

Feminism and Self-Confidence in Literature: A Study of Appearance and Identity in *Hello, Cello*

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ABSTRACT

Feminism is a movement dedicated to achieving gender equality and advocating for women's rights, with a particular emphasis on enhancing women's self-confidence. By fostering self-confidence, feminism seeks to dismantle gender stereotypes and combat discrimination that often hinders women from realizing their full potential. Creating a supportive societal environment plays a crucial role in empowering women to build and sustain solid self-confidence. This study aims to contribute novel insights to the discourse on feminism and its impact on self-confidence, mainly as portrayed in literature. Employing a descriptive qualitative method, the research analyzes textual data extracted from selected quotations in literary novels. The primary subject of this study is the novel *Hello, Cello* by Nadia Ristivani. The findings reveal that appearance and fashion serve as symbolic expressions of individuality, while societal biases regarding women's clothing perpetuate injustice. Furthermore, the study highlights the restrictive influence of social and peer environments, which often exacerbates feelings of inadequacy and suppression, ultimately leading to diminished self-confidence. However, these challenges also ignite a desire for free expression, illustrating the complex interplay between societal expectations, individuality, and feminist empowerment.

Keywords: appearance style, character, environment, feminism, novel, self-confidence

INTRODUCTION

Femininity can be defined as society's expectations of the role of women. Feminism is an evolutionary movement carried out by women over time in an effort to obtain justice, equality and equality in various aspects of life that are almost all dominated by men (Angelia1 et al., 2023). Nisa Alditta (2020) Explains that there is femininity that in a person has several aspects of needs regarding appreciation from others, status, fame, dominance, pride, and appreciation from others. Of course, this will increase self-confidence, especially for a woman because there are so many out there who like to be appreciated and appreciated by others because it can form a more confident person. The views of society in the modern era certainly vary, and in Indonesia, femininity has become a hot topic in the social sphere. Referring to Kutha (2010), feminism, when viewed etymologically, consists of the word "femme," which means a woman who has a goal to fight for the rights of women (Nisya et al., 2024: 77). In this case, feminism refers to the word woman, which is aimed at a movement carried out by women in the plural to obtain equal rights. The struggle was triggered by a form of oppression and domination over men that was increasingly uncontrollable so that this movement was carried out and intended for women around the world.

A movement against forms of subordination, harassment, violence, discrimination, oppression, and other forms that cause women to become the second gender is a feminist movement carried out by women for progress (Meivitasari & Widayatwati, 2023: 1072-1073). This

means that there is a willingness by women to make a change to their fate, which is directly and indirectly oppressed by men. This creates a movement of resistance against all forms of oppression that harm women, which is called the feminist movement. The selection of this topic is because in the selected novel there is an explanation of a female character who feels insecure about her appearance, then followed by the pressure that comes from the people around her, namely family, colleagues, and friends, so that it raises self-confidence to make a negative reaction, namely withdrawing from socializing and becoming a closed person. Not only in novels, but in real life, similar things are often found, where women who have low self-confidence due to several things, including physical, psychological, or social conditions that allow them to be ostracized by the public. This is very clearly caused by the surrounding environment that does not support and demand to be a figure like the expectations of society with all forms of demands.

The interesting side in this research is the discussion of femininity itself. The reason is because through this research, it can be seen how the relationship between femininity in increasing self-confidence of a woman in the life of society. The interesting side Another interesting side is that there is still a lack of research that uses the novel "Hello, Cello" novel as the object of study, so this research is expected to provide a new contribution to literary studies, especially those related to femininity. new contribution to literary studies, especially those related to the concept of femininity in literary works. femininity in literary works. When reviewed, previous research did not raise the discussion about the behavior or attitudes possessed by women and its relation to the understanding of femininity in literary works. women and its relation to the understanding of femininity. Therefore, this research will focus on showing the point of view of understanding femininity as shown through the behavior or attitude of a woman in literary works. shown through the behavior or attitude of a woman in a literary work. novel. The novel "Hello, Cello" is one of Nadia Ristivani's works that tells the story of a young girl named Helga and her love life. It tells the story of a young girl named Helga and her love life. This work is viewed through the concept of femininity that focuses on one of the characters in the story through the way they dress, behave, and talk to others, which can define the life of a woman who is used as a femininity code for the dominant ideology (MC Robbie, 1991: 93).

