Modesty body dressing: A case-study of young Jewish Orthodox women's religious compliance and individual fashion style

Keywords: modesty / Jewish Orthodox / fashionable / religiosity / cultural communities / symbolic

Abstract

Over the last decade there has been a renaissance and growth of Orthodox Judaism, globally claimed to be in excess of 200,000. (www.rickross.com 29/072007) In the UK, the major communities are centred in localised districts of London and Manchester. However, despite growing numbers little has been written on the social aspects of Orthodox Judaism an important component of one of the three major Abrahamic faiths. This exploratory study aims to address this gap in the literature by attempting to understand the interplay and religious tensions of dress compliance by young Orthodox females and the desire within these parameters to be contemporary and fashionable. The paper outlines key Halachic laws on modest female dressing, which includes the covering of the majority of the arms and legs, loose fitting dresses and skirts and no gender cross-dressing which is interpreted as prohibition of trousers (Rabbi Falk, 1998; Rabbi Henkin, 2003). This discussion will be contextualised with discourse analysis from the (limited) cultural texts that exist on this subject. (Boynton Arthur, 1999 & 2002; Yadgar, 2006 and Yafeh; 2007) An empirical qualitative case-study methodology, using oral biographic interviews conducted with a sample of young Jewish Orthodox women mainly aged 18-35, explores their individual fashion styles, religious compliance and where or how they purchase their chosen apparel. This paper is at the work-in progress report stage. However analysis of the sartorial biographies may still enlighten secular fashion companies on gaps in this niche market that are specific to this target sector of consumers, many of whom wish to be considered fashionable or stylish within their own communities. The study has developed a visualization model of the religious Orthodox schisms and their community lifestyles relating to fashion attitudes and consumption patterns.

Introduction

The study of ethnically inspired fashion in multi-cultural capital cities such as London has gained currency as a valued subject for exploration, (Bhachu, 2004; Craik, 1994; Hall, 2000; Jones and Leshkowich, 2003; Tulloch, 1992, Ross, 2007) but until recently little has been written on the cultural combinations of religion and fashion. The reason for this neglect in fashion studies can be attributed to Emma Tarlo's view that religion is regarded as beyond the realms of fashion, or old-fashioned and traditional in style (Tarlo, 2007; pp 144). With the growing interest in Islamic dress, the question of fashion and the 'Muslim look' has emerged which explores the context of religion, individual style and western global fashion; the most recent discourse in a double issue of Dress, Body and Culture. (Ibid 2007)

It is timely to spotlight one of the other three Abrahamic faiths - Judaism, which has had limited research in the last four decades. This will start to establish Jewish Orthodox patterns of consumer behaviour and consumption in their dress styles within the compliance of the religious codes. This paper commences by covering the key literature on the subject, with special focus on papers by Orit Yafeh, a study of the construction of Haredi femininity in children, (2007) and the Goldman Carrel text, a feminine typology of Hasidic head coverings. (1999) The main historic 'Halachic' laws on female dress will also be set out, followed by a methodological discussion and analysis of interviews.

Jewish dress codes and cultural adaptations

Histories of Jewish costume and dress have been written by Alfred Rubins (1967) and Ruth Green (2001). Both books give historical illustrations of male and female dress around the world from Biblical to (relatively) modern times. This includes sumptuary laws that were imposed both by the secular society and the rabbinic authorities. Rubins, writing on the Jewish Sumptuary laws, explains they were 'designed only partly to curb extravagance and ostentation;' but the main object was to 'prevent the adoption of new fashions, or what was known in Hebrew as *chukkath hagoyyim…* ' This means not to dress the same as the secular world, (Leviticus xviii:3) which refers to practices of the land of Canaan. (1967; pp 2) Rubin's makes links to the Torah in terms of defining and explaining the custom of dressing and to understand the origin of the modesty codes:

> "Adam and Eve became concerned about their nudity only after they had acquired Knowledge and indeed it is now generally accepted that modesty is a sophisticated feeling unknown to primitive man. Equally the modern view that dress originates

