

## Exploration of Community Acceptance in Greater Jakarta for All Gender Facilities: Use of Toilets and Changing Rooms

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### ABSTRACT

**Keywords:** community acceptance, all gender facilities, toilet, changing room.

The concept of Gender Facilities has sparked controversy in many countries, especially because of the experience of users who are uneasy about the existence of other genders in private spaces such as changing rooms. Thus, this study aims to explore the acceptance of the Greater Jakarta community towards Gender Facilities, especially in the use of toilets and changing rooms. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to understand and analyze community responses influenced by social and cultural norms. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with eight purposively selected informants. The results of this study show that the awareness and first experience of using All Gender Facilities are influenced by the extent of social media exposure and personal experiences felt when using a space with the concept of All Gender Facilities. Safety and cleanliness, which include the design and management of spaces, are the main factors that affect the privacy and comfort of users in the use of facilities with the concept of Gender Facilities. Consideration of cultural norms in the implementation of Gender Facilities plays a very important role in the acceptance of the concept of All Gender Facilities. Support and neutrality in the use of Gender Facilities arise with a conditional nature. The multicultural community of Greater Jakarta shows resistance to All Gender Facilities from cultural and religious considerations, but in terms of function, All Gender Facilities are acceptable.



### Introduction

The development of modernization and globalization in Indonesia, especially in urban areas, has brought significant changes in various aspects of people's lives. Massive urbanization, advances in information technology, and global economic integration have changed the face of the Jakarta metropolitan area. Modernization is marked by the emergence of various kinds of buildings, facilities, and various adequate infrastructures as well as people's lifestyles that become more consumptive people. Meanwhile, globalization has brought Indonesian people together with various foreign cultures, international fashion trends, and wider business opportunities.

The rapid development that occurs in this urban area provides many benefits but also raises debate. One of them is the concept of Gender Facilities. All Gender Facilities is a concept of facilities that can be used by anyone regardless of gender.

In this case, the facilities in question are toilets, bathrooms, or rooms that do not have gender signs. All Gender Facilities itself has several diverse terminologies, although conceptually it has similar definitions, such as "Gender-Neutral Facilities" (Western Washington University, 2024), "Gender Inclusive Facility" (University Of California, 2023), "All Gender Restrooms" (Michigan State University, 2024). The term Gender Facilities is not yet commonly used in Indonesia.

The concept of Gender Facilities is indeed developing in European countries including Denmark, France, the Netherlands, and Sweden. Sweden itself since 1980 considers gender discrimination and sexual orientation to be unlawful (Swedish Institute, 2024). However, the emergence of toilets for all genders, which is a representation of this concept, first occurred in China before 2013 and only after that was followed by other countries such as Thailand, Canada, India, America, Japan, and Nepal (World Population Review, 2024). China made toilets for all genders before 2013 to anticipate long queues in women's toilets which tend to take longer to use (China Development Brief, 2016).

The existence of toilets for all genders which are part of the All Gender Facilities has triggered various discussions and debates in the global community, both in terms of social, cultural, and psychological (Duffus & Colliver, 2024).

In the UK, although the government has provided gender-neutral facilities in public places as an effort to support gender equality and inclusivity, it still raises criticism and cons from some of its people (Jones & Slater, 2020). In America, not all states provide gender-neutral bathroom facilities, one of which is Texas. The Texas state government in 2017 issued a law that repealed the regulation on gender-neutral bathrooms (The Texas Tribune, 2017).

In Indonesia, especially in Greater Jakarta, the implementation of gender-neutral toilets faces obstacles from people who adhere to conservative values and religious norms, which are contrary to human rights based on international law (Sumardi et al., 2023). In 2023, a case of a gender-neutral toilet at an international school in Jakarta emerged. This case began with a visit by a public figure to an international school located in Jakarta. The arrival of public figures to the school was to survey because they were looking for a school for their children. When invited around by school representatives to see the facilities owned by the school, the public figure found that there was a gender-neutral toilet facility. A statement about the existence of a gender-neutral toilet in one of the international schools in Jakarta was conveyed by a public figure in his YouTube broadcast (Kompas.com, 2023). This news of course caused a strong reaction from the Ministry of Education and Culture and criticism from the DPR. Commission X of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia urges the Ministry of Education and Culture to inspect existing international schools (Republika.id, 2023). The existence of Gender Facilities that until now have been accepted and have not caused a reaction from the public are toilets that can be found in cafes, restaurants, public transportation modes such as planes and buses between cities, and fitting rooms or changing rooms provided by one international clothing brand in large shopping centers. The pros and cons that occur make this research on Gender Facilities very relevant to be reviewed from the

study of intercultural communication because it involves various values, norms, and different perceptions between community groups.