The form of femininity in the novel "Hello, Cello" by Nadia Ristivani is a representation of humans in social life. This study is also based on Widjajanti M. Santoso's study in her journal entitled "Femininity and Power," which discusses femininity in colonialism until today. The article mentions Kartini as a supporting character for the emergence of femininity so that through her thoughts it can change the mindset of Indonesian women at that time. One of them, the lack of self-confidence that women had at that time, would lead to the thought that they did not deserve to go to higher education, so the root of the problem is the low level of self-confidence of a person because of the figure of women who are always underestimated by society and attachment to the prevailing understanding that limits women to expect and dream.

The problem that often occurs when a woman feels insecure, tends to feel inferior to her achievements, appearance, style of speech, and also behavior in the novel story and also in real life in society is the main topic of research. The goal is that women do not need to feel less about themselves because a woman has extraordinary things in her. In addition, it is hoped that it can create a space of freedom for women in expression and expectations by raising their self-confidence and regardless of the pressure or influence of the people around them because that will make women more open and feel confident about everything. Like the way they look and when showing their hidden talents.

Literary works are often related to psychology, such as in the novel "Hello, Cello" by Nadia Ristivani, which describes the character Helga as a woman who lacks self-confidence due to

environmental influences, especially her family and friends. This research uses feminist theory, which, according to Yusfa Bayu, is gender equality from a woman's perspective to create freedom and happiness equal to men. This theory is relevant because Helga wants to be free to express herself, including in her dress, but is hindered by social stigma. For example, when Helga wears oversized clothes, she is considered inappropriate and becomes the butt of jokes. This reflects how women are often restricted in their expression, dress, and behavior compared to men. Wendy Kammerer, in her book *A Fearful Freedom: Women's Flight From Equality* (1990), even highlights that women's freedom is sometimes considered frightening, so gender equality is needed to increase women's confidence and freedom. Through this research, it was found that restrictions on women's dress and expression can trigger insecurity, as experienced by Helga. Society's stigma towards oversized clothing, which is considered to reflect a lazy nature, makes Helga more closed and difficult to show her true self. The novel emphasizes that women have the right to make their own choices, including in dress, without fear of being judged negatively. Appearance is often the main benchmark in judging someone, especially women, although other aspects such as their achievements and skills are also important. This social pressure suggests the need for a change in outlook so that women can live equal lives, free from unfair restrictions, and able to express themselves with more confidence.

This research uses a descriptive method that aims to describe the events that are happening (Sudjana, 2001: 64). In the novel "Hello, Cello" by Nadia Ristivani, this method is applied to describe the problems faced by Helga, a character who likes a different fashion style from other women, namely wearing oversized clothes. Unfortunately, this preference makes Helga often cornered by her friends and family, who do not appreciate her appearance. These comments make Helga the butt of jokes, affecting her self-confidence and prompting this research to explore how the social environment affects women's freedom of expression. The approach used is a functionalist approach, which, according to William James, is oriented towards the mental process of individuals to adapt to their environment. This research examines how social pressure on Helga's appearance creates a desire in her to express herself freely, especially in dress. The novel "Hello, Cello", which is the source of data for this research, was published by Bukune in 2022 with 428 pages. Data collection techniques were conducted through reading and recording relevant quotes, such as Helga's family's negative comments calling her "lazy" because of her dressing style. The analysis technique includes critical reading, identifying problems, and categorizing data according to the research focus, with validation through triangulation in the form of discussions with lecturers or peers. This research shows that criticism of appearance can affect a woman's self-confidence while emphasizing the importance of a woman's right to be free to make her choices without social pressure.

METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative method. Descriptive qualitative method is a research method that focuses on collecting, analyzing and interpreting data on a social phenomenon (Firmansyah et al., 2021). In the novel "Hello, Cello" by Nadia Ristivani, this method is applied to describe the problems faced by Helga, a character who likes a different fashion style from other women, namely wearing oversized clothes. Unfortunately, this preference makes Helga often cornered by her friends and family, who do not appreciate her appearance. These comments make Helga the butt of jokes, affecting her self-confidence and prompting this research to explore how the social environment affects women's freedom of expression.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Through the way of dressing, one can judge the character of each individual, and then from there, an imbalance arises between women and men and corners the women by blaming that the clothes used by the main character in the novel "Hello, Cello" by Nadia Ristivani, Helga, are considered a lazy woman because she chooses a fashion style that is said to be more suitable for men to wear. In reality, a woman deserves the freedom that makes her feel valued, loved, and cared for so that it triggers a gap between women and men who are always superior.

