

## **Modest Dress at Work as Lived Religion: Women's Dress in Religious Work Contexts in Saudi Arabia and the UK**

*This article explores how women in religious workplaces respond to organizational norms of and requirements for modest dress and behavior, both implicit and explicit. It compares two case studies: women working for faith-based organizations (FBOs) in the UK, and women working for secular organizations who travel for work to Saudi Arabia, where the state requirement to dress modestly meant wearing an abaya (slightly relaxed in 2019). Data come from semi-structured interviews with 43 women: 21 who travelled from the UK to Saudi Arabia and 22 who work in UK FBOs. It examines three themes: how women adapt to forms of modest dress; how they navigate dress regulation; and how they negotiate habitus and authenticity. The article proposes that women's modest dress in workplaces governed by religious codes be understood as a form of lived religious practice and one that raises dilemmas of habitus and authenticity.*

*Key words: dress; religious organizations; women and employment; Saudi Arabia; United Kingdom*

This article explores the dress of women who work in religious contexts, focusing on how they respond to implicit or explicit workplace dress norms and codes. It uses two case studies: women working for faith-based organizations (FBOs) in the UK, and women at secular organizations who travel for work to Saudi Arabia, where they are required to dress modestly and until 2019 were required to wear an abaya. We situate these findings within literature on habitus (Bourdieu 1977) and lived religion (notably Ammerman(2020, 2021) and triangulate with scholarship on dress, religion and habitus. We provide a fresh perspective to the literature on religion and dress which to date has assumed that women wearing religiously-related dress are part of the religious communities with which the clothing is associated. In contrast, this article investigates contexts where not all women wearing religious dress are religious or religiously affiliated (some are differently religious, others non-religious). Our exploration of if and how dress in religious work contexts can be viewed as a form of lived religious practice, irrespective of the religion of the wearer, raises fresh considerations for the definition and study of religion. Our case studies reveal the complexity of how habitus affects non- and differently religious individuals working in religious work contexts. We show that while it is possible for a non-religious person to engage in a new form of lived religious practice through their workplace dress, religion is more than simply an item of clothing put on or taken off, as it is closely connected to habitus, embodied dispositions learned in childhood and shaped and reshaped throughout life. As we illustrate below, habitus can be altered, even substantially, but arguably never completely transformed with accretions of previous – in our case, religious – habitus remaining (Krotofil et al 2021, below).

Dress and embodiment have been neglected in the sociology of religion (Page and Pilcher 2021:1). Yet dress is highly important in religion, as an external boundary marker delineating the sacred from the secular (Arthur 1999) and as an internal marker to distinguish from co-religionists with greater or lesser degrees of perceived adherence (Tarlo 2010). Religious dress codes can be a form of social control exercised by religious groups to ensure community conformity and activated by

others to challenge prevailing norms. For religious leaders, dress also signifies religious function and hierarchy. There are three main themes in the literature on religion and dress in social and workplace contexts: religion, dress and fashion; religion and dress regulation in public and work contexts; and lived religion. The first two will be discussed briefly, then lived religion and habitus will be outlined as the theoretical approaches we will use to understand the case of UK women's dress when working in Saudi Arabia and in UK faith-based organizations.

## **RELIGION, DRESS AND FASHION**

Religion was neglected in fashion studies until the twenty-first century brought new interest in the fashionable dress cultures of religious women, especially younger and Muslim women. Lewis (2013) identifies a "niche market for modest fashion" for Muslim, Jewish and Christian women. Lewis and Tarlo (2010) show how Muslim young women use dress to assert their identity as both British and Muslim. Bucar's (2017) ethnographic work with Muslim women who cover their heads and bodies in Iran, Indonesia and Turkey uses the term "pious fashion" to highlight its religious dimensions. A precursor to Bucar was Jones's analysis (e.g. 2010) of how religious dress emerged in Indonesia during and post-Suharto's regime and its role in constructing femininity, national identity and social class positions. Neal (2019) illustrates how images of Jesus, the cross and the Virgin Mary featured in clothing by many fashion designers in the late twentieth century provided aesthetic and material inspiration for American Christian (and other) consumers, inspiring emotional responses and helping them connect with the sacred in an individualized, consumerist context.

## **RELIGION AND DRESS REGULATION**

Religious dress is regulated by law, politics and within the workplace, by secular as well as religious authorities. Social scientists and legal scholars have extensively researched the intersection

of politics and Muslim women's dress and how state and international laws support or erode women's dress freedom, emblemized by veil bans in the global north (e.g. Barras 2010; Selby 2014). There is evidence of discrimination against women in workplaces based on their religious or cultural dress choices (Rootham 2015; Ku 2006; Syed and Pio 2010), with Teeple-Hopkins (2015:156) describing French dress laws as "sexist Islamophobia". This article seeks to add to that literature and contribute to organizational studies on religion and the workplace, working overseas and working for multicultural organizations (see Day 2005).

A small body of literature considers women working in ordained religious roles. Page (2014) finds that female priests in the Church of England, ordained since the early 1990s, entered a church where dress norms – elaborate vestments for worship and the clerical collar for daily professional wear – were masculine. Women priests often experience pressure to dress in a "neutral" way, disavowing feminine dress styles over-associated with sexuality within UK Anglicanism. Avoiding connotations of sexuality is also an issue for nuns, Buddhist and Catholic; nuns shave (Buddhists) or cover (Catholics) their heads to assert their dedication to the sacred (Trzebiatowska 2010; Starkey 2014:216-217). Most research on ordained religious women's clothing concerns Catholic nuns; yet, just as the nun's habit acts as a symbol of the sacred (Trzebiatowska 2010), women operating as religious leaders are expected to embody their religion and represent it to outsiders.

Beyond these themes, researchers have not examined how women dress in religious work contexts. We identify two areas meriting investigation. First, non-ordained women working for religious employers – a diverse sector that might include administrators at religious organizations, teachers at religious schools or bank clerks at Sharia-compliant banks. Second, women who work for secular organizations and travel for work to contexts defined by religious regimes (for example, various countries in the Middle East). While these religious work contexts might involve female employees sharing the religion of the organization they work for or of the country they travel to, these employees might be religiously different or not religious at all. Our study explores two examples of

this: women working for religious organizations in the UK, and women travelling to work in Saudi Arabia, a religious regime expecting and requiring them to wear state-mandated forms of religious dress. In Saudi Arabia, workplaces are governed by state religious regulation. Prior to the 2019 announcement that signaled a change towards modest dress rather than an abaya per se, regulations and norms required women visiting for work to wear an abaya (long-sleeved, generally floor length, overgarment) and sometimes a headscarf (shayla).

## **DRESS AS LIVED RELIGION**

Ammerman conducted one of the few studies on the workplace as location for lived religious experience (2014:171-211). She shows that in the USA, spirituality in work contexts is part of how people live religion. They do this through friendships with colleagues who are similarly spiritually minded, and some workers perceive work as part of an ethical spirituality or spiritual vocation. Ammerman's study does not discuss workplace dress, as is common in the scholarship on lived religion – despite the centrality accorded to “embodied practices” (McGuire 2007) of everyday religion. This article attends to that lacuna, expanding the application of lived religion to workplace dress in the UK and Saudi Arabia. We are assisted by Ammerman's recent theorization of lived religious experience (2020, 2021) which provides a framework to analyze women working in the religious contexts of Saudi Arabia and UK FBOs. Ammerman builds on twenty-five years of scholarship on lived religion, begun by Hall (1997) who coined the term to foreground and validate as religion people's everyday religious experiences, and continued by Orsi (1997), McGuire (2008), Neitz (2011) and others. McGuire and Neitz saw materiality and embodiment as important aspects of lived religion. Scholars of lived religion expand the sociological purview to include a far greater diversity of religious practice and of locations in which lived religious practice is enacted. Lived religion also tackles the spirituality versus religion dichotomy by conceptualizing religious and

spiritual phenomena as overlapping and interconnected, not distinct. Lived religion is “religion that includes spirituality” (Ammerman 2014:4). Scholars using the concept of lived religion often focus on non-mainstream forms and practitioners: non-theistic religions; spiritual practices occurring away from churches; and women.

Analyzing 64 articles using the lived religion concept, Ammerman (2016) highlights the hallmarks of the analysis, which she argues emerges partly out of the cultural turn in the study of religion producing a focus on: non-elites instead of religious leaders; practices instead of beliefs; practices outside instead of inside religious institutions; and individual agency rather than institutions and traditions. The focus on practice involves three aspects: embodiment, materiality and discourse.