Previous studies related to all gender facilities were mostly conducted outside Indonesia. In their study entitled "A Feminist Critical Analysis of Public Toilets and Gender: A Systematic Review" Lewkowitz and Gilliland showed that the concept of unisex bathrooms provides a comfortable feeling for individuals who have gender identities as non-binary and transgender (Lewkowitz & Gilliland, 2025). Boven and Marcoci in their research entitled "The gender-neutral bathroom: a new frame and some nudges" emphasized that the adoption of unisex bathrooms in Western countries has been well received and is even considered to have advantages in terms of cost and space efficiency (Bovens & Marcoci, 2023). Meanwhile, in their research entitled "Risk of sexual violence against women and girls in the construction of gender-neutral toilets: A discourse analysis of comments on YouTube videos" Colliver and Coyle discussed how the risk of sexual violence against women and children in gender-neutral toilets by men and transgender women (Colliver & Coyle, McGuire, Anderson and Michaels in their research entitled "I don't think you belong in here:" The impact of gender-segregated bathrooms on the safety, health and equality of transgender people discusses how gender-inclusive bathrooms provide a sense of safety for transgender people and provide a better quality of life for parents of young children. People with disabilities and their caregivers as well as marginalized individuals (McGuire et al., 2021). Meanwhile, research in Indonesia is still very limited and one of them is a study conducted by (Sumardi et al., 2023) and his colleagues who discussed gender-neutral toilets from the perspective of Islam in his research entitled "Toilet Gender Neutral in LGBT Practices: A Comparative Study Of Human Rights And Religion. Based on previous studies, there has been no discussion of all gender facilities that focus on the perspective of intercultural communication.

Based on the analysis of the existing problem, a big question arises, namely how does the community in Greater Jakarta accept the concept of Gender facilities in the use of toilets and changing rooms? The purpose of this research on All Gender Facilities, which focuses on the perspective of intercultural communication, will help in identifying the acceptance of the Greater Jakarta community towards All Gender Facilities. In addition, it can also explain what factors affect the community's acceptance or rejection of Gender Facilities. This research will also provide theoretical benefits which will add to the literature on gender inclusivity in the Indonesian context. The limitation of this study is the location of the research conducted in Greater Jakarta and focuses on public acceptance of the concept of Gender Facilities.

## **Method**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to deeply understand the acceptance of the Greater Jakarta community towards Gender Facilities in the context of the use of toilets and changing rooms. Case studies, as defined by (Creswell & Poth, 2016), are methods for exploring social phenomena in real-world contexts, where

the boundaries between phenomena and their contexts are not always clear. The approach used is Single-Case Instrumental, where All Gender Facilities are studied as a single case to clarify broader issues related to public acceptance of social innovation. The primary data of this study were collected through in-depth interviews with eight selected informants from the secondary data, namely, pre-research surveys and analysis of relevant documents.

The research began with a pre-research online survey that targeted respondents in Greater Jakarta without age, profession, or gender limits. From the results of this survey, eight purposive informants were selected who were willing to be interviewed in depth. The informants reflect various perspectives of the people of Greater Jakarta, with ages 22 to 35 years and professional backgrounds such as students, office workers, and self-employed. All informants have first-hand experience using Gender Facilities in places such as cafes, shopping malls, or public transportation. This experience is an important basis for understanding their views, whether they are neutral, supportive of certain conditions, or rejected because of cultural norms, security, or hygiene.

Primary data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews with eight informants, which aimed to explore the views, experiences, and factors that influence acceptance or rejection of this concept. In addition, document analysis was carried out that included policies, media articles, and related literature to complement the interview data and expand the context of the research. The validity of the data is guaranteed through triangulation of sources and methods, namely by comparing data from various informants, documents, and data collection techniques to maintain consistency and validity of findings.

The data analysis stage includes data reduction to identify key themes related to public acceptance of Gender Facilities. The reduced data was then analyzed using a thematic approach to find significant patterns. The results of this analysis are presented in the form of a narrative that describes how social, cultural, and experiential backgrounds affect people's views of these facilities. These findings are supported by relevant theories and models of intercultural communication.

