Information Sharing as Embodied Practice in a Context of Conversion to Islam

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Abstract
This article works to extend two emerging areas in information scholarship: religious practice and embodiment. By reporting on completed research about information practices among Muslim converts in the Toronto, Ontario, Canada area (Guzik 2017), this article reveals how information is shared in the context of religious transitions that take place within a contentious political landscape. Research was guided by ethnography and involved participant observation, semistructured interviews, and timeline drawings (Bagnoli 2009; Sheridan, Chamberlain, and Dupuis 2011). While additional themes related to navigation and authority were identified through the use of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2006), this article focuses specifically on how research participants express and exchange information through nonwritten sources such as clothing items, spoken words, and creative products. The article considers the visibility of information when it is carried on the body as religious symbols, and the implications that this visibility has for accessing expertise, places of worship, and secular public spaces. It also highlights how creative pursuits allow Muslim converts to become information producers and publishers, rather than mere consumers. These roles of production may involve written documents (e.g. sacred texts, scholarly articles, blog posts), but they are primarily expressed through physical actions and spoken words.

Introduction
As Marcia Bates and others have observed, information is woven into our everyday lives (M. Bates 1974; M. Bates 1999; Cox 2012; Savolainen 2008).

Research on information access, seeking, and representation in leisure settings, migration, healthcare, and the home has expanded information science beyond contexts such as schools and libraries, which continue to be focal points in the field (Allard 2015; Cox and Blake 2011; Dali 2013; Given et al. 2016; Gorichanaz 2015; Hartel 2010; Lloyd 2014a; Loudon, Buchanan, and Ruthven 2016; McKenzie 2010; Quirke 2015; Tinto and Ruthven 2016; Huvila 2013; Lloyd 2009; Molopyane and Fourie 2015; Pilerot 2016; Takhteyev 2012). Although religious practice is another important part of everyday life (refer to, e.g., Statistics Canada 2013), with the exception of a small number of studies on information seeking and use among Christian clergy (e.g., Michels 2014; Roland 2012; Roland and Wicks 2009), research about the role of information in religious practice remains marginal.

This issue of *Library Trends* notes that while earlier work (e.g., by Prigoda and McKenzie 2007 on a public library knitting group, and Hartel 2007 on gourmet cooking hobbyists) alluded to issues of embodied as opposed to "encoded forms of knowledge" ("Call for Papers" 2016), information scholars need to pay more attention to how people "receive information through the senses and the way the body is used as a sign that can be interpreted by others" ("Call for Papers" 2016). As Bates suggests, among its many forms and organizational patterns, information includes "corporeal expression or manifestation" and "calls, gestures, and . . . spoken language used to communicate among members of a species and between species" (M. Bates 2016b, 43). These issues go beyond abstract academic discussions; the relationship between information and the body has space design and service implications for practitioners.

With these two sensitizing concepts in mind—information in religious practice, and embodied forms of knowledge—this article reports on my completed research on information practices among Muslim converts in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) in Ontario, Canada. In addition to my interest in information that has personal and profound meaning, and its effects on transitional experiences, I was motivated to study how Muslim converts in particular become members of new religious communities. I was disturbed by the disconnect between the lived experiences of Muslim converts and a context in which some government policies, campaign platforms, and media coverage tied anxieties about threats to shared liberal democratic values and national security to Muslims. I was concerned with how this political context affects the ways in which Muslim converts identify resources to learn about Islam, and how they present themselves to family, friends, co-workers, peer believers, and the broader public. Given the attention in media and policy discourses to attempted bans on the *niqab* and other visible material forms of religious expression, this research was attuned to the role of the body as an informational resource, especially for Muslim converts who are striving to belong in new communities.

Overall, the project focused on the ways in which Muslim converts seek, evaluate, and share information that relates to their conversion experiences, and how these practices mediate the construction of their religious identities. Two main questions framed the research:

- What strategies and actions do Muslim converts employ to seek, evaluate, and share information related to their conversion experiences?
- How do these information practices help converts to develop and present Muslim identities?

More specifically, this article highlights how research participants share information through nonwritten sources (such as bodies, spoken words, and creative products) in the context of their religious transitions that take place within a contentious political landscape. While this project was concerned with how Muslim converts construct identities through direct experiences (which often involve being physically situated in particular places), this article focuses primarily on the body as a sign—that is, the ways in which physical bodies can act as resources or tools to display information. This perspective follows scholarship from outside of information studies, such as Erving Goffman's (1959) ideas about "self-presentation" (discussed in more detail below). It is therefore somewhat distinct from other perspectives on embodiment, such as sensory ethnography (Ingold 2011; Pink 2009), and information research that considers how senses such as touch and smell interact with cognition to enable a person to develop knowledge and literacies (Lloyd 2009; Lloyd 2010; Polkinghorne 2017), experience pleasure (Keilty 2016), and retain memories (Chen 2016).