Ammerman's recent (2020, 2021) work delineates seven dimensions of lived religious practice, including six “dimensions of human experience that constitute everyday practice” (2020:14) in social life more broadly; historically they have been neglected in the study of religion. These are: embodiment, materiality, emotion, aesthetics, moral judgment and narrative. Embodiment is fundamental: religion is lived through how we carry our bodies, and involve them in religious rituals, and through our bodily gestures and positions, movements and clothing; “lived religion is shared *embodied* know-how” (2021:75). Discussion of embodiment within sociology would take many to concepts of habitus (as we discuss below), although this is not a link that Ammerman focuses on.<sup>1</sup> Embodiment connects to the concept of habitus (see below), but they are not the same. Materiality is important because material objects and spaces can mediate between the sacred and the human. Exploring emotion enables us to understand religion beyond behavior and cognition, to see how it inspires human feelings, for example joy or anger, and enables us to analyze how religious

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Kupari (2020) notes that lived religion theorists use Bourdieu's work surprisingly rarely and makes a case for the utility of his concepts of habitus, capital and field for understanding people's lived religious practice.

communities value or cultivate particular emotional states. Attention to aesthetics reveals the sensory experience of religion, through art or music – or, as we demonstrate, dress. Exploring moral judgment – rarely considered in theorization of lived religion until Ammerman's work, and broader than simply "official" religious teaching – is about discerning in religious settings meanings about right and wrong, good and bad, which motivate social action. Narrative is about how people talk or narrate what is happening; narrative includes religious belief but is broader and includes stories about everyday life. The seventh one, the "spiritual dimension", like religion, is hard to define but Ammerman argues that it can be understood from etic and/or emic perspectives. In an emic way, "Religious social practices are patterns of action that are recognized by the participants as including experiences of more-than-ordinary realities" (2021:51). She does not dwell on the etic perspective, but implies that outsiders, not least scholars, can also identify the spiritual dimensions of lived religious practice.

We differ from Ammerman somewhat as we would argue that a "spiritual dimension" is not required for something to be considered an example of lived religious practice. Although Ammerman (2021:51) goes on to say that "Sometimes that spiritual dimension is simply implied in the words and actions of a ritual, without the individual participants having any deep experience of something extraordinary", her approach tends arguably to privilege examples of lived religion that include spirituality or reference to sacred dimensions. For some religious cultures, embodied practices (such as in diet or dress) may be carried out, treasured even, with absolutely no attribution of the "extra-ordinary": Jewish women who run a kosher home can be avowed atheists who nonetheless value kashrut as part of community life or as a tariff willingly paid to ensure visits from other community members. Our examples below of women dressing for work in religious contexts illustrate that participation in embodied and material daily lived religious practices is not always evidence of shared investment in a spiritual framework. Whilst for Ammerman, the example of "the agnostic Westerner taking communion to please their mother" shows that the "spiritual dimension is nevertheless present" (Ammerman 2021:57), our research would lead us to ask, present for whom? When adopting religious

dress as a situated organisational requirement – regardless of and supplementary to women's own religious or secular dispositions – the boundaries of acquiescence and allegiance become blurred, raising fascinating questions about authenticity, ownership, and integrity.

Dress cuts across categories: clothes are an aspect of embodiment; they are material objects that evoke emotional responses in the wearer. They have aesthetic qualities inspiring these emotions, and their form is dictated by, triggers and responds to, moral judgments about what is appropriate dress in different locations and contexts. Moral judgments may be internalized as people “choose” to conform to dress norms or may be explicit in law and guidance (and formally policed, by a state authority or workplace), or they may be articulated (and informally policed) through social interaction. Dress may accompany or illustrate religious narratives, with particular items carrying religious meanings or telling religious stories. For example, Taragin-Zeller's (2014) study of female ultra-Orthodox teachers and students in a Jerusalem seminary shows how Haredi young women practice modesty by making their own interpretations of canonical texts and stories. Utilizing “unobtrusive” colors, such as brown, black and dark blue and head covering after marriage, their reading of canonical narratives replaces “modesty for the sake of men” with “modesty for the sake of God” (Taragin-Zeller 2014:76-77). Finally, dress can facilitate connection with the sacred, for example when worn for prayer. Extending Ammerman's (2021:25) emic and etic perspectives point, we would argue that even non-religious actors in religious contexts have the “capacity to perceive non-ordinary realities intertwined with the ordinary world”. Donning religious dress is a pattern of action recognized by religious and non-religious wearers as pertaining to more-than-ordinary realities: its spiritual or religious elements are recognized as religious, even if the individual wearer does not identify as spiritual or believe that there is such a thing as a divine force. An employee at a religious organization, the case we will examine in this article, acknowledges and is conscious of *the notion of* “an alternative religious reality—something distinctive but not necessarily separate” (Ammerman 2020:18).

As Ammerman emphasizes, lived religion must be understood in its social contexts; “cultural repertoires” (2020:34) or “fields” (arenas of social interaction) structure religious action and individuals exercise agency with these contexts. One type of socio-political context she describes involves an organized and *established* religious tradition, that has state authority and maintains influence over many aspects of life, for example legal ceremonies for marriage, religious schools or holiday dates, and may involve religious nationalism. Saudi Arabia and the UK exemplify established religious contexts. Saudi Arabia is an Islamic theocracy with an absolute monarchy, with Islam central to its nationalism (Al-Rasheed 2013), while the UK is *de jure* established (Protestant Christian) but arguably *de facto* institutionalized and religiously plural, partly because of migration from south Asia, Africa and the Caribbean since the second half of the twentieth century. Saudi Arabia's state is authoritarian, while the UK's is more libertarian. The women we interviewed negotiated their dress in these contexts, with dress in Saudi Arabia governed by the state. In the UK employees are allowed to wear religious symbols unless they interfere with the organization's work (for example, for health and safety reasons), but dress is still shaped by religious employers' dress codes and by religious and British social norms.

## **LIVED RELIGION AND THE HABITUS**

Bourdieu's well-established concept of habitus, or embodied dispositions, overlaps with Ammerman's concept of embodiment, but offers something additional that helps to make sense of the dilemmas women face between their own sense of identity and self, and the religious dress they wear for work. For Bourdieu, the embodied dispositions that constitute the habitus are “durable” (1977:72), imbibed from childhood, related to the socio-economic conditions of a person's upbringing; they affect the way a person carries themselves in the world throughout life, the paths they follow, the so-called choices they make. Conceptualized as unconscious systems, habitus produces “durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures

[which] can be objectively “regulated” and “regular” without in any way being the product of obedience to rules” (1977:72).

Bourdieu's determinism and neglect of gender or religion in favor of social class have been effectively critiqued (e.g. McNay 1999; Rey 2007). Relevant to our research, Mahmood rehabilitated the idea of habitus by restoring from the Aristotelian tradition the aspects of conscious moral cultivation and bodily discipline, and the important role of religion in cultivating the habitus. Where Bourdieu assumed an “unconscious imbibing” (Mahmood 2001:838), the women's mosque movement in Egypt shows how the habitus can consciously be acquired via body discipline of prayer and cultivation of emotions, such as fear of God, that inspire virtuous actions. Wearing the veil is an aspect of this, an external modesty that inspires cultivation of internal modesty (Mahmood 2005). This links to an older Aristotelian tradition of the habitus in relation to ethical formation and the process of acquiring a moral character, which was taken on by Christians and Muslims; virtues or vice are learned through the repetition of virtuous and non-virtuous acts. For Mahmood (2001:838) “habitus...implies a quality that is acquired through human industry, assiduous practice, and discipline such that it becomes a permanent feature of a person's character.”

Changes to the habitus, even ruptures, are possible. Religious conversion is a case in point, although Krotofil et al. (2021:276) show, in the case of Polish female converts to Islam, how their previous Catholic habitus endures and “foregrounds their entry into a new religion”, by providing tools and language through which they can understand their new faith – the hijab conceptualized in relation to the veiled Virgin Mary. The new Islamic identity does not replace but overlays or transforms the old habitus, with childhood Christian religious habitus informing adult Muslim religious habitus. Changes to the habitus are more likely in late modernity and in diverse multicultural contexts marked by globalization and rapid social change, when religions evolve from stable traditions to dynamic, so Mellor and Shilling argue that when sociologists use habitus today they should take more notice of individual agency and religious versatility. They redefine religious habitus as “the

reflexive crafting of a mode of being that locates human action, feeling and thought at the embodied intersection of worldly and other-worldly realities” (Mellor and Shilling 2014:277).

