male and female identities are recognized. Society recognizes waria as male but with a tendency to have a female stature.

Informant 2 and a 21-year-old student from a state Islamic university in Sumatra, believe gender identity is limited to only men and women in social, religious, and societal contexts. Non-binary identities are seen as deviating from established norms and rules that divide roles by gender identity. While non-binary individuals may define their identities on social media, society, religion, and culture fail to recognize or ratify them. However, countries that have legalized non-binary identities offer support. Those struggling with identity and abilities may feel compelled to commit deviations to free themselves from gender perspectives.

Informant 3, a 60-year-old, believes wearing androgynous clothing is a deviation. Preserving clothing rules throughout history has aligned with gender identity at birth. Parents have always taught their children to have a physique and character that aligns with their gender identity. Gender-changing surgeries are not normalized or accepted by the local community, and those who break clothing rules may face special sanctions or ridicule. People in this area strictly adhere to clothing rules and regulations.

In regards to fashion and gender identity, there exist two groups of people who is the same. The first group consists of individuals who adhere to a religion, and the second group adheres to societal norms that dictate the rules of gender. They reject the idea of androgynous and non-binary fashion, which goes against established social norms. Gender roles are a fundamental part of religious and societal life and a natural law that cannot be contested. Even clothing is used to differentiate between men and women.

Children are educated from a young age based on their gender identity. In our society, gender plays a vital role in differentiating identities and avoiding ambiguity. This is useful as a reference for someone to choose a life partner and know gender roles and mental health<sup>11</sup>. Boys are encouraged to play with toys related to men's work, such as cars, robots, and miniature weapons, all contributing to forming their male character. On the other hand, girls are encouraged to play with toys that are appropriate for their gender, such as cooking toys, salons, dolls, and other things that contribute to the formation of their female character.

Individuals who study gender and society do not oppose gender equality stereotypes<sup>12</sup>. The concept of gender equality recognized by the local community is the balance of rights between men and women<sup>13</sup>, such as equal opportunities for education and work to meet their needs. However, there are still exceptions to this concept of equality. Women are not prohibited from doing work typically done by men, but there are limitations and contexts to consider. For example, women may work in an office or do jobs that

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<sup>11</sup>Christina L. Goodwin, Michael J. DeAngelo, and Philip J. Fizzur, "Gender Identity and Mental Health," *Encyclopedia of Mental Health: Second Edition*, ed. Howard S. Friedman and Charlotte H.B.T. (Oxford: Academic Press, 2023). DOI: <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-323-91497-0.00228-9>.

<sup>12</sup>M. Anais Martinez, et al., *Gender: Awareness, Identity, and Stereotyping*, *Encyclopedia of Infant and Early Childhood Development* (New York: Elsevier, 2020). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-809324-5.21818-X>.

<sup>13</sup>Matthew G. Nielson, et al., "Quantifying Gender Norm Resistance," *Journal of Adolescence* 84, No. 2 (2020): 219–29. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2020.09.008>.

do not require excessive physical strength, such as chopping wood, cutting trees, fishing, or building houses.

It is imperative to understand that pursuing personal desires does not justify engaging in fraudulent behavior or disregarding societal regulations<sup>14</sup>. All social norms are in place to ensure the betterment and protection of the community. It is important to note that these norms are closely tied to religious guidelines<sup>15</sup>, such as those in Islam, which allow for individual freedom within established boundaries, such as dress and fashion, for both men and women.

Men are strictly prohibited from following women's clothing styles and stature and vice versa; these two identities have boundaries in living their lives and daily lives<sup>16</sup>. In clothing, the way men and women dress has different restrictions. Where men are required to cover their genitals with modest clothing from the navel to the knees, while women are required to cover their genitals which consist of the entire body except the face and palms, with clothes that are loose and do not reveal curves or what we are often familiar with in Muslim clothing. From this, it can be concluded that men and women cannot be in the same position.

It should be noted that there is another group with a slightly different perspective from the first. Informant 4, a 31-year-old entrepreneur, firmly believes that wearing clothing with androgynous concepts and non-binary identities is acceptable as it allows individuals to position themselves comfortably. However, it is crucial to emphasize that this opinion is only sometimes accepted. Adherents of non-binary identities androgynous fashion mustn't impose their culture on society. We must refrain from judging

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<sup>14</sup>Shaozhe Cheng, et al., "Intention beyond Desire: Spontaneous Intentional Commitment Regulates Conflicting Desires," *Cognition* 238, No. 2 (2023): 105-513. DOI: <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2023.105513>.

<sup>15</sup>Cheng, et al.

<sup>16</sup>Lena Salaymeh, *Imperialist Feminism and Islamic Law: Hawwa*, Volume 17 (2019). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/15692086-12341354>.

those who identify as non-binary, as they may feel uncomfortable conforming to normative gender roles. Similarly, individuals who wear androgynous clothing may do so for work-related reasons. Ultimately, we should respect people's choices and allow them to express themselves authentically.

