Social Identity Construction and Negotiation among *Hijab*-wearing Indonesian University Students

Deborah N. Simorangkir and Sigit Pamungkas

Abstract: Today, increasingly more Indonesian young women wear the *hijab*. This trend continues in Indonesia with the booming of pop culture – including fashion, film, and music – featuring Islamic themes. This article analyzes how the *hijab* shapes identity. In-depth interviews with 10 *hijab*-wearing university students were conducted, and results were analyzed using the perspectives of Social Identity and Identity Negotiation theories. The *hijab* is an important cultural symbol of social identity. The social categorization is evident in the respondents' perception of non-*hijab*-wearing Muslim women; and their social identification is reinforced by the media's portrayal of women in *hijab*. Fashion also plays a crucial part in identity negotiation.

Keywords: *hijab*, Indonesia, social identity, identity negotiation.

Background

As the world's largest archipelago, Indonesia is the world's fourth-most-populated nation with approximately 250 million people. Having 88 percent of its population being Muslim means that Indonesia also has the world's largest Islamic population. Other official religions include Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Indonesia has more than 300 ethnic groups, 14 distinct languages, and approximately 400 local dialects. With such diversity, maintaining national unity has always been challenging for all Indonesian leaders (Ananto, 2003, p. 261; Simorangkir, 2011).

When Indonesia declared its independence in 1945, there was a tense debate over the role of Islam in politics. But under Indonesia's first president, Soekarno, "Indonesia adopted a civil code instead of an Islamic one" (Kimura, 2002). Afterwards, during Soeharto's presidency, which spanned from 1966 to 1998 (known as the New Order era), all Islamic parties had to join under one Islamic party, Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (Party for Unity and Development or PPP). But after Soeharto's resignation in 1998, "the structure that repressed religion and society collapsed" (Martin, 2004). Though present day Indonesian Muslims are well represented in the democratically elected parliament, many critics claim that this has caused the rise of extremist groups such as Jemaah Islamiyah and Laskar Jihad (Martin, 2004).

Despite having the world's largest Muslim population, Indonesia's law does not mandate head-covering – with the exception of the autonomous special district of Aceh, where wearing the *hijab* is mandatory under its sharia-based law. Still, Indonesia is experiencing a rapid increase in the number of young women taking up the *hijab* at a younger age than did their elder siblings or mothers, possibly because the *hijab* was not encouraged during the restrictive New Order era. The *hijab* became increasingly *fashionabl*e in the more liberal and democratic Reform Order beginning in 1998 (Peng,

Deborah N. Simorangkir earned her Bachelor of Arts in Communication from the University of Maryland, College Park (USA), her Master of Science in Communication Management from Towson University (USA), and her Doctor of Philosophy in Media and Communication Sciences degree from Technische Universität Ilmenau (Germany). Her main research interests are in gender, culture, and public relations. She is currently Head of Communication and Public Relations Study Program at Swiss German University (Indonesia).

Sigit Pamungkas earned his undergraduate degree from Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana (Indonesia) and his Master's degree from Universitas Pelita Harapan (Indonesia). He is currently a lecturer at the Department of Communication, Universitas Pelita Harapan (Indonesia).

2016). This is quite contrary to the Western debate about the adoption of Muslim dress and *hijab* as a form of oppression. In Indonesia, until 2002, women had to take off their *hijab* when taking pictures for passports and certificates (Nef-Saluz, 2007). Gradually, however, the *hijab* trend gained momentum and became accepted as part of the uniform at *school*, in government offices, and among the police. This trend continued with the emergence of Indonesian pop culture featuring Islamic themes in films, TV programs and novels. Though again, there are criticisms about the continuing pressure to adopt Islamic values by religious extremists.

Traditionally, Western literature has deemed the *hijab* as oppressive, mainly because Western values uphold individuality and freedom from external coercion (Williams & Vashi, 2007, p. 272). For instance, equality is a core value for Americans, thus everyone must be treated equally in all aspects, including clothing, sports, and sexuality. Consequently, any practice of separation of sexes—including the act of wearing the *hijab*—is deemed as gender inequality because while women wear it, men do not (Williams & Vashi, 2007, p. 275), and thus, women with veiled faces and bodies are perceived as constrained (Zeiger, 2008, p. 266), oppressed, and need to be "saved" (Droogsma, 2007, p. 294). The *hijab* is then perceived as a symbol of the inferiority and "barbarism" of Arabs in Muslim societies (Droogsma, 2007, p. 296). On the contrary, however, Droogsma (2007) finds that in the case of American Muslims, "the women inscribe hijab with meanings shaped by their unique cultural standpoints. The *hijab* functions to define Muslim identity, perform a behavior check, resist sexual objectification, afford more respect, preserve intimate relationships, and provide freedom" (p. 1).

