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Special Issue: Religion and Fashion

by Brett Krutzsch

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The Editor reflects on why fashion matters when trying to understand religion and our world



Dear Revealer readers,

Five years ago, in July 2015, *Fortune* magazine declared in a headline that Muslim women were the "next big untapped fashion market." To the apparent surprise of *Fortune*'s audience, Muslims spend billions on clothing each year. Multinational retail corporations quickly took note. H&M produced an advertising campaign that featured a veiled Muslim woman. Zara and Tommy Hilfiger introduced "modest" clothing lines to target Muslim shoppers. While this was new terrain for these corporate retailers, Muslim-owned clothing companies like Haute Hijab and viral-video producers like the Mipsterz (a play on the term "Muslim Hipsters") had been promoting cutting-edge fashion for years. And Muslims on social media had been creating and sharing fashion-forward styles long before *Fortune* took note. Indeed, for anyone paying attention, the merger of religion and fashion was hardly a new trend.

Whether it is the proliferation of cross necklaces for Christians, hand-woven saris for Hindu women, fur hats for Hasidic men, or brightly-colored silk veils for Muslim women, clothing matters greatly in many religious communities. For this reason, I am pleased to bring you the *Revealer*'s special issue on religion and fashion.



Revealer Editor, Brett Krutzsch

Far from superfluous, fashion reveals much about people and society. Clothing can provide insights into socioeconomic issues, gender expectations, racial politics of respectability, and people's religious beliefs. For many of us, our clothing choices are circumscribed and policed by employers, family, and strangers. This is one reason why transgender women face heightened risks of physical violence. Far too many people oppose their sartorial presentation and use violence to send a message about what they consider appropriate dress. It is also why veiled Muslim women and Sikh men in turbans experience disproportionately higher rates of hate crimes in the United States and Western Europe. Fashion is not simply about trends. Fashion is about lives, deaths, power, privilege, who matters most in society, and how people use clothing to demand cultural change.

The articles in this special issue explore the merger of religion and fashion during the coronavirus pandemic, why race matters when thinking about religion and dress, and what clothing can reveal about people's religious convictions. The issue opens with Liz Bucar's "Islamophobia and Americans' Problems with Face Masks," where she argues that opposition to Muslim women wearing veils contributes to people's resistance to embrace masks during the pandemic. Next, in "Queer Nuns and Digital Dragtivism in the Age of COVID-19," photojournalist Lauren Pond explores how the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, an international order of queer activists, has transformed their ministry during the pandemic to continue their social justice work for Black Lives Matter and LGBTQ equality.

Two articles in our special issue look specifically at religion and men's fashion. In "Bowties, Beards, and Boubous: Black Muslim Men's Fashion in the United States" Kayla Wheeler examines how Black Muslim men's clothing reflects their religious beliefs and how their styles have influenced the broader culture. Next, in "How Long is God's Beard?," Ed Simon reflects on the history that links beards with religious masculinity.

The special issue also contains two articles that consider Christianity and fashion. In "Everybody Being Themselves Real Hard," Jeanine Viau interviews theologian Linn Tonstad about the ways her fashion choices reflect her theological views on gender, race, respectability, and God. And in an excerpt from her book *Religion in Vogue*, Lynn Neal explores Coco Chanel's famous cross jewelry and accessories.

Our special issue also features the sixth episode of the Revealer podcast: "Black Muslim Men's Fashion." Kayla Wheeler joins us to expand on her article from this issue, discuss the increased media, corporate, and retail attention on Muslims, and reflect on how some Black Muslims use fashion to send a message about their religious priorities. You can listen to the episode on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Stitcher, and Google Play.

As we continue to face the pandemic's dangers, spiraling unemployment, police violence against Black Americans, and the possibility of a contested presidential election, we can

easily forget how our routine, daily choices about what we wear can matter greatly. But t-shirts can send a political message. Hats of a certain red hue can invoke disgust. Makeup on a boy can announce his fabulousness. And the veil on a Muslim woman can proclaim her pride in her religious identity. I hope the articles in this special issue open your eyes to what fashion can reveal about society and illuminate the ways your aesthetic choices can help revolutionize our world.

Yours,

Brett Krutzsch, Ph.D.

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