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Programme of Study: BA Fine Art

Module: ADAD5004 Research in Practice

Word Count: 2,410

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Three Keywords: Society, Submission and Modesty

In this essay I will be exploring three key words: society, submission, and modesty. I will be observing these in different contexts by using a variety of artist's works and philosophers' interpretations and ideas. This should allow me to form a question based off this material leading to my independent research project, my dissertation. I will dominantly be looking at these topics from a female Christian point of view and will be citing some of my research from different Christianity based sources such as the bible and bible-based writings. I will be analysing artists Michaelangelo, *Botticelli*, Bruce Herman along with thinkers, Gregg, Hart, Henstock. G and more covering historical and contemporary texts.

Modesty

Modesty has a variety of interpretations. Therefore, in art, to say something is modest is a vague statement unless specified in what way it appears/feels modest.

In - The Importance of Being Modest (date unknown) by Constantine Sedikides, Aiden P. Gregg, and Claire M. Hart, there are three different dictionaries mentioned, all with varying definitions. Within the section where they try to define it, they quote a survey.

Surveys of what people typically understand by the term modesty, in which the frequency and priority of associates are used to gauge their prototypicality, confirm that modesty is as centrally defined by intrapsychic attributes {doesn't take credit, humble, thoughtful, not big-headed) as it is by social attributes (plain/not flashy, unpretentious, avoids attention) (Gregg, Hart, Sedikides, & Kumashiro, 2007).

To simplify this, as a characteristic being modest means to be humble and quiet, when applied to appearance, it means subtle, unrevealing. Thus, modesty as a term, encompasses both elements. The Christian interpretation typically means these things, but in older interpretations refers to being fully clothed, wearing clothes that cover the sexually attractive parts of the human body. This is mentioned in a Testimony article: Modesty, Inside and Out, Geoff Henstock (2013). Where Henstock references a verse discussing women's apparel "I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves" 1: Timothy 2:9 (Bible NIV Version)

The word translated "apparel" is the Greek word *katastolē* and is used only here in the New Testament. The English word 'stole,' which we use of a cloak-like garment, is derived from part of the word. Strictly speaking the word refers to a long garment or robe reaching to the feet. (Henstock. G. 2013)

This is not followed by most of the modern-day Christian women as different interpretations appear to infer the verse is about an inward reflection of modesty. This is again backed up by the article that continues to explain that a newer interpretation of the Greek implies it is more about modesty and sobriety. A point that stands out is: "One has only to look at photographs of any society function to know that just because a dress reaches to the floor it does not always mean that it is

modest.” (Henstock. G. 2013) However, does this imply that society is simply peer pressuring the Christian community into changing their interpretation of the bible to relate more to current societies? As society becomes more body and sex positive, the Christian community eases into what would have been considered immodest to previous generations.

Nakedness is something that is considered immodest by Christian cultures, contrast to this, in ancient Greek and Roman societies it was glorified. We see this through many sculptural examples such as the statue of David by Michelangelo (1501 – 1504). The statue of David does not appear it was created for the impact of being immodest but quite the opposite.



Michelangelo's Statue of David (1501-1504), Accademia gallery Florence (2020)

My interpretation of this statue is that Michelangelo created this with a modest, humble impression. David did not have a sword or armour like a heroic warrior. The stance is slightly slanted, not a strong, bold heroic stance that David had the potential for. In his eyes, Michael depicted the fear as David prepared to go to battle with a giant. Michel had the opportunity to sculpt a historic hero full of pride, but instead depicted a scared boy, with soft sculpted edges, flowing curly hair and exposed. I feel that in this time, this could have been how they depicted modesty, through raw emotion and exposure. Leading me to believe that there is a possibility society is going back to their roots of depicting modesty not from what we wear but from our character and display of emotions, and contentment. Hence modern interpretations of Christian women behaving a certain way to show their modesty and submission, not through what they wear.

On the contrary to this, there has been issues with the Statue of David and its appearance to the public. For example, the statue of David by Michelangelo has had its genitalia covered and uncovered over different eras, based on societal views at different points in time. In 1937, a 3D printed copy of the statue of David was placed in the Italy Pavilion at the Dubai Expo. A fig leaf was installed over the genitalia, due to it being said to be "inappropriate" by the Exposition organisers, as public nudity is illegal in the United Arab Emirates. (Averrer. D. Daily mail. October 2021) This is just one example of a time the statue's genitalia was covered due to people deeming it inappropriate or immodest, disregarding the artist's intentions for the statue.

Submission

Submission is, as defined by the Merriam Webster dictionary, "an act of submitting to the authority or control of another" Merriam-Webster.com. (2019).

Within most religions, being a woman often comes with being submissive. We see this in Islam, Christianity and more: Veenat. A, Mishra. J. A (2016) "Women and religion"

This does not fit in with today's societies agenda as the world pushes for equality and is becoming a place where people are treated equally, for example, on the 17th of March 2022 "the House of Lords is scheduled to hold a "debate to mark International Women's Day" Brader. C (March 2022)

In the Christadelphian society, it is taught that women, who are called sisters, should submit to the men, called brothers. This is taken from scripture "Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything" (Ephesians 5:22-24 NKJV Bible)

This is done through a variety of actions, such as being modest, being quiet during service and not instructing brothers. Doing domestic chores is part of this as it is believed women were made to take care of the house and children while men bring money and food into the house. Another way is through wearing a head covering, this is said in 1 Corinthians 11 "every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven" 1 Corinthians 11:5 ESV.

The reason for this is because men represent Jesus, and the women represent the ecclesia. (1Corinthinas11:2) This is also the case in Islam, where the women wear burqas to appear modest before people.