In the 20th century, the *hijab* endured big transformations and consequences as it became a symbol for many different social movements. Leila Ahmed (2014) explains the processes of veiling and unveiling in Egypt and relates it to the resurgence of veiling in the US, in her book, *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America*, in which she describes how, within five decades, the rise of Islamism has gone from a 'marginal' to 'the dominant' form of Islam in the West and everywhere else (p. 300). According to Ahmed (2014), in Egypt, the Islamist style of veiling began as a marginal 'campus phenomenon' (p. 83), but eventually progressed into a 'quiet revolution' within Muslim communities, including in North America through what she calls 'immigration of Islamism' (p. 157), and eventually developed into gender and women's rights activism. When *hijab*-wearing Muslim women were being harassed by the people in America, a group of non-Muslim women took a stand against oppression by organizing "headscarf days" to support the women in *hijab*. Particularly after WWII and the decolonization era, the *hijab* became a symbol for resistance, which could be observed in Algeria, Pakistan, and especially in America after 9/11 (Ahmed, 2014).

Prusher (2000, par. 11) points out that: "The 20th century often saw the veil hijacked for political purposes. Nationalists from Turkey's Ataturk to Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser wanted the *hijab* to come off. Fundamentalists in Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, Lebanon's Hizbullah, and the Palestinian Hamas wanted it back on." This shows that, regardless of *hijab*, women are often used by different socio-political axis as symbols representing their ideology (Prusher, 2000). However, even though western literature often debates whether *hijab* is oppressive of emancipatory to women, Al-Faruqi (2001) claims that it is not even always related to an affirmation or negation. The Muslim environment overall encourages molding individual goals and interests according to the

welfare of the larger group, and that this subordination of personal interests to the larger group should not be regarded as oppression. Al-Faruqi (2001) argues that Muslim women view their goals as in need of balance. Unlike the western feminist movement, which emphasizes on the roles of providing financial support, pursuit of career, and decision-making, Islam stipulates the distinguishing between male and female roles and responsibilities in society (Al-Faruqi, 2001, p. 3).

Though *hijab* has become an obvious symbol of Islam, many Muslims or scholars of Islam still debate on whether this is indeed mandatory. For example, according to Gallagher and Smith (1999), "The Qur'an, despite what some Muslim women seem to think, does not actually specify how much of the body has to be covered." There are Muslims who insist that, though a custom, the *hijab* is not mentioned in either the Qur'an or hadith (Ali, 2005). Yet those who favor the *hijab* cite specific passages in the Qur'an: Surah An-Nur (24:31) instructs women:

> They should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their husband's sons, their brothers or their brother's sons or their sister's sons, or other women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess or male servants free of physical needs or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex (Ali, 2005).

In general, those in favor of the *hijab* claim that those who say it is not mandated are ignorant, while those who claim it is not mandatory accuse those who advocate the *hijab* as fundamentalists.

However, the purpose of this article is not to determine whether the *hijab* is directly ordered by God, nor does it aim to analyze the concept of the *hijab* from a theological perspective. Instead, this article seeks to analyze the attitudes of the particular young women to their religion and their religious identity as important factors to explain their decisions at the individual level to wear *hijab*. An example of previous researches on university-aged female Muslim students in a South-East Asian setting was Lateh and Mudor's (2014) research on Muslim female students at Thailand's Prince of Songkla University, Pattani campus. Lateh and Mudor (2014) analyzed how students' hometowns and group years affected their attitudes toward the wearing of *hijab*. Their results showed that, while these students agreed that wearing a *hijab* meant properly following the Islamic provision and regulation, the interaction of attitude towards wearing Hijab between the students' hometown and group year was not statistically significant (Lateh & Mudor, 2014). However, the attitudes of students in different group years varied. This was likely due to social and environmental influences. For instance, some students took off their *hijab* when they were at school or at work; some wore the *hijab* only in their community; whereas some were strict about wearing the *hijab* (Lateh & Mudor, 2014).

Therefore, the objective of this article is to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the dominant factors influencing their decision to wear *hijab*?
2. How does the *hijab* shape their identity?
3. How do they negotiate their identity?
4. What does the *hijab* mean to them?

As mentioned earlier, Indonesia has the world's largest Muslim population, thus arguably, women who wear *hijab* in Indonesia do not experience the same level, if any, of harassment that Muslim women in the West may experience. But in this article, we are interested in focusing on college students from three colleges near the capital area of Indonesia: SGU, UPH, and STTPH. All universities offer international-standard education and offer joint-degree schemes with Western universities. UPH and STTPH have a strong Christian foundation, while SGU was formed through a joint effort between Indonesia and three European governments. Most notably, in these three universities, students wearing the *hijab* are a small minority.

Methodology

In order to answer the research questions, a phenomenological qualitative analysis using in-depth interviews with a nonrandom, snowball sample of 10 *hijab*-wearing female college students was conducted in October 2016.

The following are the profiles of the respondents:

1. KI: 20 year-old student at SGU
2. KF: 21 year-old student at SGU
3. AK: 21 year-old student at UPH
4. AA: 19 year-old student at UPH
5. RBS: 19 year-old student at STPPH
6. MR: 19 year-old student at UPH
7. AKN: 19 year-old student at UPH
8. ADP: 19 year-old student at SGU
9. RR: 20 year-old student at SGU
10. FAA: 21 year-old student at SGU

These respondents were selected because they were either the only, or some of the very few, veiled students in their colleges at the time of the research. The selection of the colleges was due to the fact that this research particularly sought to analyze the practice of wearing the *hijab* among students in an environment where veiled students are a small minority.