Style of Appearance or Fashion Becomes a Symbol of One's Character

Naniek Risnawati (2014: 18) says that clothing is an appearance that affects a person's personality so that when someone looks neat, it gives a good and positive assessment, while someone who looks untidy seems to have a negative assessment. In accordance with existing data, here is a novel excerpt that shows appearance affects a person's personality.

"Whose clothes are you wearing, Helga?" "Your father's clothes, huh?" After seeing Helga wearing her favorite gray oversized onesie that was hard-earned because it was a limited edition. Some people with different tastes would see her outfit as borrowed or "lazy." But according to Helga, this is an interesting fashion style. Helga just smiled and held her breath. "He has a habit. Wearing clothes like a lazy person. Her mother said on behalf of Helga, who didn't need to be represented while laughing. (Ristivani, 2022: 20)

From the quote above, it illustrates that Helga is considered a lazy person just because she wears oversized clothes and from there, that a person's personality can be seen based on their clothes, even though each individual also has the freedom to make fashion choices. According to Sulistiyani (2003:60), personality shapers can be shown through appearance. So that someone can easily judge our character or personality from appearance even though they only meet once without seeing how the person's daily life is. In this case, the fashion style chosen by Helga is also often found in real life. That someone prefers to wear oversized clothes because it feels better and feels comfortable when worn.

Putri Citra (2022) explaining that women's dressing style has been burdened by wearing corsets in order to show curves and supported by wearing skirts, which causes an attraction for men. Through this quote, it can illustrate that some women out there feel uncomfortable with the way of dressing that characterizes a female figure so that they create their own fashion style in order to produce comfort for themselves. On the other hand, in the view of (Riesca Chekka, 2016) fashion and supported by a fashion label or brand actually displays a tough and independent image of women. The quote certainly supports that women who have their own unique style in terms of

fashion, of course, in the perception of each individual, show that they are independent and tough and make the personal branding of a woman better and superior.

The Injustice of Society's View of Women's Clothing

Fashion and clothing are about sex and gender. In the fashion world, fashion 'belongs' to men and women differently. Fashion becomes a means to reinforce the inferiority of a woman and a woman has a narcissistic and exhibitionist nature that has a connection with the fashion system of designing clothes for women. While men's fashion is simpler, it does not emphasize uniqueness and various decorative things but will make it easier for men to move freely. In accordance with the data from the novel excerpt, which shows that women's appearance is considered not in accordance with their nature or identity.

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From the quote above, it explains that Helga is considered inappropriate when wearing oversized clothes and is considered that these clothes are her Papa's clothes when in fact these clothes are her own choice because she feels comfortable when wearing these clothes. Women are still considered inappropriate or unnatural in terms of choosing clothes according to each individual's taste, even though when compared to men who are free to choose various types or variations of clothing, women still have restrictions. So the main character in the novel “Hello, Cello” by Nadia Ristivani, Helga, feels that women are still not given the freedom to make their own choices.

In this modern era, it is clear that every individual's style of dress and fashion is different. When the local community still thinks that the clothes worn by women must be similar to skirts, dresses, or the like, then of course for women in an era like today this view is less desirable because they will wear clothes that are trending in order to attract the attention of others. Moreover, the quote also explains that Helga's oversized one-set is a limited edition, meaning that it indicates that not everyone can have the one-set so Helga decided to buy it.

Fashion is used as a manifestation of women's efforts, especially feminists, in order to gain freedoms such as appearance and expression. So over time, women who were originally identical to wearing skirts, dresses, and so on began to wear trousers or blazers that were originally worn by men. This is also supported by Oakley's opinion (in Barnard, 1996: 193) that fashion, which was originally so stereotypical between male and female fashion, has become mixed. Women are faced with 2 choices, namely attributes to be themselves so that they feel free or wear attributes so that the woman can blend in even though in fact it is a form of manifestation of her unoriginality. Women's freedom of expression in portraying their bodies is exemplified in fashion. According to Featherstone, lifestyle is something related to individuality, self-expression, and stylistic self-awareness, so fashion does not only discuss clothing that is appropriate and inappropriate, or appropriate and inappropriate, but describes the body and personality or becomes a form of personal statement related to oneself and fashion is also considered as a person's identity.