> from the urge for decoration, is not in conflict with Jewish teaching. According to the rabbis 'the Lord's glory is man and man's ornament in his clothes'; …and one was enjoined to dress according to one's means but to eat and drink below one's means." (1967; pp 1)

Rubins again writes *'Custom and costume* are not only the same word (in Hebrew) they are inseparable…' (ibid 1) This makes the researchers job in annotating what is religious law and what is custom more problematic. What is uncontroversial across time, geography and levels of religiosity is the wearing of your finest clothes on the Sabbath and High Holy days as Green notes 'On the Sabbath one wore finer clothes than ordinary. On the festivals even finer clothes if possible and new ones. Particularly at *Rosh Hashanah* (New Year) clothes were new.' (2001, Introduction) Other key points are raised on the subject of colour. 'On the whole the wearing of black is a safe and respectable colour.' (ibid pp 144) In regard to the colour of stockings this is more about custom and varied from region to region but there had to be a marked difference from the colour worn by the men in the Eastern European *shtetls* [1] (Small Jewish villages) (ibid pp 130-131) This is because a woman should never be dressed the same as a man, which includes the prohibition of trousers.

The wearing of jewellery is encouraged particularly on the Sabbath when women '…appeared in their full glory with gold and pearls and diamonds.' (Ibid pp 130) This relates to the Friday night blessing '*Eshet Chayil'* that a husband sings to his wife 'Who can find the valiant wife? Her worth is far beyond rubies…' (Singer, 1990 pp 274)

According to Green's general observations 'There is no special dress for a woman as long as she remembers the requirements of Modesty. That means high necks, and always covering…knees and elbows – which entails long sleeves and skirts.' (Ibid pp 139) These skirts or dresses can, according to custom, consist of shapes and forms that are straight (but not tight) full, plain, pleated or long, providing they are considered modest and refined. (ibid pp 139) Goldman Carrel carefully defines the modesty codes according to Hasidic ultra-orthodoxy '…a woman's hair is considered an *ervah,* or erotic stimulus, one of several *ervah* parts of a woman's body (Fuchs, 1985). Other areas include her neck (below and including the collar bone), her arms (the upper arms, including the elbow) and legs (the thighs, including the knees).' (1999; pp 165) Therefore when this is referred to in the interview analysis it will be according to the Torah interpretation.

Rabbi Falk (1998) is considered the world authority on the subject of Jewish dress codes and modesty dressing, but although his Halachic roots and descriptions are undeniably definitive his interpretation can be considered too literal and rigid by modern orthodox women. Therefore Rabbi Henkin's (2003) more contemporary views on women's issues including dress are preferred by some. This minefield of interpretation is often made more problematic by the individual religious community's cultural dress customs. Yafeh (2007, pp 516-517) writes on Haredi Jewish kindergarten girls constructing an early ideal of femininity through 'cultural practices and attitudes concerning different body parts and bodily behaviours - dress, hair, voice…', which create a unique concept of Haredi femininity. Yafeh also offers an original contribution to the construction of Jewish Orthodox identity that links specifically Haredi ideology to times-past 'Haredi girls embody a unique concept of time reflecting the importance attributed in their culture to reliving the past as a formative experience of both present and future identities'. She argues that all Jewish identity is constructed through major past events which are relived through Shabbat and other religious holiday cycles. The key difference is that the Haredim view themselves as a distinct group that differs from the rest of society by 'lifestyle, dress code, education, and worldview (Caplan 2003) …Therefore, modernity and Western culture are rejected' (Ibid pp 522).The girls at an early age are taught of the time link with the past, that their ancestors dressed in the same way as they do now. The emphasis on visual resemblance with Jews of the past 'creates an imagined community…composed of ancient Israelites and contemporary Haredim…' (Ibid pp 529) I suggest this is even more important with the Jewish Orthodox Diaspora, regardless of levels of religiosity. Therefore British diasporic women place an even stronger emphasis on constructing their Jewish and feminine identity through dress. Caplan's paper concludes by stating that Ultra-Orthodox communities create 'cultural "symbolic bridges" between past and present, which 'may constitute cornerstones of identity' (Ibid pp 544).