All interviews were conducted online at the request of the respondents. This may have given them more time and place convenience, as well as ease during the interviews. However, the respondents were willing to be contacted back and forth for further elaboration and clarification of their answers. Thus, all interviews began with the same set of questions, but the follow-up questions varied with each respondent.

The transcripts were then analyzed using Giorgi's phenomenological method, which seeks to expose a phenomenon through the experiences of humans by identifying important themes and thus explore in detail how participants make sense of their personal and social world. The respondents' experiences were later clustered into specific and general descriptions of situated structure (Giorgi, 1989).

The data analysis used a two-stage interpretation process: First, taking initial notes on one margin, and upon finishing writing the initial notes on one transcript, then the second stage is going back to the beginning of the transcript to take notes—on another margin—of emerging themes, and the essence that was actually captured by the

researcher from the text. This is continued throughout the entire transcript. Even though phenomenology does not aim to verify a theory, it is important that it has a theoretical framework, and in the case of this research, data were to be analyzed using the theoretical frameworks of Social Identity and Identity Negotiation theories, and thus the themes that emerged were also relevant to these theories.

The next step was connecting the emergent themes that have been listed on a sheet of paper. The following stage involves a more analytical or theoretical ordering, and some of the themes were clustered together, while others emerged as superordinate concepts. A table of themes was then developed, recording the respondents' extracts from the transcripts, as well as the researchers' interpretation. Lastly, the final themes were summarized as a final statement for each participant.

Findings
Dominant Factors Influencing the Decision to Take Up the Hijab
With the rise in Islamic interest, there is a movement among Indonesian teenagers to present themselves as good Muslims, but in a trendy fashion, leading to the trend of the *jilbab gaul* (trendy hijab) style of Islamic wear to communicate their identity. In fashion, for example, many incorporate batik designs within the outfit they wear. In music and the arts, for instance, Indonesian *boybands* and *girlbands* often mimic the style of K-pop, or rappers with Indonesian political criticism (Herdman & Srivastava, 2014). Mixing English and Indonesian in daily conversations is also quite common, especially among urban teenagers, especially those who attend English-speaking schools. The majority of Indonesian teens and young adults seem to be able to negotiate a balance between the influences of globalization and adhering to their cultural and traditional roots (Herdman & Srivastava, 2014).

All the respondents in this study decided to wear the *hijab* at a fairly young age. The earliest was at 10 years of age, and the latest was at 19 years, thus on average, the respondents decided to cover up at 15.5 years of age. While the majority of respondents claim that taking up the *hijab* was their personal decision due to religious reasons, some were influenced by their mothers, while some others admit to have been influenced by a public figure who wore a *hijab*:

> Because I knew and realized that wearing *hijab* is a must for women to cover their *aurat*. But one of the factors was also because I just got home from *Umrah* and I read in the Qur'an that after doing *Umrah,* there will be angels that follow you for 40 days, so women need to wear *hijab*. I did it for 40 days and then kept wearing it until now – AA.

> I feel like it's my calling to wear *hijab*, mainly because in my family, girls who have reached their teenage years are advised to wear *hijab*, but we're not forced to, it's our own decision. But I was sure I wanted to wear the *hijab* since I was a teenager – MR.

While there have been some Indonesian celebrities who once decided to cover up, but then shortly after decided they were not ready for the *hijab* (causing much criticism), all respondents in this research claim that they have been successful so far in keeping their commitment to wear the hijab, even though they initially had difficulties:

> I never want to say that I've succeeded to keep my commitment to wear my *hijab*, because I would only be successful if I could still wear it until my last breath – KI.

Indeed, the majority of respondents admit to having encountered difficulties because of their *hijab*. These difficulties come from feelings of self-consciousness, personal choices, as well as daily conditions:

> One of the biggest challenges of wearing *hijab* is that I cannot attend some kinds of festivals or concerts, like Djakarta Ware House Project, We The Fest, or some kinds of events that allow beer or alcohol drinking, or if there is a DJ performing. I really would like to attend, but, because of my pride and also my *hijab*, I decided to just enjoy the concert through YouTube – KI.

> It's difficult because it's so hot, especially after playing sports – FAA.

> Personally I did encounter difficulties. At first, there were many people asking me why I decided to wear *hijab*, and the ones who didn't ask started to judge me as if I were an attention-seeker and wanted to be considered nice by everybody. Then, there was a time when I got discriminated by a group of people because of wearing *hijab*, they barely noticed or talked to me. And lastly, the *hijab* styles that people are inventing, I wanted to try all of the styles but kept on failing at it – AA.

Other respondents did not encounter any difficulties in wearing the *hijab*, claiming that the *hijab* actually makes them feel comfortable; that there is a certain pride for Muslim women to wear the *hijab*; that ever since taking up the *hijab*, they have been having fun trying different *hijab* styles; and that their environment has always supported them:

> I do not find any difficulties when I wear *hijab* because I do not think that *hijab* could interfere me in any ways… I can still do so many fun activities with my *hijab*, even back then I was hiking with my friends and I wore *hijab*. So, think about high heels in women's perspective, even though they hurt sometimes, but the pride of wearing them will kill the pain inside. So, *hijab* for me is more like high heels for a woman. The pride of wearing *hijab* because of my own decision is higher than the difficulties that I may feel – KF.