Habitus is relevant for this study because dress can both reflect the habitus – we choose what we wear based on the habitus we have developed since childhood – and transform it, with the clothes we choose becoming a way we can cultivate our identities and emotional states. We can understand someone's dress better when we understand the social circumstances it emerged from – their geographical location, social class, ethnic background, religious background, gender, and so forth. As Entwistle (2015:35-40) argues, the habitus concept helps us understand that dress is both determined by social structures and a product of individual choice.

In the white-collar workplace women have had to adapt their dress to fit in with the masculine habitus of suits and tie, while still aligning with the gendered habitus of femininity. Because of the link between socioeconomic background and career choice, people often enter jobs where the dress of the workplace aligns with their own habitus. But studies, including Mahmood's, show that people are able, at least to some extent, to alter their habitus via new dress practices. Yet, people are never completely able to alter their habitus through dress practices. O'Regan (2016) notes in the context of how white western young people cultivate an alternative backpacker habitus through dress and adornment that Asian backpackers are considered out of place by western backpackers, whatever clothing they wear. Women, however tailored their suits, can still be seen as out of place in the masculine habitus of the male-dominated office or certain professions (Entwistle 2015:37-38; Puwar 2004). And, as we discuss below, women of color are differentially judged in Saudi Arabia if their skin tone – or linguistic capabilities – leads Saudis to presume they are Muslim. Those whose habitus fails to match the norms of the field or workplace they operate in, often feel uncomfortable and are viewed with suspicion rather than respect, because they fail to embody what Puwar (2004) calls the “somatic norm”. Religious dress often exemplifies a mix of habitus as enduring embodied dispositions and habitus as conscious, agentic cultivation of a particular subjectivity; as Mellor and

Shilling point out, Muslim women's veiling "is increasingly a symbol of 'tradition' reflexively constructed in opposition to the secular" (Mellor and Shilling 2014:287).

Our research on dress in religious work contexts emphasizes the role of dress in lived religious practice. By choosing two apparently disparate religious workplace contexts, we begin to view a new angle: the impact on individual women and organizations of regulating religiously related modesty codes that are or are not directly related to personal belief or affiliation. Our empirical data on the gradation of how organizations and employees respond to women's dress in these religious work contexts adds nuance to discussions of habitus and authenticity, bringing new complexity to the "lived religion" framework.

## **DATA AND METHODS**

This article analyses data from semi-structured interviews with 43 women<sup>2</sup>, from two groups: 1) UK-based women who travelled to work in Saudi Arabia (21 participants), from sectors including: professional services, healthcare, sport and leisure, politics and diplomacy, fashion and lifestyle, and arts and culture. While in Saudi Arabia for work, these women were required to wear abayas or other modest clothing and to adjust to religious codes of behavior and gender segregation.<sup>3</sup> The women interviewed for the project are reflecting on their experiences over the two decades up to 2019. 2) The second group are women who work in UK FBOs (22 participants), including for faith schools, charities and places of worship, where they encountered implicit or explicit modest religious dress

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<sup>2</sup> Pseudonyms were used for all the women who participated in this study. We have removed any details that could identify individuals.

<sup>3</sup> Behavior codes or norms, for example elements of gender segregation in the workplace, were an aspect of work life in religious contexts. The article touches on this issue, but we do not discuss this at length.

codes and behavior norms in their workplaces. Participants were recruited via a combination of snowball sampling (especially for the Saudi Arabia case), and email circulation of calls for research participants to a broad range of networks and organizations with which we were connected or familiar, including religious organizations, women's networks, interfaith networks, fashion industry networks, UK networks focused on GCC countries or Saudi Arabia specifically, and multinational corporate networks. Several organizations acted as partners on the research grant and sent calls for research participants to their members. Social media, specifically Twitter, was also used to disseminate targeted calls for research participants.

None of the women who travelled to work in Saudi Arabia were interviewed in Saudi Arabia; most lived mainly in the UK, some made single or repeat visits to Saudi Arabia of several days or a week, and some were or had been resident for longer. For the UK FBOs research we sought to interview women at a broad range of FBOs, including Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist and Pagan, but those who came forward for interview were from Christian, Jewish and Muslim organizations or working for interfaith projects, reflecting in part the researchers' networks. Participants' religious backgrounds are discussed below. Our familiarity with religious contexts professionally and personally aided the research: Author A's religious background is Protestant Christian, Author B is a culturally identified Jew, from a modern orthodox background, and Author C's is non-practicing Orthodox Christian. Author B has extensive research experience in the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia, and undertook the project's empirical Saudi research, while Author A, whose research and religious experience is in the UK, led the study of UK FBOs, supported by Author C.

Our religious and professional habitus meant we were familiar with religious dress codes and norms in the research locations, so we dressed in ways that we hoped would be considered sufficiently appropriate for those locations, without trying to emulate the clothing of another religion apart from when required in Saudi Arabia – where Author B conducted a set of interviews and site observations for a part of the project whose findings are not discussed in this article. Her experiences did however

feed into her interview strategy for participants included here. In Saudi Arabia, where Author B was required to wear an abaya in public or mixed gender spaces, she wore it over a "modest" ensemble of "western" garments so that when she removed her abaya in women-only spaces she was not showing legs above the ankle or arms below the elbow, with necklines never far below the collarbone. Having developed a wardrobe of "modest" clothing sourced from global high street brands to wear when researching conservative religious communities around the world, and having worn abayas on a previous visit to Saudi Arabia, Author B shared many of the experiences relayed by women visiting for work with whom we spoke. Inexpert at abaya body management, she worked hard to compensate for the disruption to her customary research field impression management that relied on cultivating the "fashion professor" image that she had learned was often expected by research participants in the UK and around the world. In the UK Authors A and C wore clothing that covered their arms and legs (for example, trousers and a long blouse) and was not tight fitting. When interviewing participants in the UK or on screen about their work experiences in Saudi Arabia, Author B wore her usual professional workwear tweaked to blend in with the workplace or leisure environment she was visiting (corporate, arts sector, etc.).

Most interviews were face-to-face at participants' place of work, nearby cafes or in Author B's university office; a few were online or by phone. Three took place in Dubai; the rest took place in the UK. Interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. Questions focused on four main topics: participants' backgrounds (age, ethnicity, religious affiliation or heritage, education and career); their experiences of work in religious contexts; religion and dress at work; and their attitudes to modest or religion-related dress at work. The 43 women were aged between 23 and 68, including: 27 White British, 7 Asian British, 6 White and of North American or European origin, one British Egyptian, one Korean-American and one French-Moroccan. The recordings were audio recorded, transcribed, then thematically coded (Braun and Clarke 2006) and analyzed using NVivo.

Three themes were identified from our data on how women responded to religious dress norms and codes. These were: adapting to dress modestly for work; navigating dress regulation; and dilemmas of habitus and authenticity. Ammerman's seven dimensions of lived religion appear throughout the data, and examples will be highlighted. *Adapting to dress modestly for work* primarily addresses embodiment, as well as materiality, aesthetics and moral judgment. *Navigating dress regulation* focuses on moral judgment and briefly discusses spirituality. *Dilemmas of habitus and authenticity* concerns emotion and spirituality. While we do not foreground the narrative dimension of lived religious practice, this is integral throughout. Interview participants told stories of their careers and workplaces, including "biographical narratives and religiously inflected life cycle moments" (Ammerman 2020:28-99), for example a rabbi recounting how she prepares girls for their bat mitzvah.

## **RESPONSES TO RELIGIOUS DRESS NORMS AND CODES**

### ***Adapting to Dress Modestly for Work***

#### *UK faith-based organizations.*

As 17 of the 22 women working at UK FBOs shared the employing organization's religion, they tended to implicitly understand its dress norms. Dressing for work was in some ways easier, if they started their job with an understanding of what would be "appropriate" (their word). Appropriateness, a concept recurring through the interviews, nearly always involved overt or covert moral judgment, as scholars have noted. For example, in Isotalo's (2017) work on young Somali women in Finland, "appropriate" dress signifies morality and chastity and can be about wider family reputation. It is a concept used by Muslim women who veil that can be used against them in non-religious contexts where veiling is considered inappropriate (Damir-Geilsdorf and Shamdin 2021).