Literature Review

One of the major literature areas that informed this research is the emerging body of work on spiritual and religious information behavior and practice. One of the earliest studies at the intersection of information and spirituality was Jarkko Kari's doctoral dissertation on Finnish paranormalists' information needs and seeking activities (2001). Kari found that supernatural information experiences do not subscribe to strict, linear timelines, and that information could be sought and obtained through what participants understood to be "supernatural modes of communication" (3). Since Kari's study was conducted, research on information behavior in spiritual contexts has primarily focused on information seeking among Christian church leaders. For example, scholars have investigated how Lutheran clergy look for information to prepare sermons (Roland 2007; Roland and Wicks 2009), instances of "stopping behavior" among Southern Baptist ministers—that is, the point during an information search process when a person thinks s/he has gathered enough information to complete an activity such as sermon preparation (Lambert 2010), the ways in which digital media affect Baptist church leaders' information-

seeking processes as they develop their personal faith and make corporate decisions (Michels 2014), and everyday life information needs of Catholic clergy in Northern Nigeria (Dankasa 2016). Other information scholars have considered the role of documents in spiritual experiences, such as Christian icons that convey theological narratives through visual representations (Walsh 2012), and "numinous experiences" that museum visitors have with museum objects (Latham 2014). More recently, information scholars have considered information that is "deeply meaningful" and "beyond everyday life" (Clemens and Cushing 2010), and religious information practices among New Kadampa Buddhists that can be routine (immanent) and profoundly emotional (transcendent) (Chabot 2017). One study explores information seeking among Muslim clerics as they perform preaching and counseling in Borno State, Nigeria (Saleh and Abu Bakar 2012), yet this study remains focused on religious leaders in their work rather than laypeople in their everyday lives.

Additionally, this research drew upon ideas from social scientific studies of religion, which consider the nature of conversion as an ongoing process. Psychologist of religion Lewis Rambo's (1993) holistic model of conversion outlines a typology of religious changes such as "institutional transition, affiliation, intensification, and apostasy and defection" (39) and seven stages that characterize conversion—namely, context, crisis, quest, encounter, interaction, commitment, and consequences. Anthropologist Henri Gooren's framework, based on sociologist James T. Richardson's idea of a "conversion career" (Richardson and Stewart 1978), proposed that a person experiencing conversion may engage in five levels of religious activity—namely, preaffiliation, affiliation, conversion, confession, and disaffiliation—throughout his/her life, and that religious changes are continuous (Gooren 2010, 48–51). In contrast with earlier understandings of conversion as an abrupt, dramatic event (e.g., James 1902), anthropologist of religion Simon Coleman (2003) has argued that it is through ritualized rhetorical and proselytizing activities that believers continuously maintain their personal faith, even if these activities are intended to convert others.

Studies of conversion to Islam in particular have found that conversion involves a gradual seeking process in which a person evaluates religious options before deciding to become Muslim (e.g., Poston 1992). Sociologist of religion Ali Köse's studies of British converts to Islam in the United Kingdom acknowledge the continuity that many participants experienced between their previous faith traditions and Islam (Köse 1994). Köse also found that converts made an ongoing transition to become Muslims after pronouncing their declaration of faith by learning to pray in Arabic, participating in Islamic practices, and adopting a new lifestyle (1999). Other studies (e.g., Hemlow 2011; Mansson McGinty 2007; van Nieuwkerk 2008)

have observed that ongoing contemplation, learning, reading, and discussions are central to experiences of converting to Islam.

Furthermore, this study aimed to expand on the literature on religious identity and performance. For the purposes of this research, *religious identity* is defined as the distinguishable style or expression of a person's religious affiliation and spiritual values, which may be recognized by others through a person's actions, rhetorical practices, and preferences, and through the ways in which others relate and respond to them (Bourque 2006; Lemke 2010; Mulderig 2011; Rogozen-Soltar 2012; Stromberg 1993). Literature on religious identity as something that is performed in relation to authorized legitimators suggests that it is a discursive construction that reflects an implicit *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977, 1990). Philosophers, gender theorists, and scholars of religion have suggested that people construct their identities through "bodily practices," including choices about clothing and physical aesthetics, that allow them to be recognized as peers in their communities (Butler 1993, 1997a, 1997b; Mahmood 2004; Zebiri 2007). Using a "dramaturgical" approach, with theatrical metaphors of front and back stage, the late sociologist Erving Goffman (1959) proposed that people actively engage in what he called "presentation of the self" in everyday social situations. A key part of this idea is the notion that self-presentation involves intentionally managing the impressions of one's audience according to the perceived demands of particular interactions (Goffman 1959). Goffman's later work (e.g., 1963) observed that challenges to self-presentation are "most sharply felt by those who express or carry certain marginalized or non-normative identities—especially those that may be socially or culturally stigmatized" (Haimson and Hoffman 2016).