On the other hand, all respondents also found many benefits from wearing the *hijab*. These benefits include social benefits, such as: feeling respected by society; feeling protected from sexual harassment; and, feeling more self-confident; as well as practical benefits, such as: not having to brush hair; and, protection from the sun. Thus, the main benefits of wearing the *hijab* according to the respondents are respect from society, protection from sexual harassment, fashion, and practicality.

> First of all, I'm clearly protected from many things by covering my head, for example, I don't have to worry that my hair will be damaged by the pollution or the sun, or get messy because of the wind. Second of all, I look neater because by wearing long sleeves and a skirt or trousers, I get to choose from a variety of styles to mix and match. For instance, a bright t-shirt with a dark long-sleeved shirt – ADP.

> The benefits of wearing *hijab* are a lot…I don't have to spend a long time doing my hair every time I want to go out. I just pick a *hijab* that matches my outfit and wear it…Indonesia provides a lot of fashion items for *hijabers*, so that helps me so much. Socially, I feel more protected. Someone said to me that this world is mean, especially to women. There is a lot of sexual harassment out there. Because I now have no reason to wear any kinds of dresses that do not cover my body from top to bottom, I found that this helps me from men's evil eyes staring at me with desire. Besides protecting me…especially now at SGU, a lot of people recognize me easily because of my *hijab* and somehow it becomes my identity. Another benefit of my *hijab* is that people get curious about me, like they always ask me the same question, "Don't you feel hot when you go outside in the afternoon?", and I always laugh out loud. So somehow, *hijab* helps me make friends – KFP.

Clearly, the *hijab* is not only a veil to the respondents, as they believe that it serves as a fashion accessory, a means to make friends, and as protection against sexual harassment. Even though we do not agree that covering up prevents sexual harassment—as there have been numerous sexual harassment cases involving women in *hijab* (*Shahryar*, 2012) —still, we believe that it is important to note that these respondents believe that they have the power to protect themselves against the male gaze, and that to them, wearing the *hijab* means taking action against sexual harassment.

Hijab and Identity Construction

Self-identity is one's overall understanding of who he/she is. It consists of relatively stable self-assessments about oneself, for instance, about one's personality traits, skills and abilities, occupation and hobbies, and physical attributes. According to Giddens (1991, p.54):

> A person's identity is not to be found in behavior, nor— important though this is—in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going. The individual's biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing 'story' about the self.

On the other hand, according to Tajfel and Turner (1979), social identity refers to people's sense of who they are based on the group to which they belong. Belonging to these groups gives them a sense of pride and self-esteem, and through a process of social categorization, known as in-group and out-group, the world seems to be categorized into "them" and "us." The main argument of social identity theory is that members of an in-group will look for negative aspects of an out-group in order to

strengthen their self-image. When stereotyping people into groups and categories, people tend to exaggerate the differences between groups and similarities within the same group. Tajfel and Turner (1979) point out that the evaluation of others as "us" or "them" occurs in three mental stages. The first stage is categorization, in which one tries to make sense of his/her social environment by categorizing people, including him/herself. The next stage is social identification, in which a person adopts the identity of the group of which he/she categorizes him/herself as a member, and acts according to the norms of the group. The person feels a significant emotional bond with the group, and his/her self-esteem becomes bound to the group membership. On the third stage, social comparison, having categorized him/herself as member of a group and having identified with that group, he/she tends to compare that group with others. If one's self-esteem is to be maintained, the in-group must compare favorably (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Therefore, according to Social Identity theory, "each individual's composite identity has group membership, relational role, and individual self-reflexive implications. Individuals mostly acquired their composite identity through socio-cultural conditioning process, individual lived experiences, and the repeated intergroup and interpersonal interaction experiences" (Ting-Toomey, 2015).

Identity negotiation, then, occurs when two or more communicators exchange verbal and non-verbal messages in order to maintain, uplift, or even threaten, the different socio-cultural group-based or unique personal-based identity images of the other. This is very evident in Indonesia's collectivistic culture, where people tend to be more concerned with communal social-based identity issues (Ting-Toomey, 2015).

As a symbol of Islam, the *hijab* serves as an identity of the Muslim woman showing her devotion to Islam, thus identifies her as belonging to the Muslim community (Jardim & Vorster, 2003; Dunkel et al, 2010). The primary meaning of the notion of *hijab* is a veil that separates humankind, or the world, from God (Jardim & Vorster, 2003). As Jan and Abdullah (2015) explain, *hijab* or covering of head is "the only way by which women can keep herself distant from all the *fitnah* and endure respect for her in this *Dunya* and *Akhirah.*" In today's society, however:

> women cover their heads wearing tight fitting *abaya* with different designs and glitteriest look that highlight curves of, their body and modestly underlining their best features. Islam does not prohibit women to wear good scarves or veils, veils with a little embroidery within the bounds of Islamic decorum are allowed unless and until they are worn in the right manner without showing of hair and shape of their body (Jan & Abdullah, 2015, p. 8).

