

Modesty is in Fashion

This project, led by Reina Lewis at the London College of Fashion, offers a very different view of religion by looking at it in relation to consumer culture rather than the state or religious institutions, by focusing on women not men, and by looking at fashion rather than sacred texts or established institutions.

It is well known that various religious groups require female members to dress modestly, including Islam, Mormonism, orthodox Judaism, and various forms of conservative Christianity. What is less well recognised, but highlighted by this research, is that religious women also like to look fashionable, that there is money to be made by catering to that need, and that the internet has proved a powerful vehicle for retailing modest fashion across religious boundaries.

Between 2010 and 2011 Reina Lewis, assisted by Emma Tarlo (Goldsmiths) and Jane Cameron (LCF), and funded by the [Religion and Society Programme](#), conducted visual and textual analysis of brand websites, blogs and discussion fora as well as carrying out interviews with brand representatives, designers, marketers, retailers, bloggers and consumers. The team also carried out research and observation in Salt Lake City, Brooklyn, Manhattan and London. What they found was a booming online, international industry catering for a market ignored by mainstream fashion.

Whereas previous generations had had to make their own clothes and modify high-street items, women in the age of the internet have much more choice. Some of the founders of the most successful online modest-dressing brands started their enterprise to help their daughters dress modestly with style. The web provided an ideal means of expanding their business. More recently, associated blogs, discussion fora, e-zines, and tie-ins with retailers have become an important part of the 'industry'.

Overall, the project found that the internet has created deterritorialized and safe spaces where women can interact within and across faiths in ways which few religious scholars had imagined possible.

Find out more...

- Visit the project's web page: <http://www.fashion.arts.ac.uk/research/projects-collaborations/modest-dressing/> and read the summary: <http://www.fashion.arts.ac.uk/media/research/documents/PROJECT%20SUMMARY%20pdf%20MODEST%20DRESSING%20LCF.pdf>
- Listen to the podcasts of presentations from a symposium on modest dressing organized by the project and supported by Religion and Society:

MEDIATING
MODESTY:
FASHIONING
FAITHFUL
BODIES

http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/research_findings/featured_findings/mediating_modesty_fashioning_faithful_bodies

- Look at an article on the project published in *The Guardian* 17.06.11:
http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/uploads/docs/2011_06/1308819761_The_Guardian_G2_17th_June_2011.pdf and listen to a BBC Today Programme report broadcast 22.06.11:
http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_9515000/9515265.stm
- An article also appeared in *The Jewish Chronicle* on 23 June 2011: <http://www.thejc.com/news/world-news/50696/vogue-does-strictly-orthodox-fashion>
- Keep an eye for the book Reina Lewis is editing from the symposium, to be published by I. B. Tauris, and her book on 'New Trends in Muslim Style' in preparation for Duke University Press.

You might also be interested in...

- Reading about the Religion and Society event 'Young, British and Muslim' at which Reina presented the project:
http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/events/programme_events/show/young_british_and_muslim_academic_research_and_real_lives
- Reading about the findings from another Religion and Society-funded project 'Fitna, the Video Battle' also represented at the 'Young, British and Muslim' conference:
http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/research_findings/featured_findings/fitna_and_youtube
- Listening to Kaye Haw discussing her research supported by the Programme conducted with young Muslim women in Britain:
http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/publications/podcasts/show/being_british_and_being_muslim

Award Title

Modest Dressing: faith-based fashion and internet retail

Team

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University

London College of Fashion



Arts & Humanities
Research Council



Award Type

Phase 3 Small Grant

Key terms

dress, orthodox judaism, hijab, mormon, internet retail, women, consumerism