A Friendship Circle that Makes You More Closed and Depressed

The influence of people who are around certainly has an impact too. A new environment for some people is a stimulus that can sometimes be the reason for difficulties in adjusting, old friendships do not guarantee that they can be as frequent. In accordance with the existing data, the following novel excerpt shows that friendship can make a person lose his self-confidence.

“Lo, are you on Instagram?” Una asked, enlivening the atmosphere. “Yes. I really sent the order format at 0.001 seconds after the order opened. The mosquitoes haven't had time to flap their wings, and I've already sent the order format.” He said excitedly. “Cool, cool, cool. What's the chest circumference, Hel? Oversized, really!” (Ristivani, 2022: 30)

From the quote, it describes the figure of Helga who is always haunted by a sense of high self-confidence because of the words of the people around them who are always demanding it, the words are imprinted both in the heart and in the mind. Lauster assumes that high self-confidence is a form of personality that is confident in one's own abilities so that external influences do not make a sense of lauster. The existence of positive stimulus from the surrounding environment, of course from parents and friends, is needed to be a form of support to form a person's self-confidence that is stronger and can grow for the better.

Sarason (1990) provides support for the surrounding environment as a belief that refers to the form of awareness of every human being about loving themselves. Friends play an important role in the development of each individual's personality both emotionally and socially. From the novel "Hello, Cello" by Nadia Ristivani, the main character, Helga, does not get support and attention from her own family and friends. They cornered Helga with sensitive questions such as what is her chest circumference and your father's clothes? And that's what makes Helga's confidence disappear. Women who are underestimated by the general public regarding clothing are also the reason that women cannot be given strong freedom like men so that a sense of free expression arises which drives that women can also be like that, women can be like men but for some people women are still weak figures and are not comparable to men.

The Fading of Self-Confidence and the Desire for Free Expression

If women are still limited in various aspects, of course, there will be a sense of wanting to be free from these restrictions so that it triggers a sense of high self-confidence and is built with difficulty to deal with what the surrounding community says about personality. In accordance with the existing data, the following novel excerpt shows Helga's high self-confidence.

“Tired,” she replied. “By the way, you're the one who said my thrift shirt was cool. Usually people say, why do you buy clothes for hundreds of thousands to millions when they're old, old-fashioned, too big like borrowed clothes, and so on.” “It's weird that people say it's old-fashioned. Their fashion sense means mass-produced fashion that's duplicated in Southeast Asia.” Cello disagreed with the opinions of the people Helga had heard. “Not really, I'd say. Cool. Cool. It's really cool.” “THANKS! Helga shouted enthusiastically.” (Ristivani, 2022: 229)

From this quote, it explains that Helga only needs appreciation and recognition about fashion, each individual must have different desires and comfort, therefore when Marcello, who is Helga's close male friend or can be said to be a boyfriend, says that women are cool when wearing fashion that is the result of their own desires or their own fashion style, it makes Helga's confidence increase.

Parhani Siti (2020) expressed her opinion regarding gender stereotypes that can kill a woman's self-confidence, this opinion is also reinforced by Coffman, namely self-confidence is the most important factor because it has an influence on future processes. Therefore, a person's self-

confidence can be a determinant of direction for life because it will result in various important decisions in an individual's life. According to Tahniah Windy, women are often faced with situations and conditions that make them anxious and worried at the same time because of the pressure and demands of the surrounding people and the environment. So that friends, family, relatives, boyfriends can be the main factor in the existence of self-confidence or vice versa a woman's self-confidence. It can also be said that a woman is a feeling creature and easily thinks about what other people say or see about her.

Langit Alessandra provides an explanation of what factors can affect a woman's self-confidence, one of which is that a woman more often compares herself with others. The point of the explanation is that comparing herself to others is one of the signs that women are more likely to feel insecure and inferior when compared to men.

Femininity is a manifestation of women having the opportunity to live properly, free from violence, gain access to education, family planning and a career reproductive system that is completely equal to men. (Chekka Riesca, 2016) In terms of fashion, it also provides opportunities for women out there to develop and empower themselves professionally or personally so that fashion can be an adequate medium for women. But when it comes to the facts, women are more heavily criticized for what they wear than men. In fact, every woman is free to wear clothes, accessories and all fashion attributes as they want because in terms of determining their own aesthetic appearance that can describe their personality from personal style and provide comfort against behavior that makes the heart offended because of being shamed about appearance or fashion. This is certainly not in accordance with the quote in the novel "Hello, Cello" by Nadia Ristivani because Helga received unfair treatment and was considered a joke by her mama's friends because she was considered a lazy woman. This treatment makes Helga feel that she cannot be like other women out there who are free to make their own choices as they please.