Den Heyer and Schelling point out in their book, *Symbolen in de Bijbel* (2006), that clothing not only protects the wearer from cold and heat or serves as adornment, but also has a social function, from which people obtain their identity, and consequently, clothing reflects the wearer's identity (Den Heyer & Schelling, 2006), and in the case of the *hijab*, it reflects the wearer's social identity. Therefore, clothing is a manifestation of how one understands oneself to be. "Clothing relates the person as an individual in or as part of a communal setting expressing the acceptance or denial of propositional values of the community one belongs to" (Jardim & Vorster, 2003).

Mary Ali (2001) explains that most sources indicate that the practice of wearing *hijab* originated from the Quran, Sura 33: 59:

> O Prophet, tell your wives and daughters and the believing women to draw their outer garments around them (when they go out or are among men). That is better in order that they may be known (to be Muslims) and not annoyed / molested…

Ali (2001) argues that a Muslim woman wearing *hijab* is expressing her identity and is highly regarded and perceived as modest. "*Hijab* is not merely covering dress but more importantly, it is behavior, manners, speech and appearance in public. Dress is only one facet of the total being" (Ali, 2001, par. 22). And today, the amount of covering and rationale for taking up the *hijab* differ "from the long robes and colorful scarves in the North African countries to the black-on-black garb of the conservative Gulf states" (Prusher, 2000, p.8). Indeed, the globalization of Islamic countries has recently increasingly transformed the representation of Muslim women and the *hijab*. One example is the way Malay-Muslim women have changed the Malaysian public perception of the *hijab*, giving it a more liberated Islamic identity through mass communication. This, consequently, enables Muslim women to "experience empowerment and diminish oppressive stereotypes" (Hassim, 2014, p. 1). This proves that the *hijab* has become a powerful tool to communicate identity.

However, some Muslim scholars criticize the *hijab* fashion trend, arguing that the function of the *hijab* is not as an ornament, and thus the Islamic dress style entering the global fashion industry is a paradox, citing Surah an-Nur verse 31, which prohibits women from revealing their adornment, which may cause men to stare at them, and the Al-Ahzab verse 33: 175: "And you shall remain in your house and do not ornate and behave like people of ignorance" (Mustami, 2015).

Because it has been established that the *hijab* communicates one's social identity, and there are many variations as to the styles and extent of coverage, it is important also to discuss the rise of Muslim fashion. Fashion also communicates one's self-identity (Nam et al., 2006), "when an individual is keeping oneself updated with a current fashion knowingly and unknowingly he/she is communicating to the society of who they are and what is important for them" (Jan & Abdullah, 2015). Today, Indonesia, like many other countries, is witnessing a booming in the Muslim fashion line. Often influenced by western fashion, Muslim fashion is increasingly featured in magazines. Hanzaee and Chitsaz (2011) and Latiff and Alam (2013) argue that the media give exposure to the concept of fashionable Muslim wear and show the audience new ways of wearing *hijab* that make women attractive while covering their body. In response to this demand, increasingly more designers have started mixing *hijab* with the latest fashion, which some criticize as blurring the main reason and meaning of *hijab* (Latif & Alam, 2013; Monkebayeva, Mustafayeva, & Baitenova 2012; Reeves & Azam, 2012). "Therefore, this inner dilemma of a woman to stay attractive even while covering her head is solved when *hijab* becomes trendy. But this dilemma arises when Muslim women are confused between keeping the modesty in their *hijab* according to Islam and following the fashion trends by wearing stylish *hijab* according to modern fashion that fashion industry demands" (Jan & Abdullah, 2015).

For many women, identities are not merely choices (Sen 2009) or clearly delineated fragmented facets of selves. Identity can be ascribed rather than chosen

(Parekh 2009), and women have to negotiate and struggle to move beyond the stranglehold placed on them by such ascriptions. Women recognize identities as dynamic and malleable and are able to use differing interpretations to move beyond the limitations imposed in the name of specific faiths, cultures, or socioeconomic norms. Many reconceptualize their understanding of self and move beyond boundaries that remain fluid, hard to define, and culturally and historically constructed and reconstructed within specific socioeconomic contexts (Baumann 1996). By keeping oneself up with a current fashion, the individual communicates who he/she is and what is important to him/her. In many ways, today the *hijab* not only symbolizes the identity of Muslims, but also her status and power, and according to Mustami (2015), in modern Muslim societies, the *hijab* is more often related to the upper class.

As mentioned previously, the *hijab* is the most obvious symbol of Islamic identity, and indeed, "the religious practice of *hijab* has become one of the chief symbols of what is perceived as a growing visibility of Islam in the public sphere" (Bracke & Fadil, 2012, p. 80). In this study, the vast majority of respondents agree that the *hijab* communicates their identity as Muslims:

> Sometimes, I feel like I have to communicate with a good attitude, like I represent my religion, my family and most importantly, I represent myself as a youngster wearing a *hijab*. I do not want people to immediately consider me a good person only because I am wearing *hijab*, and later find out something bad about me and thus begin to judge my *hijab* also. I want people to communicate with me as a human being, and still consider me a person with my own personality, my own weaknesses, and my own decisions – KF.