The subject of head covering for a married woman is particularly fraught with religious and ritual complexity and needs to be discussed to illuminate empirical analysis. Green gives a simplified overview 'The theory is that a married woman should only look attractive for her husband!' (2001, pp 154) This head covering takes many guises a wig or *sheitl*[2]*;* a 'fall' which is a half wig that is designed to be worn with a scarf or bandana; a hat, scarf or snood (long scarf-like hat that is designed to fall into a long point at the back) or any combination of these. The real hair underneath can according to custom and the husband's preference be kept long, cut short, or even completely shaved off although rare today in anything other than a few ultra-orthodox

communities. The custom for Jewish married women to cover their heads can be traced to antiquity and the *Mishnah*[3] describes this as a 'Jewish Ordinance.' (1967, pp 20) Green (2001) and Rubins (1967, pp 21) write that the wearing of wigs dates back to biblical times but the cutting of the hair became popular in 18-19th century Poland. Wigs during this period were disapproved of by the Rabbis but became more acceptable in Western Europe and America. There is now a real dichotomy about the wearing of expensive *Sheitls* since if they look like your own hair, making you more desirable and overly attractive to men, they defeat the original intention of wearing the wig. (Ibid pp 132 &154) Goldman Carrel's study of Hasidic women's head coverings uses Bourdieu's theory of cultural distinction (2002) to develop a typology of religiosity based on the levels of head covering within the American Hasidic community. (1999 pp 169) However in order to fully understand the dictates for women in different religious communities it is first necessary to establish a preliminary model of Jewish Orthodox hierarchical religiosity based on contemporary literature. The model has been created as a visualization aid, using categories of religious versus secular interaction clearly affecting women's attitudes to fashion consumption and behaviour. Text in the boxes references the origin of relevant publications.