Thus, it resonates beyond religion. As Hoggard (2013) notes, the concept of appropriate dress is maintained by the UK media, and women who display “too much” flesh are berated by journalists; likewise, UK workplaces can have dress codes requiring employees to dress smartly or in uniform, as long as they are not discriminatory. Women at FBOs were expected to dress in a way that fitted with the organization's religious norms and, where they had them, dress codes. This generally meant dressing in a way that would be considered modest, professional and appropriately covered – in other words, not exposing much flesh, sometimes avoiding tight clothing or items that might attract attention such as high heels. Covering one's hair was not required in any of the workplaces, although it was occasionally expected for interfaith events or visits to places of worship.

*Women who shared the religion of the FBOs where they worked already conformed to many of the organization's dress norms because of their religious background and beliefs. Yet, the organization's dress norms or codes could be different from or more conservative than their own dress preferences. Zainab, who works for a progressive Muslim charity, provides a typical case of adapting her dress to show respect for conservative co-religionists, while retaining some personal choice:*

*whilst [ORGANIZATION] is very progressive, it's working within quite a conservative sector, so it's not really so much what I think the [ORGANIZATION] staff would think, it's about what other people would think of the organization and I have to be mindful of that and respectful of that... If I was going to a meeting with just internal staff I could wear whatever I want... but if I'm going to a meeting where I'm meeting someone who – and I know I'm representing [ORGANIZATION] – then I'd have to think quite carefully about making sure that I am dressed in a way that nobody's going to take offence to. Which is difficult, because I think in a Muslim context, because I don't cover my hair, there's almost already an assumption to some degree that I must not be that practicing. So, it's about sort of combatting that idea already from the get-go.*

Zainab adapts to fit the views of the most orthodox, which might be easier for her than for a non-Muslim because of her religio-cultural competency in Muslim dress. But it is in other ways harder because conservative religious people judge as inadequate her accommodations of their versions of Islamic practice (her headscarf style challenged at a mosque meeting). The impact of strictures from co-religionists is inevitably greater than for women "wearing" someone else's religion. Zainab balances adapting to conservative expectations with "combatting" religious assumptions she disagrees with, challenging their idea that uncovered women are not practicing Muslims.

The only direction on dress that Charlotte received at her orthodox Jewish organization was to wear a skirt to visit head office, which she was happy to do, preferring skirts anyway. Although some colleagues held beliefs and moral judgments about women's dress – for example that married women should cover their hair for prayer – she had not been told to do so. She adapted her dress according to religious social norms she observed at the organization, drawing on her widespread Jewish cultural knowledge. Raised Reform Jewish, she was aware that if she wore a "*kippah*" (or *yarmulke*, a skull cap), as she liked to do for prayer and as women in liberal or progressive Jewish communities are increasingly doing, this would be seen as a major transgression, so she chose not to. She considered embodying the right version of Jewishness (according to her employing organization) important, and for her this was as much about what she did not wear (the *kippah*) as what she did wear.

Women in ordained religious leadership positions were distinctive in having less separation between their work and home lives and clothing. They embodied their religious role at all times, like the women that Page (2014), Starkey (2014) and Trzebiatowska (2010) studied. Salvation Army minister Julia remarked: "my work is my lifestyle, so it's almost like a lifestyle of ministry, potentially I'm 24/7, seven days a week." She wore a uniform for work. Asked how her workwear differs from what she wears when not at work, she replied: "I guess the challenge... is the wardrobe that I have as non-workwear hardly ever gets used because I'm in this like uniform... all the time, pretty much. But I'm probably casual, jeans, t-shirt type of person." The "probably" suggests she has

lost a definite sense of what preferred leisure clothing would be. Her uniform, purchased from the national Salvation Army supplier, offers a range of options:

*The Salvation Army uniform is different depending on what I'm doing. Today I'm wearing just navy trousers and a light blue shirt with the Salvation Army shield logo embroidered on to it. But most days, if it's a weekday, I tend to be in jeans and a Salvation Army polo shirt. We have a community café, kids' work, that kind of stuff, I would wear that kind of uniform. If I'm doing home visits or hospital visits, something like that, I'd probably wear what I'm wearing today. If I'm leading worship, I wear a white – again, it depends on which congregation I'm part of – so the Salvation Army uniform people know probably is the formal tailored tunic, tailored skirt, dark navy with epaulettes.*

Julia hints at the uniform's materiality and how activities shape uniform choice: jeans are hard-wearing for practical work running a café and working with children, but Sunday's work of sermon-delivery and church service-leading demands something recognizably smart, the "formal tailored tunic". The uniform has changed somewhat over the years and women are now allowed to wear trousers. The uniform, a trademark of the Salvation Army introduced in 1880 for its paid officers, "conveyed an authoritative professionalism and gave these working-class women a distinctive presence in their communities" (Walker 2001:117). Julia explained (echoing Walker) that the uniform was intended to present a distinctive Christian identity as a "witness" to "non-believers". Julia's uniform is integral to her ability to embody Christianity to outsiders, a big part of her role.

Other clergy are also required to dress to embody and represent the faith. Church of England curate Zoe said she would wear smarter clothes to lead a Sunday service, for example a dress with Converse brand trainers. But during the week she chose jeans with her clerical collar: "my overall view is I want to be me and be normal and just wear my normal clothes, I was not going to go out and buy a new wardrobe when I got ordained, apart from having to wear a collar." She had to wear a

clerical collar for certain activities, and she described the visibility it gave her so that people could strike up conversations. She did not wear it on her weekly day off. Materially, the clerical collar might be a piece of white plastic smaller than any other clothing item, yet wearing one symbolically transforms someone into a visible member of the clergy.

Several women struggled to reconcile interest in fashion with their religious role. Rachel, a rabbi in a Reform synagogue, who ran a small fashion company before finding her religious vocation, started wearing clothes that covered more of her body as she became committed to training as a rabbi. She did theological research:

*I had to write a piece of responsa, like responsa is traditional legal questions, you'd ask a rabbi a question and they would reply, and I wrote a piece of legal responsa last year on what the definition in Jewish law of synagogue appropriate attire is. And looked a little bit at some of the law behind this and kind of decided for myself that a broad sleeveless dress is okay, but a spaghetti strap isn't. You shouldn't be able to see underwear.*

She detailed how she dressed for each part of her job, meeting congregations, running a children's club or leading a funeral. Each was different. She aimed to present an image that was not simply the same as any other congregation member. Skinny jeans, in fashion at the time of interview, were fine for the office, but not for synagogue. She and her colleagues kept high heels under the desk in their office to be ready to change their outfit, she explained, adding, "I also keep a couple of black dresses here for funerals." Rachel and Zoe are conscious of the continual sartorial decisions they make, as they use dress to display their religious role as well as to maintain social norms of modesty and smartness.

*Women who did not share the religion of the FBO where they worked* included atheists Danielle and Melanie and non-believer Nikki, working at Muslim organizations, and Muslims Hala and Samirah, working on interfaith projects. Danielle and Melanie's experience offers a contrast and

points of continuity. Both respond to their organizations' dress codes – shaped as they are by moral judgments – by embodying a more “modest” aesthetic. Melanie had adapted her dress for the job, wearing looser-fitting trousers and tops with high necks that avoided showing the chest area. Danielle, who worked in an HR role for a Muslim charity, had adapted from dresses and skirts to trousers:

*My work wardrobe for this role is different to roles that I've had before. Because I didn't used to really wear trousers for work, I more regularly would wear dresses and skirts, which you can do here. But my previous work wardrobe tended to be, once I reassessed it having got this role, they were all above the knee dresses, which I think they were perfectly professional dresses for the remit that I was working in, but they wouldn't be appropriate here. I've got a couple of long skirts and long dresses that I bought for my role here and I mainly wear trousers and a top, I just find that's easier.*

One hot summer day she had worn a sleeveless dress, not realizing it would be considered inappropriate. She was happy to put a cardigan on when asked by a female colleague. Danielle was very content to make any adaptations asked of her. Melanie, discussed below, was less happy about adapting her dress.