> *Hijab* for me is like an identity, because Muslim women wear it, so the *hijab* shows what your religion truly means, doesn't matter from where you live or what nationality or race you are – AA.

For the respondents in this study, wearing a *hijab* communicates that they are attempting to be better Muslims. When asked how they think other people view them because of wearing *hijab*, eight respondents claim that everyone views them positively, especially their family and friends, whereas two respondents feel that there are those who view them positively and others who view them negatively:

> Most of my family, such as my sisters, mom, grandma, aunts, nieces, all of them wear one. Wearing *hijab* is a tradition for us, when our age is old enough to understand the true meaning of wearing *hijab*, we start to wear one. Friends and society will treat me the same I guess, when I'm wearing my *hijab*, my signature style, they'll notice me instantly that this is me, and they will treat me carefully, they don't want to harm women in *hijab*, women are sacred like pearls and diamonds that are meant to be protected, *hijab* is the shield and people will respect that – AA.

> In UPH's environment, indeed, the first time I wore a veil and wore the class uniform, I was stared at weirdly, may be due to the new appearance. But after a period of time, it became

> something usual. When the new students came, the weird stares upon me appeared again, there were strange and cynical stares at me, but there were also normal responses to me. As for my friends who knew me, at first they were somewhat surprised, but then they got used to it. About my family, they definitely considered it as an ordinary thing, because it wasn't unusual to see me wear the veil – RBS.

Indeed, all but one respondent feel that society views them differently now that they wear the *hijab*. Some claim that people respect them more after they took up the *hijab*, some feel that people tend to trust them more now that they wear the *hijab*, and some feel that the change of society's perception is not only due to the change in the respondents' appearance, but because the *hijab* has also made them behave better and become better women:

> Before I wore the *hijab*, people considered me an ordinary girl would soon become a woman, and if I don't wear *hijab*, they will judge my way of dressing every time. But after I started wearing one, little by little they respected my decision and realized that I have decided that I do not wish to attract attention for them, but to commit my decision – AA.

> Before I wore the *hijab*, I was just the same as them at STPPH. After wearing the veil, they gave a different reaction to me. I became more easily recognized, because there are very few students who wear a veil in STPPH – RBS.

It is interesting to see that, while some feel that the *hijab* helps them make a statement that they do not want attention from people, others feel that one of the benefits of the *hijab* is actually the fact that it distinguishes them from others in a community where Muslims are a minority. The one respondent who did not notice a difference in the way society viewed her after she started to wear the *hijab* admits, however, that this may be because she started wearing the *hijab* since she was a child, thus people around her were already accustomed to it.

Not only did the way people viewed them change, but the respondents also felt that wearing the *hijab* has changed them in many ways:

> I changed a lot, for instance, I now prefer to go to the Mushola rather than to the canteen or play with friends, I'm more respectful to others, and I tend to be more sensitive when someone talks about hijab in front of me and they mock someone who wears a *hijab* but looks strange, then I would get really mad with that person – KI.

> *Hijab* has changed me in many ways, such as the way I talk to people, I try to not curse or say bad words whatever the situation is, the way I think too, I'm starting to think more maturely when taking decisions, in relationships, whenever me and my soon to be fiancé argue about something, the *hijab* itself reminds me not to be selfish and forgive each other – AA.

> Wearing *hijab* doesn't change my relationship and friendship, maybe in my behavior, I would keep my attitude, such as: prioritizing honesty and decency – AK.

Overall, the respondents felt that the *hijab* has changed their attitude and made them more respectful, religious, and, consequently, more trustworthy. This is evidence of the social identification stage, in which upon categorizing people including him/ herself into social categories, he/she adopts the identity of that group and changes his/her behavior and attitude in order according to what he/she believes are the norms of the group. The respondents of this study also tended to be more sympathetic to fellow Muslim women who wear the *hijab*. They also felt as though they can motivate other Muslim women to continue wearing the *hijab*. According to Social Identity theory, this is because in the social identification stage, a strong emotional bond with the group is formed (Ting-Toomey, 2015).

When asked whether they feel there are any misperceptions or stereotypes from other people toward them because of wearing the *hijab*, six felt that some misperceptions indeed lingered, for instance, that a woman who wears a *hijab* is more spiritual than others, and that women who wear the *hijab* are just looking for attention or trying to make a better impression:

> Oh yeah, my other Muslim friends thought that my I was more religious than they are, and that my knowledge and my attitude are better than theirs. But all is wrong. It's not like, because I wear a *hijab*, then everything about me is better than others. I am still learning too. Even I try to learn more and try hard to lessen all my weaknesses since I started wearing the *hijab* – KF.

Obviously, these misperceptions and stereotypes are different from the ones often felt by Muslims living in the West:

> Actually Indonesia is fine with the *hijab*, because a lot of Muslims wear the *hijab*. But it would be different if we compared it with other countries, like Germany, Switzerland, and so on. They still have misperceptions about Muslims who wear the *hijab*, because they still believe that Muslims are terrorists – IK.