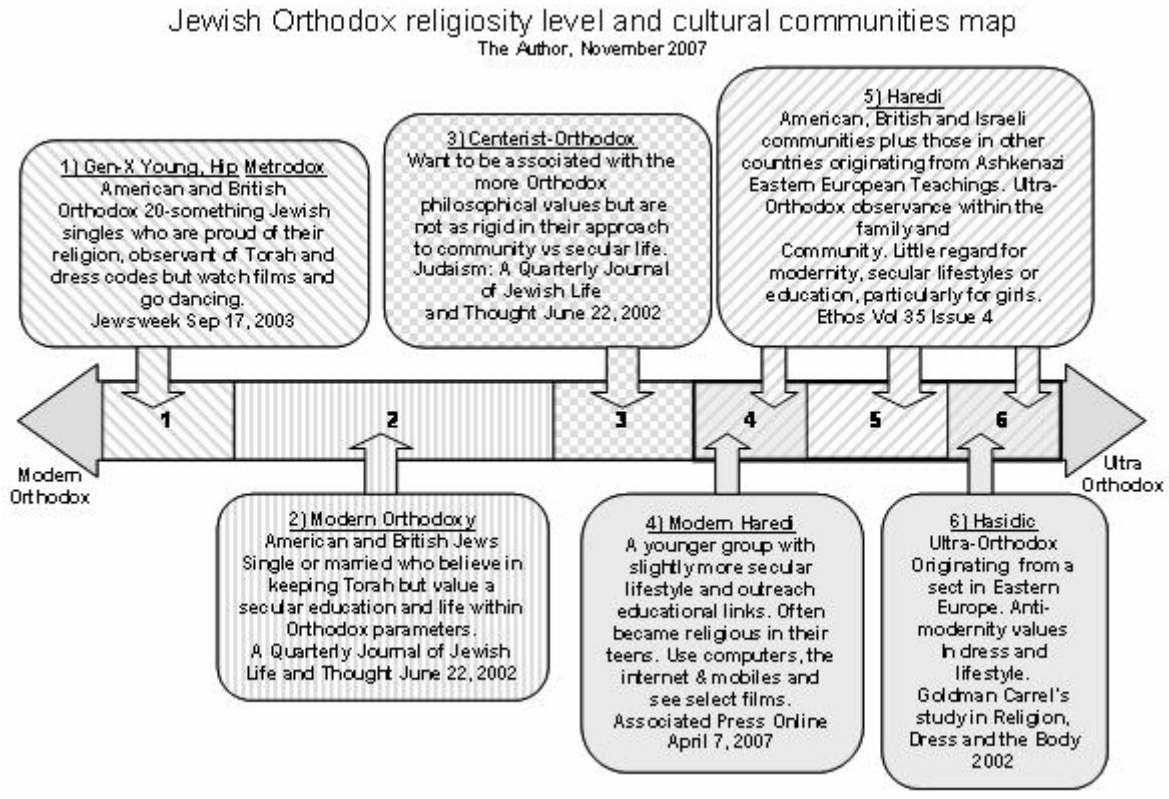

Figure 1. Jewish Orthodox religiosity and cultural communities map

Symbolic distinctions have differed throughout time and across national and religious boundaries resulting in an interpretative struggle to embody the representation of Hasidic women (Ibid 1999; pp 166). Based on her ethnographic fieldwork the following (edited) typology gives an important guide to the variables based on the Hasidic woman's station in life through reading the symbolism of head-covering.

Category	Head coverings worn by women. After Goldman Carrel (1999)
1)	Scarf only + padding to feign the appearance of height. Hair completely covered.
1a)	Scarf + piece of brown pleated material at front under scarf to feign hair. (*Schpitzel*). Hair completely covered.
1b)	Scarf + *Schpitzel* of 100% synthetic hair
2)	100% synthetic wig + scarf all the time.
2a)	100% synthetic wig + hat all the time.
2b)	50% human hair wig + scarf all the time.
2c)	50% human hair wig + hat all the time.
2d)	100% human hair wig + scarf all the time.
2e)	100% human hair wig + hat all the time.
3)	100% synthetic wig only
3a)	50% human hair wig only
3b)	100% human hair wig only.

Figure 2. Typology of Hasidic women's head coverings

These twelve variables are applicable to the ultra-orthodox Hasidic married women's head coverings and indicate that analysis of data on all areas of dress across the spectrum of religious and cultural communities is a complex problem. Therefore although commonalities can be identified in this study the complete typology model cannot be evaluated until the sample has increased to become representative of the complete religious spectrum.

Methodological discussion

Phenomenological research takes the experiencing agent as the starting point and explores the world of lived experience. The researcher is also considered an active part of the construction of the research rather than an impartial vessel that collects knowledge; in the case of this study by

being of the same faith, the respondents felt at ease and empathetic towards the researcher. (Hackley 2003, pp112-113)

An exploratory research study was chosen as this gives a better insight and understanding of the different communities. It is accepted that a theoretically informed interpretation of the research data will generate rich descriptions of everyday consumer behaviour and attitudes to fashion and can therefore be considered a legitimate scientific approach. Qualitative data was required rather than statistical material as the research questions are based on the acquisition of phenomenological knowledge. (Hackley 2003, pp 112-113) This took the form of transcripts and/or audio-recordings of interviews with observations and photographs when permitted, generally of the clothes on a hanger or arranged on a flat surface but never shown on the person for ethical, personal or discretionary reasons. Ethnography is often considered 'just another form of observation' (Payne, 2004 pp 94) but others explain that carrying out ethnographic research includes making subjects feel at ease and gaining 'trust' in relation to the researchers intervention so that material can be gathered about their working lives and their dress requirement. (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995 pp 152) Such an opportunity presented itself when an invitation was extended by a respondent to view two specially designed outfits that had been restyled to fit with the modesty codes.