## **Results and Discussion**

The pre-research online survey conducted managed to collect 87 responses from respondents domiciled in Greater Jakarta. The survey results showed that as many as 15 respondents strongly disagreed, 42 respondents disagreed, 19 respondents were neutral, 9 respondents agreed, and 2 respondents strongly agreed with the implementation of the concept of All Gender Facilities in Indonesia. From this data, eight respondents were selected purposively based on their backgrounds to be interviewed further and in-depth. This interview produced important findings that were the focus of discussion in this study.

### **Awareness and First Experience of Using All Gender Facilities**

This study found that the level of awareness of the people of Greater Jakarta towards Gender Facilities varies widely, depending on the extent to which they have been exposed to this concept before. Most informants first learn about All Gender Facilities through

social media, news, or first-hand experience in public places such as cafes, shopping malls, and public transportation. One of the informants said, "Mostly I saw it on the internet, because it appeared several times on my FYP, especially on Tiktok because what I saw was actually from outside, not only local." Social media is the main source of information for informants to know the concept of All Gender Facilities, besides that personal experiences in public places are the moment where they begin to understand the function and purpose of the concept of All Gender Facilities. This shows that exposure to these facilities plays an important role in shaping public awareness.

The initial reaction to the use of All Gender Facilities was also varied, ranging from surprise with the statement "First shock, just because this is in Indokan. I mean, I'm richer Wow!! How dare you? Because surely everyone else will not agree..." to objective. Some informants feel anxious when they first use this facility, mainly due to a lack of understanding or not understanding the concept behind All Gender Facilities." Even though we guys continue to be shirtless, it's not comfortable, especially since this is a girl - boys combined", the statement from the informant is not appropriate related to the depiction of All Gender Facilities. Although everyone regardless of gender can enter the facility, there are still small spaces in it that can only be used alternately for urination/defecation and changing clothes.

The unpreparedness to use changing rooms accessible to all genders was also conveyed by the informant. "That's why we're like showing off our private self in this room, right, I think the whole concept has always been about privacy and especially being divided into two genders and maybe I'm more comfortable myself." The informant expressed his concern about using the locker room with the concept of Gender Facilities because he considered that with this concept, his privacy and security would be threatened. On the other hand, the informant said "... When I was a child, it was usually if... Especially to the toilet at the restaurant. Well, that's not differentiated, between men and women. So yes, yes, I've used it" is an illustration that the informant is used to this concept based on his experience so that he feels more open.

As an urban area exposed to modernization and globalization, the people of Greater Jakarta are more easily connected to global concepts such as Gender Facilities. However, adaptation is uneven because cultural norms and prevailing social values make most people still think conservatively. This can be seen from the reaction of some informants who feel that this concept is contrary to traditional values in terms of privacy which generally separates the space between men and women. This uneven adaptation is by Berry's acculturation theory which explains how individuals adapt to new values through the process of cultural interaction (Berry, 1997).

Interestingly, the interview also revealed that a person's perception of All Gender Facilities can change the more often the person uses All Gender Facilities. For example, one male informant admitted that he initially felt uncomfortable using a toilet that is accessible to all genders. However, after using these facilities several times in cafes and shopping centers, he began to understand that good facility design, such as closed doors and sturdy partitions, can provide a sense of comfort in doing things in privacy.

Experiences like this show that a negative initial impression can change to be more objective or even positive as the user experience increases (Nur, 2024).

This study shows that exposure alone is not enough to increase public acceptance. Strategic communication efforts are needed to educate about the benefits of this facility, especially how good design can ensure user privacy and security. Thus, public perception can be directed towards a more positive understanding.

People who are more often exposed to these facilities through hands-on experience or social media tend to understand the concept better, while less exposed people tend to maintain a conservative view. It explains that the social experiences of individuals, including exposure to innovations such as Gender Facilities are able to shape the way society understands and accepts new realities and this is in line with Berger and Luckman's theory of reality.

With the increasing frequency of All Gender Facilities being implemented in public spaces in Greater Jakarta, it will help to increase public awareness in the area regarding the existence of All Gender Facilities. However, this study highlights that acceptance is not only influenced by exposure but also by the cultural context, facility design, and communication strategies used to introduce this concept to the public.

### **Safety and Hygiene in All Gender Facilities**

Safety is one of the main concerns in the use of Gender Facilities, especially by women. Concerns about potential sexual harassment such as snooping or covert filming will arise when these facilities are not properly designed. Some female informants feel that gender segregation in the use of public facilities such as toilets and locker rooms can reduce the risk of violence against women such as sexual harassment. However, some male informants say that proper design, such as doors that are tightly closed from the roof to the floor so that there are no gaps, sturdy partitions, and CCTV surveillance, can help address these concerns. The findings are related to the privacy regulation theory by Altman (1975) where individuals need control over their interactions in certain spaces to create a sense of security. In the context of Gender Facilities, a design that provides physical and symbolic boundaries between users is an important element to reduce anxiety and improve safety.