As explained earlier, the third part of social identity is social comparison. A person belonging to a certain social category – in this case, the social category of women with *hijab* – will have a positive self-esteem if the group to which the person belongs continuously compares favorably. This is why our respondents agree that they often observe other women who wear a *hijab*. Some of the reasons for doing so are: they want to learn the different styles of wearing the *hijab*; they want to observe how the *hijab* can be fashionably incorporated into their outfit; they want to check the extent to which the others' *hijab* cover their *aurah* (body parts deemed private in Islam); they want to observe the behavior of others who wear *hijab*, and; observing other *hijab*-wearing women encourage them to keep their commitment in wearing the *hijab*:

> To be honest, yes. I often observe the women around me who wear *hijab*, sometimes I am amazed by women who perfectly

> cover their *aurat,* not half-heartedly, and also, I often get sad when I see women who wear *hijab* but don't meet the provisions of *hijab*, for example, wearing *hijab* but also wearing tight clothes at the same time – AK.

> Yes, I do tend to observe others wearing *hijab*, I observe the style and their fashion. How they do their *hijab*, how to mix and match the patterns or colors to the outfit they're wearing… – AA.

The majority of respondents also agree that women who wear *hijab* also admit to pass certain judgments on other women who do not wear *hijab*:

> From my point of view, I do see other girls who do not wear *hijab* in a certain way. If the girl is a non-Muslim, then I cannot judge her. But, for Muslim girls, I really pity them, and really want to educate them on how important it is to cover the *aurat*, I know that not every girl considers *hijab* as their first choice in what to wear but, it is a must in Islam – AA.

> I pity the Muslim women who have not decided to wear *hijab*, because in Islam, covering your *aurat* is an obligation that all adult women must obey. Nevertheless, even women with *hijab* do not necessarily behave better than those who do not wear *hijab*, but at least as Muslims, we are one step ahead when it comes to fulfilling our obligations – AKN.

Overall, even though literature shows there are different opinions among Muslim scholars regarding whether the *hijab* is indeed mandatory, the respondents in this study believe that for Muslim women, the *hijab* is not optional, and thus, they are obligated to wear it regardless of their readiness to cover up. Therefore, they have a desire to share with Muslim women who do not wear *hijab* about the importance of covering up their *aurat*. This is a clear example of the categorization of "us" and "them," especially the social comparison stage of social identity.

There were three respondents, however, that claim that women cannot and should not be judged based on whether they were the *hijab*, but somehow still contradicts themselves in their response:

> In my opinion, perceptions about other girls or women who don't wear *hijab* are not a big deal because it depends on their beliefs. But sometimes it is bad for them because some of them wear *hot pants* or *tank tops* and to be honest, that is not polite at all. And one more thing, for Muslim girls who still don't wear *hijab*, I think they're better than those who have worn it but later decide to take it off for no apparent reason – IK.

Identity Negotiations and the Media's Influence
When asked about how they think the Indonesian media portray women with *hijab*, the respondents in this study pointed out that Indonesian media often portray public figures and celebrities who wear *hijab* as good and religious. These women are often portrayed as beautiful and fashionable women who are free to express themselves. However, in

TV series and films, veiled women are often portrayed as weak and pitiful, often treated improperly. The respondents do not agree with such portrayals:

> In my opinion, Indonesian media consider women in *hijab* as a soft people, sometimes women in *hijab* are the ones getting tested, such a pity! Women in *hijab* must be considered strong and independent women, just like any other woman – AA.

> The media usually portray *hijab*-clad women as good, pure, and perfect. In reality, that's not always the truth. Women who wear *hijab* can also make mistakes – MR.

However, it cannot be denied that Indonesian media have also been a source of inspiration for many *hijab*-wearing young women:

> In my opinion, everything has changed since Dian Pelangi, the Muslim fashion designer appeared. She's everywhere and she attended a lot of fashion shows, such as London Fashion Week, Paris Fashion Week, and so on. In Indonesia, the media always portray women who wear *hijab* as good figures. Nowadays, there are actresses who have decided to wear *hijab*, like Laudya Chintya Bella and Dewi Sandra, and the audience, including me, copy them, and some fans just copy their behaviors, their fashion and become more religious by wearing *hijab* and attend some prayer groups, or help orphans, just like their idols do – IK.

Yet when asked whether the media have influenced their decision to wear the *hijab,* half of the respondents denied the influence of the media, claiming that wearing the *hijab* is a personal decision, and not due to the media's influence. However, the other half agrees that the media have influenced them at least in two aspects: theological knowledge about the *hijab*, and how to wear the *hijab*:

> I once saw a TV show that said that wearing the *hijab* was obligatory, and if we don't, then our fathers will be tortured in hell with each step that we take outside our home and meet men who are not our blood relatives. Later on, I also saw a lot of women with *hijab* on social media, especially Instagram. I really like seeing their pictures, they're beautiful and their styles are age-appropriate. I feel a little influenced by them, but that's not my main reason for wearing *hijab* – MR.

> The media was a big influence in my decision, especially the TV sermons about women's obligation to cover up and the punishments for those who don't. The second influence that solidified my decision to wear *hijab* was social media, which depicted many beautiful and stylish women in *hijab* – AKN.

> Yes, because media such as the Internet enable us to check out current *hijab* trends, and then I saw that there are actually many women who wear the *hijab* and it's quite common – RBS.