Content analysis can be used for either text or image-based analysis and was considered a suitable way of presenting evidence from the interviews and visual material. Silverman (2003, pp 45-46) states that 'content analysis' is a favoured method in which researchers establish a set of criteria or categories and then count the number of instances that fall into each designation. All respondents were asked if they would be happy to have photographs taken of their favorite outfits. This usually consisted of two, a best for Shabbat or special occasions and a work-day outfit. These images are analysed alongside the transcribed interviews to look for commonalities or differences in styles within the modesty dress codes.

Sample sizes should be determined on the grounds of pragmatism, representativeness and quality of insights generated. (Hackley 2003 pp 112) Pragmatism dictated that this initial research had to be completed for a set deadline, although further research is continuing. Representativeness and quality of insights were combined, by interviewing three or four respondents from three groupings of 18-22; 23-28 and 29-35+ years. Those selected were based on a recommended 'Snowball' sampling, a valid approach as the aim was to understand

what is currently happening across the religious range. According to Geoff and Judy Payne (2004, pp 74) this method begins with a few informants who pass researchers on to other informants who add more useful information. It stops when either there are no more respondents, or no more useful information is required. The study started with friends who knew respondents in the relevant religious categories, further recommendations came through the website-blog of a local North London Jewish community. This method was considered an ethically acceptable way to gain trust and confidence within the Jewish communities. It is accepted that more respondents are required from the Ultra-Orthodox sector, but agreement is required from the families and community taking more time for the snowball approach to be effective.

Interviews were in depth, conducted either face-to-face or on the telephone and averaged 40 minutes although some respondents felt happy to talk for over an hour's duration. The research design originated in many cases from the literature, and the questions were semi-structured in order to allow respondents to expand their opinions. Where possible and with permission the interviews were recorded.

A general philosophical overview of the interviews

Before analysing the responses it is valuable to cover some key issues on the notion of 'fashion' in the Jewish community that emerged from the interviews. The youngest respondent was 19 and had originated from an Ultra-Orthodox community in Gateshead, Newcastle (category 5) but had shifted towards modern Orthodoxy (Category 2) since studying in London. Her story was therefore interesting as she had lived at two ends of the Jewish Orthodoxy lifestyle spectrum.. What I called the 'Poncho debate' comes from her narrative which helps illuminate the fashion versus secular world dress-compliance tensions. Three or fours years ago Ponchos were all the rage in fashion. The respondent wanted to buy one but despite the fact the shape, colour and body-covering all conformed to the modesty dress codes her family disapproved because it was worn by everyone else outside of the Jewish community and therefore fell into the edict of '*chukkath hagoyyim…* ' not dressing the same as the secular world. (Rubins,1967; pp 2) The wife of a Rabbi summed up this 'fashionable' dichotomy as follows: 'You can be fashionable or stylish but it is in a different way, it is a different fashion sub-sector'. She also felt that if you needed an overall code for how to dress on a day to day basis rather than considering every fashion apparel purchase in terms of colour, form or length it could be measured against this benchmark 'The aim is always to be attractive but not attracting.' This

originates from ‘This ideology (which) prohibits a woman from standing out-and from being outstanding.’ (Henkin, 2003; pp 37) Another respondent, a university lecturer who categorized herself as Modern Orthodox (category 2) also had many friends in category (1) Metrodox. She commented: ‘Some things are more about societal taboos than Halachic laws’ and she felt religious Jews in Britain dressed differently to the Modern Jewish Orthodox style in Israel which was more casual. This was not just related to climate but also communal differences, ‘religious British people define themselves by clothing – so therefore clothing is more important.’ This has clear links with Yafeh's thesis (2007) of the diaspora’s ‘imagined community’ through past styles of dress (Ibid pp 529). The discussion with the respondent continued to identify the importance of being recognized and categorized by your dress, ‘as clothes signified your belonging to a specific religious group’ within the Jewish Orthodox community. For the secular world however the reading was a more generalized interpretation of identity as belonging to a homogenous Jewish Orthodox group. The important point is that there is a double meaning to Jewish dress compliance, to be both recognized within and without the Jewish community and this can be described as the general philosophy that underwrites all fashion behaviour and attitudes in Orthodoxy. This respondent made a further point helping to contextualize the following analysis. Jewish Orthodox fashion ‘portrayed a different type of fashion identity one that was a feminine rather than a masculine identity, a non-sexual but…*not* an a-sexual identity but definitely one that was respectable.’