On the hygiene side, informants from various backgrounds showed a similar view that cleanliness is an important element in determining their acceptance of Gender Facilities. Some informants stated that they can accept this concept as long as the cleanliness of the facility is maintained. One of the female informants described how the experience of using a dirty toilet in a public facility significantly reduced her comfort. According to him, a clean toilet or changing room is the main requirement to feel comfortable and safe in using these facilities. In a previous study, cleanliness was considered one of the main dimensions that affected users' perception of service quality (Herlina et al., 2024). This finding is consistent with the views of several informants who stated that cleanliness not only reflects the hygiene of the facility but also becomes a symbol of professionalism and attention of managers to the needs of users.

Some male informants added that their perception of the cleanliness of unisex facilities is often influenced by the habits of other users, especially men who are considered to lack toilet hygiene. This poses a challenge in creating a comfortable space for all genders. Female informants, on the other hand, often feel the need to clean the toilet first before using it to ensure comfort, as one female informant stated "... I must be like cleaning it first, at least so that I can be a little more comfortable...". This view shows that cleanliness is not only a hygienic factor but also a symbol of collective responsibility between users and managers.

The informant's view also revealed that the existence of clear rules of use can help maintain the cleanliness of this facility from the side of users and facility managers. One of the informants of this research shared his experience at one of the well-known cafes in the BSD area, Tangerang, he viewed that the café had a good implementation of the rule message between the manager and visitors regarding the cleanliness of the All Gender toilet there, by providing a physical card that reads 'Please give this card to the server if you think this toilet needs attention' to be given to the manager of the café facility without having to feel awkward or uncomfortable. On the user side, some informants suggested the need for education to users to maintain cleanliness together. One of the informants stated that education can be taught through sex education, "I think it is very important, even this means that this can also be the material that is included in sex education... It also matters how we treat people of different genders... It's important to tell how we can respect each other. One of the important things is the use of the toilet, because yes I said honestly that the usual people who are harmed are women". This kind of education reflects that cleanliness is not only the responsibility of managers but also users, as part of the collective experience of using Gender Facilities.

### **Consideration of Cultural Norms in the Implementation of All Gender Facilities**

Social and cultural norms in Indonesia have a very important role in determining the acceptance of society, especially in Greater Jakarta, towards the concept of Gender Facilities. The majority of informants felt that All Gender Facilities were contrary to cultural values, especially regarding the use of private spaces such as toilets and changing rooms. The patriarchal culture that grew and developed in Indonesia did give more roles and power to men than women. This indirectly strengthens the social order in society about gender which is very rigid, thus giving rise to norms that limit women's movement space, including in the use of public facilities in public spaces. A narrow understanding of privacy spaces and public facilities separated by gender has taken root in society, so the concept of Gender Facilities is considered incompatible with the existing social order. "So according to me, the unisex space in Indonesia is not in line with the norms and what has been formed from our birth". When I was in junior high school in the 2nd grade, I used to go to school for a year, sorry Islamic junior high school, and we were separated by the classrooms of girls - girls, boys - boys...".

The findings in this study show that there is resistance to the concept of Gender Facilities in Greater Jakarta in line with the fairly high masculinity score in Indonesia. This finding is by the concept of masculinity vs femininity from Hofstede's cultural

dimension theory which emphasizes strong masculinity values such as success, competition, and assertiveness, tending to maintain the traditional division of gender roles (Hofstede, 2020). This then gave rise to resistance from the community to the concept of All Gender Facilities which tries to eliminate gender segregation in private spaces. People in general are used to cultural values that have existed for a long time and have become a habit in every activity of their lives. When something new emerges such as the concept of All Gender Facilities, rejection from the community will occur. This rejection arises because the new concept will change the order or habits that have been in place for a long time in society and this will cause discomfort for them.