The community has set forth regulations that aim to enhance the social welfare of its constituents. Religious doctrines heavily influence these regulations, particularly in Islam, where individuals are granted the liberty to live as they desire within specified limits, such as clothing and style preferences<sup>17</sup>.

## **2. How Do the Students Respond to Androgynous and Non-Binary Fashion? Is Their Attitude towards It Accepting or Resistant?**

Some students accept and support Androgynous fashion. They see this as a form of freedom of expression. But they think this is inappropriate behavior. The nature of their support is only because of an attitude of respect for fellow human beings. So it should not be avoided, let alone discriminated against.

This assumption is supported by their statements about the people involved in Androgynous fashion and the nonbinary gender, who are generally very relaxed and friendly in their environment. They show more concern for others than the general public. They are usually terrified of actions that have a connection with criminal acts.

Those who reject and oppose androgynous and non-gender-binary fashion argue that they have tried to deny their nature. Men must look like men and vice versa. They defend their conservative views by referring to conflicts with the social and religious norms they believe in. This traditional view makes them resist new things, such as androgynous fashion and non-binary gender.

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<sup>17</sup>Tedi Supriyadi, J. Julia, and Endis Firdaus, "The Problems of Gender Equality: a Reconstruction of Islamic Doctrine," *Journal of Social Studies Education Research* 10, No. 2 (2019): 91-110.



Androgynous fashion is unavoidably affecting the younger generation<sup>18</sup>. Non-binary identification and androgynous clothing may offer comfort and security to some due to past traumas or psychological disorders. Although some regions may not accept these lifestyles, certain groups tolerate them based on the individual's background. Technological advancements have contributed to these changes as foreign cultures are adopted through social media. However, ensuring that these lifestyles do not negatively impact society's social life or religious beliefs is imperative. If individuals who identify as non-binary or wear androgynous fashion only do so within their communities, they should be tolerated. Everyone deserves the freedom to choose their way of life.

Notably, non-binary identity and androgynous fashion are not accepted in Islamic conservatism<sup>19</sup>. This goes against the norms and rules of the religious community. However, it should also be noted that not everyone follows Islam and may have cultural practices that permit androgynous fashion and acknowledge non-binary identities. For those who reside in a Muslim-majority community, it is of utmost importance to adhere to the customary and cultural rules set by the religious community in their daily life. This includes dress, behavior, and speech norms.

### **3. The Fashion Industry Is Increasingly Catering to Androgynous and Non-Binary Genders**

Certain religious and societal groups have deemed the concept of androgynous fashion and non-binary gender identities to violate social norms. However, a growing number of individuals accept and embrace those who identify as non-binary and

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<sup>18</sup>A.M. Tormakhova, "Androgyny in the Context of Current Visual Fashion Space: Philosophical and Culturological Aspect," *Anthropological Measurements of Philosophical Research* 15, No. 1 (2019): 82–91. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15802/ampr.v0i15.168834>.

<sup>19</sup>Hafsa Lodi, *Modesty: a Fashion Paradox, Uncovering The Causes, Controversies And Key Players Behind The Global Trend To Conceal Rather Than Reveal* (Havertown, USA: Casemate Group, 2020).

incorporate androgynous fashion into their daily lives<sup>20</sup>. This acceptance is primarily concentrated among public figures in the fashion industry, such as designers, actors, and artists, who openly identify as non-binary and frequently use androgynous fashion, especially in Indonesia<sup>21</sup>. This leads to the increasing popularity of androgynous trends in the fashion world. Individuals who utilize androgynous fashion often feel more comfortable expressing themselves through clothing not confined by gender constraints. Public figures frequently incorporate androgynous fashion into their style because it is considered unique and captivating, allowing them to express themselves in a way that stands out. They often combine contrasting and striking colors to create a visually appealing and satisfying look. Moreover, the advancement of technology and social media has made it simpler for individuals who identify as non-binary or incorporate androgynous fashion into their style to express themselves and share their distinctive fashion sense on platforms like YouTube and TikTok<sup>22</sup>.

The public's response to the androgynous fashion trend also varied. While some joked about it, others received it positively as a creative and amazing fashion statement. Based on observations on social media such as youtube, Instagram, and TikTok, many displays of everyday life have androgynous themes. However, it is important to note that androgynous clothing blurs the lines between men's and women's clothing, which goes against the dress code that adherents of religious and conservative societies believe. This assumption was born from the notion of clothing which they

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<sup>20</sup>S. Atwood and Jordan R. Axt, "Assessing Implicit Attitudes about Androgyny," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 96, No. 2 (2021): 104-162. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2021.104162>.

<sup>21</sup>Reza Oktivia Hamenda, "Representation of Androgyny Fashion in Fashion Page in Elle Magazine Indonesia : a Semiotic Study," *Allusion* 1, No. 1 (2012): 50-59.