An analysis of the interviews

Religious affiliations perceived by respondents (sometimes prompted by the options from the model when requested) were as follows:

Religious Category		Respondents	Notes
1	**Metrodox**	0	1 respondent recognized this as description of her friends.
2	**Modern Orthodox**	6	1 stated 'philosophy closer to Haredi'. May classify as Centralist-Orthodox
3	**Centralist Orthodox**	2	
4	**Modern Haredi**	2	
5	**Haredi**	1	
6	**Hasidic**	0	
-	**‘Orthodox’**	2	Used 'Orthodox' as a generic term, avoiding categories 1-6. From analysis possibly 'Centralist-Orthodox'

Figure 3. Sample group by religious categorisation

Marital status: six out of the thirteen were married and one was engaged, this gave an even sample split in terms of issues such as head covering.

How often do you buy clothes? All thirteen respondents fell within the category option of 'once' or 'twice a month'.

On buying new for the High Holy Days: seven out of the thirteen respondents said either 'yes' or 'they try to'. This percentage of responses is interesting as the Orthodox Haredi rabbinical view is that it is '…the duty of husbands to buy their wives pretty clothes for the High Holy days.' (Shapiro, 2002 pp 6) One respondent emphasized this fact that her husband would always say 'if you want anything new for Yom Tov (Festivals) go and buy…' and she added 'it depended on the state of her wardrobe (pregnancy or getting back her figure) but it was a good opportunity…' this was echoed by another respondent 'Good opportunity to get something nice for Festivals, something special for Yom Tov' another respondent said 'Yes it is tradition, a Mitzvah[4] religious girls like to dress like queens especially for the festivals.' Five of the respondents gave a closed response of 'no' and one qualified 'no' as 'if you have something new wear it…'. If the sample was larger the religious affiliation could be mapped out by the model to show the affirmative responses indicate that the Modern Orthodox woman (1-2) are less likely to buy new than the Ultra Orthodox women (3-6) and this is noted for on-going research.

All respondents considered they adhered to the modesty dress codes but their cultural and ritual interpretation showed variability. On the length of skirt all thirteen respondents agreed it had to be below the knee, although on the knee is acceptable the consideration was whether your knees showed when you sat down. The style of skirt was less of a consideration with the caveat of 'not too tight' which was quoted on twelve occasions and was sometimes dependent on whether stockings or tights were worn. The biggest divide between the levels of religiosity was on fabric, in particular 'denim'. All six Modern Orthodox respondents said yes, many said they wore 'lots of it'. The respondent that had shifted her religious affiliation from 5 to 2 said 'now she was less strict, denim was ok '. Centralist-Orthodoxy to Haredi 3-5 differed 'Denim not worn in this community and it would make you stand out...I might consider black denim in London…' (Modern Haredi respondent living in Israel originally from north London). The same reasoning applied for style/length of skirts ' I would not wear skirts trailing the floor' which she added was dependent on the community she was in at the time. So the sensitivity to dress is not

just about Halachic law but also religious environment. A Modern Haredi respondent from London affirmed this as saying ‘although she did not own a denim skirt at present’ she had nothing against them philosophically and ‘dressed her girls in them’ if they were suitable in other respects. Another Haredi respondent stated ‘she never wore denim.’ One Centralist-Orthodox respondent reflected ‘she had nothing against denim or suede but would definitely never wear a leather skirt.’ This sensitivity to dress within their religious affiliation and community environment also had an impact on the choice of stockings/tights and shoes. The majority of respondents would go bare legged in the summer if their skirts were a little longer. However one Haredi respondent considered ‘she had moved to another level’ in religious terms and this meant in all environments she would not expose her legs or toes by wearing open shoes. This sensitivity to the different levels of Torah dress typology was eloquently described as ‘My religious growth spurt over a period of years has made me more sensitive to Halachic and Jewish Laws and deepened my appreciation so I now keep my legs covered at all times’.