#### *Saudi Arabia.*

Only two women working in Saudi Arabia were Muslim: Dina, who is French and of Moroccan heritage, worked in a senior marketing role for a fashion and lifestyle brand; Amal, a British woman of Egyptian heritage, had a senior role in healthcare consultancy. Neither came from a Muslim habitus that was abaya-wearing, but being Muslim aided their familiarity with the adaptations required for the Saudi context. Amal's abaya became an occasional part of her religious life back in the UK. Dina chose to work in the Middle East as she found it difficult to combine her commitment to religion and fashion in France, where her work colleagues expected her to go out drinking alcohol at all-night

fashion parties (the secularism of French workplaces and their impact on Muslim women has been critiqued – see Barras 2010; Rootham 2015). When in France she had not covered herself other than for prayer. She enjoyed discovering modest fashion. She bought her first abaya in Dubai, in blue, for Ramadan visits to the mosque, but when she went to Saudi Arabia she bought two new ones in Dubai's tourist area, both black, because she heard that black was expected.

Dina felt initially uncomfortable meeting male Saudi colleagues who she had met before outside Saudi Arabia, as they had seen her in western clothes, but that feeling went away fast:

*There is this five-minute weird moment where they look at you like, oh, okay, you did the effort and so on, but it doesn't look like you. But then you completely forget about the abaya. You just focus on the business and the outfit goes away.*

Dina manages to conquer her initial emotional reaction of discomfort at embodying an image she feels “doesn't look like” her almost by ignoring her dressed body. Like a kind of psychological conjuring trick, an effort of emotion-suppression, she can make the outfit “go away” by concentrating only on “the business”. (The effort required points to the need to see dressing differently for work as a form of aesthetic labor – see Authors forthcoming).

Amal worked for about a year in Saudi Arabia, going home to the UK one week per month. Before her first work visit she had worn an abaya only to go on pilgrimage. She borrowed one from a family member and bought several early on during her trip; abayas that would be more appropriate (“classy”) for work. The term “classy” illustrates the way moral judgment can connote social class as well as modesty, both in Saudi Arabia and in the UK. During her time there, she enjoyed shopping for abayas. By the time she left, she said:

*I started to get a little bit addicted to shopping for abayas and I had to stop myself in the end because I remember really well in my last week looking at this abaya and it was a beautiful material and it had this beautiful embroidery on it, and I just kept trying to think of a reason that I would need it, but I couldn't, so I had to stop myself from buying it.*

Aesthetics should be seen as a part of lived religious practice, as Ammerman argues. The aesthetic quality of the abaya was tempting and important, a source of pleasure for Amal during her time in Saudi Arabia. The fact that she was Muslim meant that she would get an occasional opportunity to wear them when home in the UK, for example for Ramadan prayers in the mosque. In this way, the workplace abaya became part of her personal spiritual practice, part of the spiritual element of lived religious practice.

*Women travelling to Saudi Arabia who were not Muslim* – all but two women interviewed – made the required adaptations to fit with the Saudi state's requirements for modest dress and wore abayas. Most sourced abayas before they travelled, buying or borrowing them from colleagues. Others bought or were given them by their hosts at the airport. They were often black, a color associated with modesty in other religions too (Taragin-Zeller 2014). On Jo's first trip to Riyadh she described being surprised to be given a black abaya with silver embellishment: "I was met at the airport with a very colorful abaya, which surprised me, because I thought it had to be black, but they said as a Westerner that was okay." Jo ended up purchasing several abayas for different trips and in less-conservative Jeddah was able to use color and select a closer-fitting garment. Color has been at times an important part of the aesthetics of abaya-wearing and alternatives to black were embraced by women we interviewed. But seeing their abayas as temporary and generally lacking Saudi fashion literacy, women often bought them from inexpensive markets or malls. As Fiona said, recalling her first trip, "I had a really boring one and there were Arabic girls from other Arab nations who had some fabulous ones, because they knew the score better than me. But then I wasn't going to waste money on something that I didn't have to wear that often." She covered her hair with a scarf the first time, but on subsequent trips, although she draped a scarf around her neck in case it was needed, she discovered that covering her hair often was not expected.

### *Navigating dress regulation*

Regulation or, to use a term with more negative connotations, moral policing, of dress occurs in a variety of ways: through dress codes, dress code enforcement by HR departments and managers, actual religious police in Saudi Arabia, social norms, and comments and interactions among colleagues and family members.<sup>4</sup> Women were policed in Saudi Arabia and monitored in UK FBOs, whether or not women shared the religion of the context they worked in.

#### *UK faith-based organizations.*

The non-religious women who worked for FBOs commented on dress regulation more than the religious women. Nikki described an incident involving a more junior employee, non-Muslim like her, wearing a vest top one summer day and being told she was not dressed appropriately; her reactions are discussed later. Melanie described how when the dress code was transgressed, HR staff took aside those who had been subject to complaints from colleagues, managers or visitors to the organization. The HR staff, all female and Muslim, “have made comments to friends of mine about the length of their hemline or their dress, or that something is too tight-fitting”. This enforcement is applied by Muslim women to both Muslim and non-Muslim women.

Danielle experienced a different dynamic. Where Melanie and Nikki critiqued dress controls, Danielle was content to be the voice of HR reiterating the rules and moral judgments of the

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<sup>4</sup> Regulation of women's dress is not unique to religious contexts; a body of feminist research understands dress policing as misogynistic, based on the assumption that women are responsible for preventing men's sexual advances via dressing modestly, as well as often racist and queer-phobic (see Aghasaleh 2018; Hale et al. 2018; Kringen and Novich 2018).

organization. She trains new staff on the dress code, advising them to present themselves in ways acceptable to the charity's Muslim donors and stakeholders:

*I talk about it in the sense of we need to ensure that we are dressing conservatively in line with the Muslim faith, because we need to be respectful to any external stakeholders that we are actively inviting in and asking for their support. In order to do that and to represent ourselves properly as a faith-based organization, we need to be following the cultural norms of our faith, and as an organization we do have a faith and the cultural norms of that mean that we dress conservatively. So more specifically, that affects females more than men here, so I normally talk about that means we don't want to wear low-cut tops, we don't want to wear skirts or dresses that are really much above the knee.*

Using the words “ourselves” and “our faith” indicates that Danielle is happy to present herself as part of the Islamic faith in some way, even though she is an atheist. She is also willing to ask women more than men to adapt their clothing – something that might be anathema to feminist HR staff elsewhere. The contrast between Nikki, Melanie and Danielle demonstrates the way women can exercise agency in relation to dress within systems of moral judgment. They react in different ways to the moral judgment, some, like Nikki and Melanie, being bothered by it and others, like Danielle, embracing it pragmatically as necessary for performing their job and becoming an enforcer of this judgment via advising other colleagues. Melanie and Nikki's responses are discussed below.

Women who shared their FBO's religion were less likely to notice dress regulation occurring and less likely to suffer censure due to their familiarity with religious dress norms. However, Salvation Army minister Julia discussed how a fellow female minister was told off by her manager for contravening the uniform rules, for example wearing a lot of jewelry. Julia explained that wearing rings was not allowed, apart from a wedding ring.

One person who had been reprimanded was Safya, a Muslim who worked at a Muslim charity. She was taken aside by an HR colleague and told she was dressed inappropriately, after a visitor to the office had complained. This affected her confidence and provoked anxiety:

*I was really, really upset... I couldn't understand why or how and what it was, I just couldn't put it all together. So, I started asking my colleagues, do you think I dress inappropriately? Do you think I wear too much make-up? Do you think my heels are too high? And 'no, if anything, you're the most smartly dressed person in the organization'... And I was just really thinking about it and then I went back to this HR and I said to her, do you think that – forget what you've been asked to tell me – but do you think I dress... And she said, no. So, I said, why did you not, whoever asked you to say this, why didn't you say to this person, or director, whoever this person was, why did you not as HR, you have a say. She was like, 'I'm just the messenger'.*

Moral judgment from family members could be presented in apparently jocular form. Davina, who worked at a Christian organization, described buying a pair of heels for her new job. She thought them smart and fashionable, but her husband “made a comment about how they might lead my Christian brothers astray”; for him, they seemed to connote a sexiness that should not be visible to men other than him. Where the workplace and religious community merge, as in this example, moral judgments can extend beyond the workplace: Davina's husband sees her male colleagues as her “Christian brothers”. This merging of the workplace and religious community is very clear when women work for a place of worship (for example, as a church youth worker), but even when they work for other Christian organizations that are not directly connected to an individual church, this can still occur, as it did for Davina, because religious kinship is understood to transcend individual religious institutions: wherever Davina works with a Christian man, he is her “Christian brother”. Although she believed her husband was joking, she was no longer confident to wear them. Jocular commentary can, therefore, function as another effective form of regulation and judgment. Moreover,

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as Sue and Golash-Boza (2013:1582) show for racial humor in Mexico and Peru, humor reinforces “racialized systems of domination”; in this case, the guise of humor reinforces moral judgments based in systems of patriarchal domination: women's sexuality is owned by their husbands.