When it comes to the universal nature of fashion, it has to do with femininity to be able to recognize the freedom of others when it comes to dressing and basically everyone has full freedom to decide how they want to dress, what they want to wear, whether they follow a certain fashion trend, or not care about their appearance at all. Freedom is something that every human being strives for of course and freedom is such an important value in society that all human beings regardless of gender are entitled to freedom regardless of their economic and social status. (Harrison & Boyd, 2003) Women's freedom was severely restricted in earlier times and it is still the same today. In terms of fighting for a form of freedom and justice for women, femininity will certainly emerge because it focuses on social injustice and equal political rights between women and men, including education, independence, appearance, behavior, and many other things. Each individual's self-confidence is influenced by factors derived from family experiences, customary traditions and the social environment or group to which the family belongs.

With good support received from the family environment, for example family members who interact well with each other will provide a sense of comfort and high self-confidence and a friendship environment that will bring and arouse one's self-confidence, so the role of family and friends in increasing self-confidence is very necessary. This can also be proven through Helga's attitude when she does not get attention and appreciation from the people around her so that she feels that she is lacking in all aspects and a sense of inferiority arises, unlike when Helga's figure gets recognition and appreciation from just one person, her confidence will appear so quickly. When someone experiences low self-confidence it will have an impact on mental health so that someone will be able to feel stressed and can even get depressed and then problems arise from friendship to work and hinder educational and career achievements, so that when Helga is not given space and freedom of expression it can be fatal. But Helga's confidence began to grow when

she was appreciated and given freedom by someone. Feeling supported is a great way to start improving one's self-confidence, Helga is also able to hide her emotions well even in the presence of people who have considered her a joke.

In society, there is a generalization related to women who are always seen as subordinate to men (Mills, 2005: 148), but the results of this study show that the female characters in the novel "Hello, Cello" by Nadia Ristivani are considered as dominant and women's power may not necessarily be interpreted well by the readers. Women become individuals who have no limitations and are free to show their true selves. The results showed that the overall figure of Helga displays femininity because the formation of roles is still visible and how Helga responds also shows that she is a strong female character in front of people but fragile behind. Self-confidence is a feeling of suggestion from within the individual that is used as a provision for confidence in doing something. When Helga is given space for expression, she will feel that she is valued as a woman and of course she will be more confident when dealing with the people around her without caring about the words that can make her down. Helga also when her self-confidence appears, will easily show a fashion style that may be as people out there like it because every individual must have different opinions. Women certainly have a sense of envy towards the treatment of society that always gives men freedom in any aspect and this triggers the injustice of their own society's perspective so that women are required to be graceful.

This study only focuses on Nadia Ristivani's novel "Hello, Cello", so the culture contained in the novel is likely to be different from that found in other novels. In addition, this research takes aspects of femininity that center on self-confidence in the character including the way of dressing and the perspective of the present era.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the analysis and research on the novel "Hello Cello" by Nadia Ristivani, the conclusion is that self-confidence does not only arise from within each individual but there are also factors from the surrounding environment that trigger it and women also have freedom and are given space to express, behave, look the same as men because that way women and men are the same. The mindset and views of society also need to be updated which do not always corner women and do not easily conclude something, when someone is given freedom, they will easily and without shame consider and show their identity as a woman. Women over time will experience changes ranging from mindset, fashion, career and so on. However, there is also a need for support from people around to make women out there more confident. Not only through works of fiction is the attitude of society that always corners and underestimates women, but in real life it is also often found or found that people are unfair, always demanding of women. A woman's self-confidence tends to be lower, so this self-confidence is related to femininity. In the scope of family, relatives, friends, and also people who are around certainly have a very large influence and contribution to creating a branding and self-confidence in a person. When talking about a woman's appearance, how she dresses, or fashion, there are certainly some perceptions or views that women are more independent and slang from their dressing style or even the opposite, namely women with their appearance styles that tend to make themselves uncomfortable, thus causing a sense of self-confidence.

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