The wearing of nightwear in a private space did allow PJ’s. Although a form of trousers these were considered suitable if they looked like they were made for women and you were sure the ‘intension of the manufacturer was to produce a women’s garment’. This applied to other apparel such as ladies shorts, swimwear and sportswear. Exercising in the gym was conducted in a women-only environment when joggers and baggy T-shirts were donned, but travelling to and from the gym the majority of respondents put on a long sleeved top and a skirt that covered most of the joggers. Swimming in a ladies-only pool it was mostly considered ok to wear a 1-piece or ‘Tankini’ (one respondent). However four of the respondents from mixed levels of religiosity went to great lengths to construct swimming attire that still fitted with the modesty codes in any public environment. ‘I buy 3 sizes up’ or ‘I swim with a long skirt and top on, but I make sure they are not good clothes that I would worry about’ and ‘I wear a baggy Lycra long-sleeved top and surfer shorts and when I come in or out of the water I put on a sarong.’

Makeup was worn by most respondents, especially for Shabbat or special occasions, and many liked to feel dressed up and special. The more Orthodox (3-5) considered the amount and colour carefully so they looked naturally enhanced rather than overtly sexy. The same principal was applied to nail varnish.

Jewellery seemed an important way of individualising your look and two respondents said they liked ‘Funky jewellery’ one referred to individually designed pieces and the other as different

costume jewellery. No-one discussed gold, rubies or pearls but symbolically the reading was that jewellery as adornment was liked, provided you did not have too many ear-piercings 'as this still currently perceived as having negative connotations in society'. Many of the photographs that have been sent show jewellery besides selected favourite special outfits and some accessories were for work-day clothes. The clothes photographed are all diverse in style, with the only commonality being the prohibition of the colour red, which has both Halachic and cultural symbolism of sexual passion and fallen women.

Head covering by the married respondents is broken down into a typology similar to Goldman Carrel's (1999; pp 166) but because of the size of the sample, no overall conclusions can be made except that Jewish law, community customs, family choices and personal preference all play an equal part in the construction of head coverings.

Category	Respondents head-covering typology
1)	Only cover hair with hat/scarf out of respect for other religious levels
2)	'A fall' + hat/scarf most of the time. A *sheitel* occasionally
2a)	Hat/scarf even at home. S*heitel* only for special occasions.
2b)	Hat/scarf + *sheitel* out of home. Snood in house.
3)	Hat/scarf because of philosophical objections. Natural-hair *sheitels* rarely worn.

Figure 4. Head covering variables for Orthodox married women

Fashion shopping

Overall interest in fashion was rated by all respondents as either 'interested' (second highest on the scale) or 'slightly interested'. Only three respondents said they read fashion magazines, One stated only 'at other people's houses.' Another respondent did not buy them as she 'did not want her husband to see them, especially models in semi states of undress'. Another told me she 'specifically had them for her work as design inspiration.' One was adamant 'she should not waste her time looking at them'. None of the respondents had television so they did not view fashion programs.

Online shopping and fashion catalogues which may be considered a suitable channel for purchasing modesty-style clothes were viewed 'sometimes' by seven of the respondents, four of which only used the facility as a pre-shopping selection experience as they 'preferred to try

clothes on'. One used online for their kids and another 'only when she was pregnant and was finding if difficult to get clothes' fitting with the modesty criteria and her personal taste.

The same shops were referenced by nearly all respondents as generally carrying ranges that worked for them. M&S Per Una, Next, Zara from the middle high street range and from the price conscious fashion shops Primark, H&M and New Look. Monsoon and Jigsaw were cited as aspirational but generally considered too expensive. Other stores mentioned by one or two respondents included BHS, Warehouse, Oui and Wallis. One shopped mainly in Long Tall Sally because of her height and because of the necessity to have the correct length clothes. At the top-end of the fashion market Massimo, The Postmistress for shoes and Harvey Nichols got a mention. Nearly all stated they buy clothes regularly either in Israel or New York where Jewish Orthodox women are better catered for.