This is often represented in Christian art, where the women in paintings where a headscarf, the most famous examples are of Mary holding baby Jesus, typically in

blue to represent the mourning she would go through for her son and wearing a head covering to show her submission to the will of God.



Madonna of the Book by Sandro Botticelli, 1480

In this painting, Mary is dressed as what would be classed as modest. A prevalent point Paul makes in the bible in 2 Timothy is that women should avoid braided hair, gold, and pearls, none of which Mary is wearing (1Timothy2v9 ESV). Within the testimony article, Henstock mentions “The fact that sisters were to wear head coverings at ecclesial meetings suggests that the problem was not the fact that they styled their hair but that, having done so, they would make a show of the fact.” (Henstock. G. 2013) implying that the verse has been taken too literally in religious art where the women are often conveyed in duller outfits. Perhaps even justifying the

climate today where it is praised to wear expensive clothes, jewellery and to take pride in oneself.

This all implies that modesty is a form of submission to the patriarchal society we used to live in here in the UK and that some countries still live in. This goes against the feminist movement that society celebrates here in the UK. The question posed is that, are religious women shamed by the public for their beliefs and does that contradict the notion of treating people of all beliefs, genders, and races equally? Or are women of a religious belief where they submit to men, holding the feminist movement back through their high demographic and therefore power in numbers?

A paper, Efforts by Women of Faith to Achieve Gender Equality by Koehler. R and Calais Haase. G (May 2018) discusses how there are many religious women fighting for equality within their beliefs, churches etc in America,

Sally Jane Priesand was the first woman in the United States to be ordained as a rabbi and has worked in the central conference of American Rabbis task force on women to help more women become ordained in the reform Jewish movement. (Koehler. R. May 2018)

Society

Society plays a key role in the progression of equality, change and justice. I want to look at how society has been able to change the interpretation of a women's role over the years, even in the Christian community where the core values and beliefs come from the bible. To narrow the society down I will be analysing the UK as an example. The UK has always been a primarily Christian country, without splitting that into different branches of Christianity:

“We tend to associate the arrival of Christianity in Britain with the mission of Augustine in 597 AD. But in fact, Christianity arrived long before then, and in the 1st Century AD, there was not an organised attempt to convert the British.” - (BBC writer 2011)

The kings and queens of the country have always been from a branch of Christianity, and that is relevant today as queen Elizabeth follows the belief, “The Queen's relationship with the Church of England was symbolised at the Coronation in 1953 when Her Majesty was anointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury” (royal.uk)

In an article by Julie Hamilton, Representing Women in Contemporary Religious Painting (2015) she discusses contemporary artists trying to convey religious women in an empowering light, which poses contradictions to catholic beliefs. This could be the influence of modern society on ancient texts like the bible and religions like Catholicism.



QU4RTETS No.2 (Summer) 97" x 60" Bruce Herman 2012

Eleanor Heartney argues in *Postmodern Heretics: The Catholic Imagination in Contemporary Art* that contemporary feminist artists have found the Magdalene and Virgin tropes an oversimplification for the iconography of women. In attempting to deal honestly with female sexuality and human equality, many have found the Virgin Mary to be a problematic ideal for women. (Hamilton. J, 2015)

Where it mentions the oversimplification for the iconography of women, it refers to the paintings of Mary being a generalisation for women. The artist strives to display modesty within the woman's character in this painting, so although the figure remains shirtless, the femininity, modesty, humbleness is preserved through the soft

depiction. The painting exhorts feminism within the Christian world and uses Christian iconography of Eve to represent the first woman. This is done using the tree and colours as if in the garden of Eden. As this is a modern painting, it is fair to assume this is society's influence on the Christian world, a more equal world where the women feel freer to express themselves whilst understanding the modesty aspect of the belief.

Observing how Christianity has changed throughout the years brings into question if it is still true to its beliefs or if it has been altered by society to become more acceptable to current trends. The testimony article mentions an early piece of writing called *The Courts of the Women* (date and author unknown)

“The very differences between young women in Christ who follow holiness and others with whom they must work provide the openings for giving a reason for the Hope that is within us: these opportunities arise out of the oft-asked questions why we do not go to the pictures, theatre, or pantomime; why we do not smoke; why we do not use makeup or lipstick. Shall we dip painted lips into the wine of which Jesus said, ‘This is my blood’?” (*The Courts of Women*, date unknown)

The comparison with a Christian woman's view today is far from that point in time, showing that society must have influenced Christianity in some form. The question now posed is, has society changed core values through disapproving of what once were the core religion in the UK, or has society improved and helped understand the Bible better?

To conclude this proposal, it has become clear that modesty is not defined by one thing, but by one's actions, society's influence, and that the appearance of modesty is relative to different people of different religions and origins. Through the writings of

Constantine Sedikides, Aiden Gregg, and Claire Hart, I have come to the conclusion that the various aspects of modesty are all as important as the other. For my further independent research project, I wish to take these philosophers to further understand modesty within the art world and understand whether empowering female art coincides with Christadelphian belief. I want to do this through looking at characters in the bible and their symbolism, like the scarlet witch in Revelation and the relationship between the man and woman in the Song of Solomon book of the bible. For my practice I am going to strive to create works based on the criteria of inward modesty through religious figures, to create work equally acceptable to both Christianity and modern-day society whilst applying feminist approaches to my work. I will achieve this through painting impressionistic and contemporary based pieces. The question I am going to lead my research project with is, does the bible depict modesty in the song of Solomon books, through the explicit relationship between the man and woman, and does it reinforce feminist beliefs?

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