### *Saudi Arabia.*

The word “policing” is appropriate in Saudi Arabia, where many participants discussed the “religious police”. They are not police per se, but civil servants and volunteers tasked with enforcing adherence to the state's interpretation of Islamic precepts. The fuller term for them is the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (CPVPV) (Le Renard 2014:174-5). The CPVPV expanded in the 1970s and '80s via the Saudi oil boom and religious revivalism, part of a system which from the mid twentieth century segregates and subordinates Saudi women in the interests of a religio-nationalist project (Al-Rasheed 2013; Le Renard 2014). The CPVPV created a “climate of ubiquitous surveillance” (Le Renard 2014:27), including checkpoints and entrances to women-only spaces. The CPVPV's remit covered adherence to dress codes and gender and sexual norms, meaning they could apprehend Saudi women and command them to cover themselves with an abaya and/or hair cover. Surveillance of women's dress extends beyond the CPVPV, legitimating men's public monitoring of women's dress – for example drivers honking at women they consider inappropriately covered (similar to the way women in the UK are harassed by men in public spaces). While non-nationals, such as the women we interviewed, are subject to Saudi dress codes, the expectations on them are less strict: they are not expected to embody Saudi national, gender and religious identity. In contrast, Dina, below, was honked in the street because she could be perceived as “looking” Saudi and hence subject to the informal male regulation extended over co-religionists and co-nationals. In recent years, the CPVPV's power has eroded leaving greater flexibility in modest

dress for Saudi women and (since late 2019) for visiting women as part of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's aspirations to modernize Saudi Arabia's national image.

Depending on the date of their visit and locations within Saudi Arabia, some of the non-Muslim women we interviewed encountered religious police in shopping malls or hotels. Lou described a colleague who refused to wear an abaya in a hotel in 2004 being told by a male Saudi member of hotel reception staff that she must, lest the religious police arrest and question her. Several women felt these police were watching them. Language teacher Lorraine who lived in a teachers' apartment in a mixed Riyadh neighborhood in 2009-2010 recounted:

*if we walked out of the flats not wearing the abaya or not wearing the headscarf or something – of course we always wore the abaya, but sometimes we didn't have our headscarves on - then the neighbors would call the Mutawa and say those girls are, you know, acting up, and we would get warnings. So, we were being watched.*

For Barbara, who visited Saudi Arabia in 2014, wearing an abaya was necessary to respect the culture and avoid the religious police, who not only enforce the law, but may take a stricter view:

*Although people will tell you it's not the law but that you have to, it is the norm and you don't want to... well, firstly you want to respect the culture of the people that you're dealing with, and secondly, you don't want to be got at by the religious police who maybe have views which are stricter interpretation of the law than is actual.*

Her observation reflects Saudi women's perceptions of the CPVPV as over-zealous (Le Renard 2014). The "religious police" act as symbol and reality of the intertwining of religion, gender, morality and politics in Saudi Arabia.

The two Muslim women who travelled to work in Saudi Arabia believed their dress was more policed than white Western women's, illustrating the way race as well as gender operates in the surveilling of women's bodies. Like nationals being treated more strictly than non-nationals, Dina was

honked at in the streets of Jeddah when not wearing a headscarf because drivers assumed she was Saudi and/or Muslim and so believed they had more right to comment on her clothing than on a white western woman's. Amal felt similarly when Saudi colleagues judged her more harshly than non-Arab British visitors. This is not about the religious police, but about more subtle assumptions and interpretations by male Saudi citizens who consider themselves entitled to regulate women's dress and behavior.

*I had the impression...that [British-heritage colleagues] would probably be able to get away with more than someone like me for being Arab... Saudi men might be okay with a British woman calling them out or joking in a certain way with them in a meeting, but if I said that same joke or if I called them out about something, then they might respond negatively to me.*

### ***Dilemmas of habitus and authenticity***

Dressing for work in a religious context can provoke challenges to women's sense of self and to their confidence at work. It evokes emotional and affective responses ranging from discomfort and anxiety to comfort and pleasure. Their emotional reactions and attempts to regulate emotions that arise in response to religious dress codes are part of their lived religious practice in religious work contexts. Negative feelings or reactions were most obvious among women who did not share the religious perspective of the context they worked in. This section presents their perspectives after those of women dressing to work in a context related to their own religion. Those working in contexts where they share the religion find an easier fit between their religious habitus and the dress and behavior expected at work, although women in leadership roles may encounter obstacles. For those working in a very different religious context, we will argue (see Conclusion) that the lack of fit between the women's religious habitus and their workplace creates an authenticity dilemma: dressing according to

the norms of another religion leads them to feel inauthentic, that they are neither being themselves nor properly portraying the religion of their work context.

*Dressing for one's own religion*

The majority of participants working at UK FBOs shared the organization's religion and felt content with how they chose or adapted their dress at work. Yasmin, who is Muslim and works for a Muslim women's charity, was worried when she started the job that she would be asked to follow a conservative dress code. She said:

*This is the first time I've worked in predominantly Muslim kind of organization... At first I was really apprehensive. I thought it's going to be challenging. Now I actually feel so relaxed. ... I can be whoever I want, I don't have this identity crisis. Like, if I go home, I'd be still happy wearing this.*

Yasmin was concerned that as she had previously worked in secular contexts there would be a mismatch between her usual workplace habitus and her experience at her new Muslim place of work. In fact, she found a comfortable fit between her own identity and self-presentation and that of the charity. Her use of the word "home" implies this, as she would be content to wear her outfit both at work and at home. Yasmin had been brought up by strict parents and had to wear a headscarf and "really loose clothes so it didn't define our shape". It was hard work persuading her parents to let her attend university, and her father expected her to wear "predominantly Asian clothes", so she changed into her preferred "western clothes" when she arrived at university and changed back at the end of each day when returning to the family home. Her religion took a backseat at university and she "rebelled", before reading the Qur'an in English and understanding relevant sections of it on covering in a new way: that unlike her father's interpretation, women do not need to cover themselves when with family members. She became more religious and for the first time in her life started praying the

five times a day expected in Islam. Conflicts with her family over marriage followed, as they wanted her to marry sooner and to someone of their choosing. She determined to choose her spouse, just as she chooses to dress how she wants. Choosing how to dress is a complex process and she discussed at length the garments, fit, length and style that she would and would not wear and in what context (for example, a swimming costume on a beach holiday with her husband, but accompanied with leggings when with Pakistani family members). Her dress combines her childhood religious habitus with more typical western-style dress, and she covers her head in a mosque: "That's because that's religious reason for God, not for people." Her religious habitus and her dress have evolved together, and her practice of prayer, dialogue with and resistance to her parents echoes Mahmood's point that habitus is about the cultivation of morality and values via bodily disciplines; her changing dress practices were part of this cultivation of values and morality. She discussed delaying going on pilgrimage because she feared coming back wearing a headscarf like other women she knew, and she did not want that, but inspired by friends who came back dressing the same way as when they left, she and her husband were now planning their trip. Living in a multicultural English city, she demonstrates agency and religious versatility; to echo Mellor and Shilling (2014:277), she is "crafting [...] a mode of being that locates human action, feeling and thought at the embodied intersection of worldly and other-worldly realities." Yasmin exemplifies the way dressing for the workplace is embedded in women's personal histories and evolving habitus.