Finally the question was posed: 'do you consider there is a growing need for the fashion industry to provide clothes that are fashionable but more modest in length, shape and colour?' Nine out of thirteen agreed, although they had no expectations of this happening. Some of the more interesting comments include:

'Yes I would like this to happen but do not expect it as the whole aim of the fashion industry is to create clothes that turn heads…There is a definite need in Britain…'

'It would make fabulous sense but commercially … the Jewish market goes no where, we are a tiny proportion of commercial spending-power...but it would be fabulous to empower all women to have choice…' Along the same lines:

'There is a place for high fashion but ordinary everyday clothes for older women and others that do not want to show lots of flesh should be possible' and one respondent was even concerned about the fashion industries choices for children. 'I do not want to buy lots of see-though clothes for my daughter'

Add-dressing a conclusion

The creation and use of the religious and cultural level map shaped from the contemporary literature helped to identify and understand the interplay and religious tensions of dress compliance by young Jewish Orthodox females and their desire within these parameters to

construct a specific form of feminine identity and acceptable fashion style. The word 'fashionable' has to be contextualised within a sub-sector of religious meaning but the variables may be related to category positioning on the model in terms of their individual cultural lifestyles and communities. The limitation of the size of the sample group and the lack of Metrodox and Hasidic respondents is to be addressed for the on-going study, in order to try to map out a complete fashion typology paralleled with the levels of religiosity.

The myth that Jewish Orthodox women are a homogenous conservative group in dress style and personality is exploded by both the textual and photographic analysis collected for this exploratory study. The Jewish laws of women's dress have been passed down from biblical times and across nations and cultures. They are still being adapted and re-appropriated, but this research has demonstrated intelligent and sensitive interpretations allowing individual female identity to be signified. While heterogeneous cultural readings can be decoded from within Jewish communities their homogeneous appearance of difference and 'otherness' is also communicated to the secular world. These polysemous meanings and tensions can be summed up by returning to the quote 'The aim is always to be attractive but not attracting,' which is considered a contemporary female Orthodox re-reading from Henkin's (2003; pp 37) interpretation of 'not standing out' or 'being outstanding' which has rather derisive connotations. The strong link with times-past through religious modesty dressing makes for comforting associations with the Jewish heritage and as Yafeh concludes 'cultural symbolic bridges…may constitute cornerstones of identity' (2007, pp 544).

In terms of the needs of this niche market, if combined with the requirements of older women and women of other religious faiths that desire a more modest interpretation of fashion there is a gap that should be addressed by the fashion industry, especially in Britain which should take note of America and Israel. In conclusion although some high street fashion stores have been cited as generally doing a good job providing for this niche; society may need to question the cult of celebrity that encourages young women to show off as much flesh as possible in order to feel fashionable and attractive. We may *all* have something to learn from the virtue of modesty in dress.

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Endnotes

[1] All endnotes come from the Joys of Yiddish

***Shtetl* =** Little city, small town, village – in particular, the Jewish communities of eastern Europe, where the culture of the Ashkenazim flourished (before World War 11) The *shtetl*, a term of special importance in the history of the Jews, evokes special meanings and memories.

[2] ***Sheitl* =** The wig traditionally worn by Orthodox Ashkenazi Jewish women, in eastern Europe, after they were married. The *shaytl* was made either of the user's hair, or someone else's hair, or false – ie., manufactured – hair. Sephardic and Oriental Jewish women never adopted the *shaytl,* but instead wore a shawl, turban, or veil over their own hair after marriage.

[3] ***Mishnah* =** The Mishnah is the codified core of the Oral Law – that vast body of analysis and interpretations that was originally not written down for fear of affecting the sanctity of the Torah.

[4] ***Mitzvoth* (plural) =** Are regarded as profound obligations, as inescapable burdens, yet they must be performed not from a sense of duty but with 'a joyous heart.'