<sup>22</sup>Chakrapipat Assawaboonyalert, et al., "Digital Media's Design Reflects Gender Equality Based on Androgynous Fashion Principles," *International Conference on Cybernetics and Innovations (ICCI)* (2022): 1-6.

believe is to help people identify and play their roles according to their gender.

#### **4. Community Norms Regarding Identity and Clothing**

Fashion is a personal expression that may be temporary and varies depending on one's mood. However, social norms dictate specific dress codes and characteristics in different regions, including patterns, designs, and accessories<sup>23</sup>. Clothing holds its significance and purpose, often linked to societal and cultural values and moral messages. The designs and patterns on clothing worn by specific groups of people often symbolize special meanings according to their cultures and their community's viewpoint. Religion plays a significant role in shaping clothing choices, as cultural and religious norms often go hand-in-hand in dictating acceptable behavior and dress codes. These norms cover all aspects of life and determine what is permissible. In social life, each figure has a specific role, with men being the head of the family and responsible for protecting and providing for their family. At the same time, women are tasked with caring for the household and raising their children with a gentle demeanor. Furthermore, religious norms dictate that men and women should only imitate or follow each other's styles and stature with consequences.

The Islamic religion places utmost importance on dress code, particularly regarding showing respect and honor to its people<sup>24</sup>. Muslim individuals are strictly required to wear clothing that sufficiently covers their genitals, which are deemed private and must not be exposed. Men must wear modest clothing from the

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<sup>23</sup>Beniamino Cislighi and Lori Heise, "Gender Norms and Social Norms: Differences, Similarities and Why They Matter in Prevention Science," *Sociology of Health and Illness* 42, No. 2 (2020): 407–22. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9566.13008>.

<sup>24</sup>Viola Thimm, "New Directions in Islam", in Viola Thimm (ed.), *(Re-)Claiming Bodies Through Fashion and Style* (Switzerland: Springer Nature, 2021). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-71941-8>.

navel to the knees, while women must cover their entire body except for the face and hands with loose-fitting clothing that conceals body curves, also known as Muslim clothing.

These dress norms are explicitly defined in the holy book of Al-Qur'an and are further enforced by cultural rules specific to the Islamic community. Thus, established clothing rules are considered normal for everyday wear, and deviation from these standards is heavily frowned upon. However, the passage of time has brought significant changes that have impacted people's lifestyles and resulted in changes in identity that go against religious and societal norms. One such change is the emergence of groups that do not conform to traditional gender norms.

Gender is no longer limited to males or females in today's world. Non-binary gender has emerged, including genderfluid, bigender, agender, and more. People who identify as non-binary can choose to identify as one gender or the other or even have no gender. Unfortunately, only a few countries legally recognize non-binary gender identities, according to the Asia Pacific National Human Rights Institution Forum<sup>25</sup>. Most countries, including Indonesia, only recognize male and female identities for official state documents such as identity cards, driving licenses, passports, birth certificates, and marriage certificates. However, some progress has been made as 42 countries, including Argentina, Germany, Thailand, the Netherlands, India, and Australia, have recognized non-binary gender classification in recent years.

Society must recognize and acknowledge the gender identities of non-binary individuals and empower them to express themselves freely<sup>26</sup>. Genderless fashion provides a comfortable and

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<sup>25</sup>Aoife M. O'Connor, et al., "Transcending the Gender Binary under International Law: Advancing Health-Related Human Rights for Trans Populations," *The Journal of Law, Medicine, and Ethics: a Journal of the American Society of Law, Medicine, and Ethics* 50, No. 3 (2022): 409–24. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/jme.2022.84>.

<sup>26</sup>A.M. Tormakhova, "Androgyny in the Context of Current Visual Fashion Space: Philosophical and Culturological Aspect," *Anthropological Measurements of Philosophical*

unrestricted clothing style, breaking free from gender limitations. This neutral style is designed for both men and women, promoting inclusivity and equality. Non-binary individuals also express their fashion sense through Androgynous fashion, challenging societal norms and stereotypes surrounding gendered fashion. This daring concept incorporates the equal distribution of clothing styles for men and women, often mixing and matching clothing styles associated with one gender. Men wear suits with earrings and heels, and women wear dresses with ties and loafers.

### **C. Conclusion**

Non-binary gender identities and androgynous fashion are often seen as deviations from established social and religious norms in certain communities. These norms have been ingrained for generations, and clothing is used to differentiate between genders and identify a person's identity. However, as society evolves, lifestyles change, leading to the emergence of non-binary identities and a shift towards gender-neutral clothing. While some individuals accept these concepts, religious communities must work towards normalizing them, despite conflicting societal norms. Every rule, including clothing-related, must be strictly followed in these communities, and deviation is not tolerated.

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