Teachers Salma, in a Muslim school, and Melissa, in a Christian school, dress in a way their school would consider appropriately covered, professional and modest. Rather than being asked to do this, although there is a dress code, their own religious habitus, their beliefs and backgrounds (Islam for Salma, Christianity for Melissa), have influenced the dress choices they make. There is a match between their religious views and the religious dress code they are expected to follow, so they feel comfortable with how they dress for work. Participants were sometimes frustrated with workplaces for being more conservative or traditional than they would like. Rabbi Rachel's religious leadership role

meant that she had to adapt her clothing more than many of the women at FBOs did, which accounts for her greater discomfort:

*I feel like I'm dressing as someone else when I dress for shul because it's so different to how I would choose to dress myself. Although I've found my own way of feeling a little bit more like myself over the last few years.*

“Feeling like myself”, to quote Rachel, is a good way to sum up the ease some religious women feel when working in a similarly religious workplace, when their habitus is similar to that of the people around them. The way they are expected to carry themselves, dress and behave is a close match with the habitus, or embodied dispositions, they have learned since childhood. For some of them, including Rachel, it is not so simple, as their personal and spiritual journeys since childhood have led to modifications to the habitus, for example learning to love fashions that would be considered by religious parents to be secular or sinful, and when confronted in the workplace with religious colleagues, managers or community members whose habitus reflects the old habitus the woman has partially discarded, she feels uncomfortable. Rachel reconciles herself to this discomfort but tries to reduce it by dressing in clothes she sees as both modest and fashionable, mentioning a luxury sneaker brand (“I’ve found my own way of feeling a little bit more like myself over the last few years”). For her this means, reflecting fashion at the time of interview, “my...day-to-day work staples tend to be smartish trainers, like Common Projects or kind of like a smarter brand, like skinny jeans – never blue, only black – and then a kind of like silk shirt of some kind, often tucked in”. Rachel had to navigate her own and others’ reactions to her dress each week:

*Rachel: Every Shabbat, guaranteed I get like comments on my dress, no matter what I'm wearing, even if I'm wearing like a sack. I regularly wear a sack deliberately. But yeah, people feel like very empowered to comment on your appearance.*

*Interviewer: And how does that make you feel?*

*Rachel: I hate it. It's different, my colleague who works in there, her attitude is, they're just trying to be nice and like this is just the vocabulary we have for being nice. I think I'm just less tolerant of it. Obviously you just say thank you, because that's what shuts people up the most.*

She has occasionally received sexualized comments from men in these contexts and has to manage her negative emotional reactions to appearance-related comments, responding with thanks as a way to “shut people up”; emotions accompany her sense of comfort or discomfort and inhibit her desire to be recognized as authentically religious, as habituated to the role she embodies, as she dresses for work. Although her religious habitus is aligned with her other synagogue members', the sense of never achieving the “somatic norm” (Puwar 2004) because of being a woman in leadership in a male-dominated workplace is ever-present.

Among those working in Saudi Arabia, the Muslim women felt some discomfort at having to wear an abaya, but perhaps less than some of the non-Muslim women because their religious backgrounds and habitus are likely to have equipped them with experience and knowledge of modest dress. Dina's comparison of Saudi Arabia and Iran illustrates this: she is used to covering, but not to wearing a veil:

*The first time I wore it [the abaya] I was kind of feeling a bit weird, because it feels like you're just stealing the clothes of someone... I'm used to cover myself when I pray, but I'm not used to wear a veil. And it's the same thing happens to me when I go to Iran, because when I go to Iran I have to wear also the shayla. I wanted to wear it properly, because otherwise I didn't know how to wear it... To wear it completely on my head, because in Iran you can just wear it half of your head.*

The example of Amal (discussed above) wearing her Saudi abaya for her personal spiritual practice in the UK mosque during Ramadan demonstrates continuity between her religious and work habitus.

*Dressing for another religion.*

In UK FBOs, with the exception of atheist HR officer Danielle at the Muslim charity who was happy to adapt her dress and talked about herself as representing Islam at work, it was the non-religious women who responded most negatively to their employer's dress codes. Nikki was willing to follow the dress code although she thought it "a bit excessive" that the code stipulated avoiding clothes that were sleeveless or above the knee: "[b]ut I didn't have a problem with it, coming here, knowing that I was going to be in a senior position where I wouldn't be wearing that anyway". Her concern was more for more junior colleagues affected by management's reminder, circulated by email one summer, that the code prohibited "low cut" clothing:

*"Low cut"... No man wears low cut stuff... it's quite a sexist message and also to start by saying we are faith-inspired does not include those of us who are not of faith... To me, all that needed to be said was, just a quick reminder of our code of conduct around dress.*

Yet despite saying that she "didn't have a problem with" obeying the dress code, the dress code enforcement message challenged something core to her identity both as a woman and as non-religious.

Melanie, subject to the dress and behavior code at the Muslim charity discussed in the previous section, was uncomfortable with it. She describes the organization's induction for new staff:

*You're taught about the... core values of the organization and what that means, which is really great, really insightful and interesting.... But at the end you're given a lecture on appropriate behavior code and dress code at work, which I found it very challenging actually. The training was delivered by an outside cleric...and there were others on the training course alongside me, other women who were challenging a lot of what he said. Like that stipulating certain dress, like that you had to dress very modestly so as not to cause any*

*offence to other staff in the organization, they felt that was quite an inappropriate thing to tell people.*

Bringing in an outside cleric seems to trouble Melanie particularly. It is not known whether the other women challenging the cleric were Muslim; as a Muslim-majority organization, it is likely that some were. Melanie has chosen to work at this organization and to navigate the situation cautiously, abiding by the rules even though she does not agree with them:

*other people's religious beliefs and the faith-based nature of the organization I think's quite strongly influenced what I choose to wear. And to some extent I'm absolutely happy to be very respectful of the organization's faith-based nature, but also, I think it does cross the line into too much kind of policing, moral policing of what people choose to wear, that isn't in line with the culture of Britain. The culture of Britain is quite diverse... What I used to wear when I worked for [international professional services firm], which I would consider to be professional business, British business dress, is not really, I don't think is considered suitable in this organization.*

For Melanie, dressing to fit the religion of the organization is not comfortable; it does not reflect her non-religious habitus or background. It challenges her idea of her professional self (“what I consider to be professional business...dress”) and her wider identity and social relationships, as she also feels the need to disguise the fact that she is not married to her male partner because she anticipates colleagues will disapprove.

While most women who went to work in Saudi Arabia were not Muslim, some women's Christian backgrounds provided points of connection. Women raised Catholic found comforting parallels between the shayla and abaya and the clothing of nuns. Describing the shayla, Linda said “they always remind me of nuns – they're like little, you put them on and they're like a sort of cap around you that fits into your abaya”. Lou said:

*I did think some of the time when I was in Riyadh, actually this is very like my early school days. I was very used to nuns in full habit, because in those days, nuns wore the wimple, the full veil and shoulder to floor-length garb, so that in itself didn't perturb me at all.*

There is a strong parallel with Krotofil et al's (2021) study of Polish female Muslim converts; their participants and ours evoke their Catholic habitus and the memory of Catholic apparel as a way to make sense of, and feel familiarity with, Muslim dress. Wearing an abaya was a complex, embodied experience. Moreover, what was positive for one person was negative for another – for example, the feeling of anonymity when wearing an abaya allowed women who wanted to blend in to do so, while others who valued their individuality in the workplace felt that wearing an abaya affected diminished their self-confidence because it neutralized their individuality:

*Instead of just being me and getting on with my business of the reason why I was there, I was sort of constantly aware of this, of wearing this uniform... this thing that didn't really represent me. I think clothes help with confidence..., and wearing something that's so shapeless, I sort of felt that people didn't really know me, it sort of created a barrier. (Sue)*

Similar to Melanie's feelings of having to conceal her true or preferred self at work in the Muslim charity, Sue felt that she was not herself. Feelings of not being oneself, of being inauthentic because their habitus was different, were common. Some non-Muslim women used the argument that the abaya was a cultural garment, not a religious one; expressed by many Saudis, this formulation potentially helps visitors minimize unease with wearing clothing associated with another religion. For example, Anna had reflected on whether wearing the abaya was wearing someone else's religion. She was Christian and she viewed the abaya as cultural, not religious; this strategy to manage a mismatched religious habitus seemed to ease any discomfort she might have experienced if she saw it as wearing an Islamic garment:

*I don't view the abaya or covering my head or something as a religious thing, I personally view it as a cultural thing. So, for my mum, she sometimes views it as a religious thing for me to come to Saudi and put on an abaya, I'm conforming to like a Muslim rule. But I'm not, I'm still Christian, I confidently tell people that I'm Christian without feeling uncomfortable or unsafe... And people respect it... When I put on the abaya I never link it as a religious thing, ever.*

For Anna, viewing the abaya as a cultural garment was vital to preserving her own identity as Christian, perhaps for self-justification, or perhaps because of personal or Christian community's discomfort with her wearing clothing they regard as "profane" because it is associated with another religion.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study adds to the religion and fashion literature the insight that religious fashion plays an important role in the religious workplace. It also contributes to the literature on religion and dress regulation in the workplace two case studies so far unexplored: non-ordained women working for religious employers and women travelling for work to religious contexts overseas. Our work demonstrates the complexity of these contexts, the ways in which women adapt their dress to accord with religious dress codes and how women feel about this.