This shows that the media plays a significant role in social identity. Through the media, young women can associate themselves with the social category where they belong—Muslim young women who wear the *hijab*—and they also learn more about the norms of the group, which leads to change in their behavior and attitude, thus strengthening their social identification.

The media, especially social media, also seem to be a vehicle of identity negotiation, because the media have enabled them to exchange verbal and nonverbal messages with others to maintain and uplift their identity as Muslims, but still be able to satisfy their desire to keep up with the latest fashion. As a collectivistic cultural group that is Indonesia, being able to relate to communal social-based identity issues is important. And in this case, finding out that there are many young women out there who wear *hijab* and still be stylish was important to them, as this allows them to be a 'good Muslims' and still be able to follow fashion trends.

It must not be forgotten, however, that the *hijab* is so much more than just a fashion accessory to the respondents. They claim that the *hijab* makes them feel at peace, that it is a way to make them continue their commitment to be a better person; that it serves as their protector, and most importantly; the *hijab* communicates their identity as proud Muslims:

> Wearing *hijab* means I am a proud Muslim woman who can do everything in Allah's blessings and ignores all the haters out there who think they know more about me than I knew myself – AA.

> The *hijab* for me serves as my identity as a Muslim, and as my inspiration to do better things, it motivates me to pray more diligently and to control myself in order to avoid negative things – AKN.

> For me, the *hijab* makes me feel content and at peace with myself, no matter the amount of stress or drama I am presented with at the time – IK.

Conclusion

The *hijab* has indeed acquired the status of "cultural symbol" though traditionalists and modernists alike debate its application. Whereas the western literature on *hijab* often debates whether the *hijab* is actually oppressive or emancipatory, we conclude that in the case of our respondents, it is neither. Our respondents are open-minded modern women who are free agents. As free agents, they have consciously chosen to take up the *hijab*, with the support of their families, even at a younger age than when their mothers started to wear *hijab*, as their commitment to follow Islam.

In explaining gender difference, Moghadam (1988), refers to what she calls "the ideology of domesticity," which suggests that the physical, physiological and biological differences between men and women "are translated into universal and immutable differences in their social and intellectual capacities" (p. 223). These ideologies are based on three elements (the three D's): Difference, Danger, and Domesticity. And the "danger" element is used to justify *hijab*, because of the perceived intrinsic danger in the female nature, as reason to limit women's presence or to ban them altogether from the public sphere, which many see as a negation of female sexuality.

However, the different applications and interpretations of women's role in the Islamic community show that *hijab* as cultural symbol is not a uniformly understood and agreed concept. It can be viewed as a symbol of the feminist struggle, or as a symbol of defiance against western cultural domination (Jardim & Vorster, 2003). As Franks (2000) argues, the *hijab* is "of itself, neither liberating nor oppressive, and that the power relations with which it is associated are situated not only in the meaning with which it is invested but also in the circumstances under which it is worn."

In general, the respondents in this article understand the wearing of *hijab* to be Allah's will and proper Islamic behavior, and as such, it also serves to deflect unwanted male attention, as well as a self-reminder to control themselves against negative things. Moreover, the respondents also see practical benefits of wearing the *hijab*, such as protection from the sun and fashion alternatives.

In conclusion, the *hijab* is indeed a cultural symbol that is an important part of the respondents' social identity. The social categorization of "us" and "them" is evident in the way the respondents perceive other Muslim women who do not wear the *hijab*; and the social identification is reinforced by the media's portrayal of women in *hijab*, celebrities who wear *hijab*, and social media that portray different styles of the *hijab*. Indeed, the *hijab* is also associated with fashion, which is an essential aspect of their identity negotiation. In essence, the *hijab* has become a tool to construct, negotiate, and communicate their identity.

The social categorization of "us" and "them" – claimed by the Social Identity theory – is evident in the way the respondents perceive other Muslim who do not wear the *hijab*. Because the respondents in this study believe that wearing the hijab is not an option but an obligation for Muslim women, "us" to them refers to Muslim women who wear the hijab, whereas "them" refers to Muslim women who do not wear the hijab. The social identification is evident when the respondents point out how wearing the hijab has changed their behavior and attitude. This identification is then reinforced by the media's portrayal of women in *hijab*, celebrities who wear *hijab*, and social media that portray different styles of the *hijab*. Through the media, the respondents observe other *hijab*-wearing women on social media for styles and latest trends—but frown upon those who do not wear the hijab properly, which indicates social comparison—and are inspired by celebrities who have taken up the *hijab*. Indeed, the *hijab* is also associated with fashion, which is an essential aspect of the respondents' identity negotiation, enabling them to express themselves through different styles. This, however, is not without criticism, since some Muslims cite Qur'an verses that state that the *hijab* should not be worn as an ornament to seek attention from men.

Even though scholars of Islam offer different views as to whether the *hijab* is indeed mandatory, and the specific extent to which the female body must be covered according to Islam, the respondents of this study have a rather unanimous view of the importance of the *hijab*. Nevertheless, the findings of this research are not to be generalized as they only apply to the specific respondents in this study. Still, we believe that studies such as ours are important because it presents the conceptual formulation of *hijab* as understood by the individual believers.

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