### **Privacy and Comfort of Using All Gender Facilities**

Privacy is the main need that determines the comfort of the community in using Gender Facilities, especially for women. The majority of female informants feel very uncomfortable if they have to share a private space such as a toilet or changing room with a man, "so if for example, I have to join another gender, I think it will interfere with my privacy as a woman". They consider these spaces to be highly private areas, so gender separation is often considered essential to creating a sense of security and comfort. One female informant explained based on her experience that the presence of men in All Gender Facilities raises her concerns about the risk of privacy being compromised. This view is also supported by male informants, who realize that women have a higher need for privacy than men in the context of Gender Facilities. A male informant revealed that although she felt quite comfortable using a room with the concept of Gender Facilities, she understood that women were more worried because toilets and changing rooms refer to spaces used to carry out very personal activities. These privacy concerns are in line with the concept of gendered spaces, which states that public spaces are often designed to accommodate certain social and cultural needs that reinforce gender norms. In the Indonesian context, conservative culture and strong social norms increase the need for gender segregation in private spaces. This is consistent with McGuire's research which found that Gender Facilities are often a challenge for women and minority groups who require a higher level of privacy (McGuire et al., 2021).

The results of the interview also revealed that some male informants did not feel bothered by the existence of All Gender Facilities, as long as the design could guarantee privacy. However, they also realized that women, as a group that is more often targeted by harassment, have different experiences. This view shows that the implementation of Gender Facilities needs to consider a comprehensive gender perspective to be more inclusive and acceptable to various groups. Thus, adequate design is a key factor in creating a sense of comfort for all users. "I think the most important thing is the barrier", a design that takes into account the needs for privacy, such as sturdy partitions, tightly closed doors, and good supervision, can reduce the concerns of female users and help create a sense of comfort for all users.

### **Support and Neutrality for All Gender Facilities**

In certain situations, the implementation of Gender Facilities can be tolerated, especially as a temporary solution. For example, for business owners such as cafes,

restaurants, or clothing outlets that have limited space and capital. In this context, Gender Facilities are considered a practical option until they are able to provide separate spaces for users based on gender. In addition, the use of portable toilets for outdoor events such as music concerts is also considered more acceptable due to its temporary nature.

The results of the interviews revealed that support for the concept of Gender Facilities is generally conditional. Support for the implementation of Gender Facilities mainly comes from individuals who are familiar with modern changes and have experience using Gender Facilities in public spaces such as cafes or public transportation. They see this facility as a solution to improve efficiency, especially in reducing waiting times in public toilets. For example, one informant mentioned that he was frustrated when gender-segregated toilets caused long queues, and he found the facilities accessible to all genders to be more efficient "... If there is one, for example, this toilet is only for boys, yes, one toilet is for girls. Then it happens that the girl or the guy uses it much longer, while there are people of the same gender, who want to use it, so they can't use the toilet because it's gender-specific... Personally, if I am in that situation, I am upset, 'Oh, why is this toilet not all genders' is my view because I am more important in time efficiency". However, they insist that this efficiency is only acceptable if the design of the facility guarantees the safety and privacy of users. This finding reflects the concept of conditional support by Rogers in his book *Diffusion of Innovations* (2003), where public acceptance of social innovation depends on the fulfillment of certain conditions that provide a sense of security and comfort. Good facility design such as sturdy partitions, closed doors, not using curtains as room covers, and CCTV surveillance or direct surveillance can reduce community resistance. However, without proper communication, resistance to these facilities remains a challenge, especially among communities with conservative norms.

## **Conclusion**

Acceptance of All Gender Facilities shows complex dynamics, influenced by cultural norms, personal experiences, the design of the facilities themselves, and the situation. The social environment influenced by culture determines how informants view the concept of Gender Facilities. The multicultural community of Greater Jakarta shows resistance to All Gender Facilities from cultural and religious considerations, but in terms of function, All Gender Facilities are acceptable. The majority of informants consider Gender Facilities to be contrary to existing traditions, especially in the context of private spaces such as toilets and locker rooms, where there should be gender segregation. The main concerns expressed by the informant include the risk of privacy disruption, the inconvenience of sharing space with the opposite sex, and the potential for sexual harassment. In addition, the cleanliness of the facility is a crucial factor that affects the comfort and acceptance of users. On the other hand, some informants stated that this concept is acceptable if the design of the facility expressly supports privacy, security, and cleanliness, such as through sturdy partitions, tightly closed doors, not using curtains as room coverings, and adequate supervision, as well as the use of non-verbal and verbal

symbols. In addition, in certain situations, the concept of Gender Facilities is still acceptable if it is temporary.

For further research, it is recommended to focus on women's groups, considering that their privacy needs are higher as expressed in this study, it can be focused on an in-depth exploration of women's experiences and perceptions of Gender Facilities, including how the design of facilities can better meet their privacy needs. In addition, research that examines the design of the facility in detail, such as the layout of the space and security supervision, can provide more concrete guidance for the implementation of these facilities.

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