For this paper, Bates's ideas about information as "patterns of organization [of] physical materials" (M. Bates 2016a, 21) are also especially relevant for thinking about the representational patterns that indicate a person's religious affiliation and values. As Bates explains, these "patterns are known to us, because we . . . have developed evolutionarily to be able to discern and construct patterns of organization . . . to have observational experiences and to articulate our experiences" (21). This capacity to recognize patterns of organization allows people to express and represent their beliefs and values—including religious affiliation, for some—through physical materials carried on the body, such as clothing and jewelry.

Methods

Research for this project was guided by ethnography—a qualitative methodology that aims to develop rich descriptions of participants' personal experiences, based on the researcher's social immersion in particular sites and communities and documentation of observed actions and practices

(Bernard 2011; Clifford 1983). Between November 2014 and July 2015, I attended religious conventions, discussion groups, and religious education classes, and recorded detailed fieldnotes. These site visits took place at conference centers, mosques, and university classrooms and meeting rooms in the GTA. Additionally, I attended an *iftar* dinner for Muslim women, hosted at a home in the GTA and coordinated through a local chapter of a convert care organization. I also met with thirteen Muslim converts (nine women and four men) and two converts' spouses (one woman and one man) at cafes, libraries, and homes in the GTA for individual semistructured, narrative interviews (J. Bates 2004; Jovchelovitch and Bauer 2000). Initial interviews (held between June 2014 and July 2015, with an average time of one hour and 10 minutes) helped establish trust and a context for participants' conversion experiences by focusing on critical moments, resources, and people in their lives. Follow-up interviews focused on participants' experiences of seeking and learning from information sources. The average time between initial and follow-up interviews was seventy days, with as little as nineteen days between initial and follow-up interviews.

During follow-up interviews (held between September 2014 and October 2015, with an average time of one hour and 23 minutes), participants were given the option to create a timeline drawing. This drawing exercise is an arts-based technique that is designed to prompt participants to reflect on their current experiences, memories of the past, and goals or expectations for the future (Bagnoli 2009; Jackson 2012; Sheridan, Chamberlain, and Dupuis 2011).[1] This technique served two main purposes: (1) it generated insights into participants' conversion experiences and related information practices, and (2) it offered participants a chance to create a product that evoked further conversation. The timeline drawings also acted as a chance for the researcher and participant to discuss "something they see together" (Cerwonka and Malkki 2007, 149), and work toward balancing the power dynamic inherent in a conventional interview. Discussed below are three of the ten drawings that participants completed during follow-up interviews. The first is by Dahlia,[2] a film producer who also holds a graduate degree in journalism. Dahlia described her drawing (see the drawing in Guzik 2017, 73) as follows:

> That's me, after converting. . . . Various journeys I took because of converting. . . . A lot of the times when I get bogged down in this, like the world of experience, I lose sight of like the point of it all. . . . I don't often stop and look at the stars, but I think that if I were to, the truth would be a lot more apparent. . . . So, that's kind of what the stars represent, that kind of the natural world, and the cosmos. . . . The truth is beyond my grasp sometimes. . . . If I just stopped for a moment, I could maybe see it.

The second drawing pictured is by Hermione (see Guzik 2017, 64), who was finishing her master's degree in interdisciplinary studies at the time when fieldwork took place. As Hermione explained,

> When I was going through the literal conversion process and I was re- ally thinking like, okay, is this how I feel, is this what I'm doing? . . . I was walking in the living room in my grandmother's house, and there was a carpet there. And I was just walking in circles 'cause I just think you think more clearly when you're walking. And I remember I would stare at these Arabesques just being like, "Make sense!" . . . I was first thinking the moon and the ocean, because of the gravitational effects that the moon especially has on water. . . . In the process [of embracing Islam], I felt that something was pulling me towards something. . . . And then, okay, so that's supposed to be a reed flute. And that's supposed to be a kind of a drum. . . . When someone who knows how to play it plays a reed flute, the sound it makes, like it can convey so much more than I can.

