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newspaper of the year

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**The women's room 17.06.11**

Style

**Faith-based fashion takes off online**

Online retail is big business. According to the British Retail Consortium, online sales account for 8% of the UK's retail sector - worth £23bn a year. Besides being a godsend for white goods and electronics, internet shopping is perfect for lovers of fashion, and religious women are no exception.

Professor Reina Lewis and her colleagues at the London College of Fashion have been researching Modest Dressing, which refers to women who "dress in a way that satisfies their spiritual and stylistic requirements for reasons of faith, religion or personal preference".

"What we have observed is that it's a growing phenomenon and it's happening among women of different faiths," says Lewis. "In the UK, what we see most often are young, trendy Muslim women in headscarves - many of this generation are working modesty in relation to mainstream fashion trends, not through

wearing so-called ethnic or traditional clothing. This is a generation who have grown up with consumer culture, and who expect to express every aspect of themselves through participation in consumer culture."

Muslim fashion online has been steadily growing over the last few years, with blogs such as the UK-based Hijab Style and Hijabs High, which post photographs of hijabis in a style not too dissimilar to that of super-blogger The Sartorialist. Googling "modest fashion" produces sites that interpret "modest" in vastly different ways - some showcase fashions that only show the face, hands and feet. Others, such as I'm Clothed Much (run by an LA-based Mormon blogger), showcase styles that are more revealing but appeal to the faithful and fashion-forward.

"There is no single definition of modesty; different faiths have different parameters, but there is

also discussion and dispute within faiths and denominations," says Lewis.

The researchers discovered that many of these new modest brands are transcending their original intended audiences, and adjusting their product ranges for other faith groups - and beyond. "One of the things this project set out to do was to widen the frame to look at women of other faith backgrounds and those who don't identify as religious. We were looking at the ways in which e-commerce is making, developing - and encouraging - this new market."

**Bim Adewunmi**



A model showcases an Indian designer's work

**From the blog**  
**'No surprise' as UK fails domestic workers**

To the sound of gasps from other delegates, the UK government announced this week its intention not to vote for an International Labour Organisation convention aimed at **protecting domestic workers from abuse and exploitation**. As Rachel Williams reported at guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/the-womens-blog, it was "a chance to make sure that the women whose labours in many cases allow middle-class women to balance careers and family life, are given the same rights as everyone else". Charities were disappointed, but a spokesman for the business department said the government does "strongly support the principles [the convention] enshrines".

Getridofem seemed resigned: "No surprises here then!" christineottery found the decision "shocking", wondering "whether it has anything to do with the government's poor record on providing inexpensive childcare. How would some families cope without nannies or childminders?" Something else caught alpen's eye: "Am I the only one to notice that it was "middle-class women" these workers allowed to "balance careers and family life"? So once again domestic work is seen as "women's work". Fair point.

**Women in numbers**

**21%**

The percentage of women aged 50-53 who do not know they must now wait until they are 65 before they get their state pension  
Source: Age UK

**Afghanistan**

**'War has created chaos for women'**

This week a report named Afghanistan as the world's most dangerous country for women. But what do women who live there think? Wazhma Frogh, a human rights

activist and recipient of a 2009 International Women of Courage award, says it's not that simple:

"As a woman who is living in Afghanistan and have lived my whole life with Afghans, I don't believe it's the worst country in the world for women. I have seen worse countries.

"We do have our challenges,

but have come a long way. What the world forgets is that Afghanistan has been at war, civil war, conflict for so many years, almost all my life, and that is what has created chaos for women and shrunk women's rights."

Join the debate at guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/the-womens-blog