The case studies of women travelling to Saudi Arabia for work, and women working for UK FBOs, reveal the complexities of negotiating dress in religious workplaces. As in all work contexts, women make dress choices in the context of the different demands of employers, family members, society, income, job role and fashion trends. Although Saudi Arabia is very different from the UK, these two contrasting contexts offer a surprising degree of continuity. Women working in religious workplaces and contexts dress in ways that conform, or are sympathetic, to the religious ethos of the

context and specific dress codes and regulations. They conform to norms of modest dress. Women in both contexts often made adaptations to their dress for work, even when they shared the religion of their employer or context. More adaptations are required in Saudi Arabia than in UK FBOs, with the abaya being the required dress adopted by all the women we interviewed. For many women travelling to Saudi Arabia, they must adapt not only their clothing but also their behavior (such as not shaking hands with men or abiding by codes of gender segregation). More adaptations are required, in both contexts, of women who do not share the religion of their employer or context because they have to change their dress more in order to fit religious norms they did not previously follow. Nevertheless, women who share the context's religion experience some tensions between how they would choose to dress and how they need to dress for work, with workwear being sometimes more conservative than they would choose.

Just as women working in Saudi Arabia navigate dress regulation, in relation to dress codes, religious police or employers, so do women working in UK FBOs. Reprimand by HR or a manager is a softer version of regulation than arrest by Saudi Arabia's religious police. Yet, in both contexts women's work dress is subject to varying degrees of regulation and in both contexts men's appearance and behavior is comparatively less stringently monitored or regulated. Gendered norms and codes can also contradict UK norms and expectations of gender equality at work. Women often conform to dress norms because of the existence or threat of formal and informal policing and regulation and because they internalize these norms; for many religious women, they are part of the habitus they have imbibed since childhood. But just as women visiting Saudi Arabia sometimes object or resist, so do women working for UK religious employers. In relation to their sense of personal and professional identity and authenticity, women who did not share the religious habitus, background or embodied dispositions of the context they worked in – whether Saudi Arabia or UK FBOs – felt more uncomfortable, less at ease and more negative about the dress adaptations they needed to make.

This study has illustrated the role of dress in lived religious practice, and specifically, in religious workplaces and contexts. We argue that women's modest workwear in religiously inflected contexts can be considered an example of lived religion. In adapting to modest dress, women working in religious contexts become part of the religious culture of the organization or context, participating in its daily rhythms. They live out the religion of the work context through modest dress and they serve the organization's religious aims – including when the organizational aim may be to accommodate religious norms generated by location rather than by the organization itself. Although their religious beliefs and backgrounds vary and do not always match those of their workplaces, we have sought to show how the different dimensions of lived religious practice identified by Ammerman are present for women working in the religious contexts of Saudi Arabia and UK FBOs. Embodiment, moral judgment and emotion are the most evident, but materiality, aesthetics, and spirituality also feature in the women's narratives.

For women working in FBOs in the UK, there is a fit between their religious habitus, their embodied dispositions, and the clothes they wear in their workplace. For women travelling to work in Saudi Arabia, there is much less of a connection, and women's habitus is more likely to be Christian in background or secular, with the professional dress they are accustomed to in UK businesses and organizations, for example the skirt or trouser suit, having to be shed or covered as women don their abaya on the airplane to Saudi Arabia. That some UK women choose to work in Saudi Arabia, a context very different from their own religious habitus, demonstrates the way in which the globalized nature of work in postindustrial economies, such as the UK, enables ruptures to and transformations of habitus (cf. Mellor and Shilling 2014). Religious dress enables them to begin to acquire a new habitus via the bodily discipline (cf. Mahmood) of wearing the abaya each day, including learning how to walk differently to accommodate a long garment. Yet where Mahmood considers practices of modest dressing as one of the means by which the internal pious disposition is cultivated, the occupational wearing of – in this instance – the abaya is more often understood as a temporary situational tactic to

ensure mission delivery. Learning to manage an abaya can be a professional advantage for any woman working in Saudi, but the ability to disassociate from or be interpellated more fully within the religious disciplines the abaya represents is differentially available depending on women's personal – or perceived – religious affiliation, racialized presentation, and age and appearance. Women who accept wearing the abaya as “the price of doing business” include both women who are sanguine in the face of interpellation into another religious culture and those who feel strongly affronted by the gender and religious politics of what they are compelled to wear. In contrast to the alienness of the abaya as workwear for everyone we interviewed, the sometimes smaller wardrobe adjustments required in UK FBOs use a familiar and easier to source set of garments. Yet the incursion of modesty codes into the familiar wardrobe can be more pervasive on the individual sense of self – unlike the abaya as a foreign context-specific garment, the familiarity of clothing for the UK religious workplace bleeds out from and into women's “normal” attire. This makes modest presentation both easier to achieve and harder to disassociate from, troubling boundaries between work and home, religious and secular.

The examples discussed in this article demonstrate continuities in habitus (especially in UK FBOs and for women whose work dress aligns with their own religious background) and changes in habitus (especially in Saudi Arabia and for women whose work dress deviates from their religious or non-religious background). Lived religious practice in work contexts presents unique challenges and dilemmas of habitus and authenticity. We argue that when women are expected to embody through dress a different religion from their own, or a religion when they are non-religious, the lack of fit between the women's religious habitus and their workplace creates discomfort and an authenticity dilemma. Wearing religious dress in the workplace is not a straightforward example of lived religion, akin to a Roman Catholic praying with rosary beads during a lunch break. Women dressing for a religious employer or context experience ruptures of habitus and dilemmas of authenticity not understood by religious employers and not considered by sociologists of religion. So, while we would

argue that modest dress in religious workplaces can be regarded as a form of lived religious practice irrespective of the religious or philosophical beliefs of the wearer, and that dress is an integral part of lived religion (whether at home, leisure or work), religious dress in the workplace is not always comfortable or easy. Religious workplace dress does not necessarily align with women's own religio-spirituality. Within sociology of religion, lived religion approaches have often been celebrated as a way to represent the authentic and neglected religio-spirituality of people who have been neglected by mainstream sociology. We share this impetus but note that this approach is insufficient to understand the diversity of women's experiences in following religious dress codes. Our evidence of the discomfort, regulation and constraint of religion-related dress offers theorists of lived religion a new and challenging case. Lived religion is usually used to aid understandings of authentic but neglected forms of spiritual practice outside or beyond institutional contexts, so what does it mean to use it for forms of lived practice that contradict the religious or philosophical beliefs of some of its "practitioners"? What possibilities does such an expansion of meaning offer? We argue that expanding the meaning offers many possibilities, but that the concept of habitus should be brought into dialogue with that of lived religion to enable a careful understanding of the difficulty of fully transforming the embodied dispositions someone holds in relation to religion, gender, ethnicity, and so forth, and their dilemmas of habitus and authenticity.

Beyond the specific field of women in religious workplaces in the UK and Saudi Arabia, more sociology of religion research is needed on religion and the workplace. Scholars will find the workplace a rich site for studying lived religion, not just for women, but for all workers in religious contexts. Further studies on the interaction between work and religion can also build on the widespread incursion of work into the home during and after the COVID-19 pandemic; this is a new layer of complexity given that religious dress codes often distinguish between public and private spaces. Dress is also an important theme for sociologists of religion so that the field can expand

beyond dress as leisure activity and personal choice and beyond the focus on Muslim women and the hijab – both topics are important, but there is a rich field for investigation.

In proposing that workplace dress be considered as lived religious practice even for individuals who are not personally religious, we seek to initiate a debate about the limits of concepts such as “lived religion” – how can this and other definitions of religion account for situations of lived (religious) practice where religious belief or spirituality is often but not always present? If it were only appropriate to use “lived religion” to signify personal spirituality, the power of its contribution to sociology of religion would diminish. The lived religion concept has contributed to broadening the purview of what is understood as religious and worthy of sociological investigation, and it has offered vital insights. Many would not go so far as to argue that personal religious belief or personal spirituality has no relevance when theorizing religious practice. Undoubtedly, advocating a theory that renders personal belief irrelevant has similar drawbacks to other theories that have done this, such as implicit religion or civil religion. Yet the case of women dressing for work in religious contexts shows us the complexities of narratives, experiences and contexts. It calls us to carefully interrogate the role of dress and its intersection with religion in diverse and interrelated global contexts and to be open to revising theories to account for this complexity.

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