Finally, the third drawing is by Ruqayyah (see Guzik 2017, 75), a home-school educator, who explained her drawing as follows:

> I just put Islam as the focus. And the arrows go forward. . . . In grade ten when I started working. And at school . . . I felt like I was stuck in a routine. . . . I just wasn't happy. So then at this point, I started read- ing the Bible. Which led to eventually other books. . . . I wasn't *looking* for something else. I just thought that I should gain more knowledge about the faith I was born into. And then, that time too was when I started *speaking* to more people . . . from *there*, that's when I accepted Islam, *from* the knowledge that I gained, and then, that's just when I started to learn Arabic. So I could *actually* understand the Quran and not rely on translations. . . . And then, I guess after that, I have a family now, a new community has also happened and I just drew a picture of a hijab. And then, depression at that point, contentment at that [one].

While these drawings represent different personal experiences, they point to the significance of embodied information for making a transition into a new faith community (e.g., wearing *hijab*, feeling pulled toward a spiritual force or entity, embracing a religion while being situated in a specific place, conveying messages through musical sound, and gaining knowledge by talking with other people).

Once interviews (including timeline drawings) and participant ob-servation were completed, I analyzed data using constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2006). This approach enabled me to identify patterns of information practices while remaining mindful that data are cocon-stituted by the researcher and participants through social interactions and "negotiated interpretation" (Charmaz 2006; Lloyd 2009). This kind of "abductive" (Cerwonka and Malkki 2007) analysis follows a different approach to research in a positivist paradigm that aims to have statistic-

ally representative samples and develop universal theories. As such, it should be evaluated based on different criteria, including the ability to present plausible, credible, transferable, relevant findings (Hammersley 1990; Guba and Lincoln 1982) that reveal broader concerns about practices and the meanings participants attach to them, rather than precisely recollecting objectively verifiable facts (Cerwonka and Malkki 2007; Waterston and Rylko-Bauer 2006). Data were reviewed and coded line-by-line to produce an "analytic frame" of initial codes (Charmaz 2006). Then, topics that participants described in interviews and that were addressed in fieldnotes were compared with initial codes. After identifying similarities and differences between topics and codes, and removing duplicates, data were categorized into initial groups of related themes. Next, I produced analytic memos to reflect on my observations about the themes that were generated and how these themes connected to each other. Finally, themes were developed and refined based on my interpretations about recurring, common experiences or contrasting sentiments and their relationship to research questions and sensitizing concepts.

Once themes were developed, I selected compelling excerpts from interview transcripts and fieldnotes and arranged them under three main themes: Navigation, Authority, and Expression & Exchange. These themes correspond with the research questions that are primarily concerned with the three phenomena of information seeking, evaluation, and sharing. Findings chapters were developed around "excerpt-commentary units" (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011), which combined data, my interpretations as the researcher, and connections to relevant literature. As much as possible, findings prioritized participants' voices and perspectives (over my own personal concerns or deductive theoretical assumptions and models).

Findings

This article focuses on research findings outlined under the theme of Expression & Exchange. These findings reveal how participants present religious commitments through their bodies, spoken vocabularies, and creative pursuits.

Many participants share information about their religious beliefs through the clothing they wear and their physical appearance. Unlike print publications that can be concealed in an e-reader, placed at the back of a bookshelf, or tossed into a bag, information about a person's Muslim identity when carried on the body as visible religious symbols is more difficult to hide. Because of their particular visibility in a geographic context where Muslims remain a minority group, items such as head and face coverings act as resources on which viewers may base judgments about the wearer's religious affiliation and potentially even their level of devotion. Choices about whether or not to wear certain styles or items of clothing,

and gendered aesthetic concerns about appropriate cosmetics, are made after careful reflection, consciously anticipating how Muslim peers and non-Muslims may respond to these personal choices.

For example, January recalled making the following "concessions" when she started her undergraduate degree in a new city:

> I kind of *toned down* my image. Like I used to have a lot of *piercings* and stuff, and I took 'em *out*. And then I started wearing *hijab*. . . . And I eventually got more accepted into the fabric of the Muslim community.

While January talked about the pressures she felt from her religious community to fit in by dressing more conservatively, Ruqayyah spoke about what it's like to be a visible target for Islamophobic attitudes, as follows:

> I was already in the veil [*niqab*]. I've had things thrown at me. . . . Verbal assault . . . like, "Go back to your country," "Do you speak English," you know, dirty looks or other heated things. Sometimes on the bus, when we were really constricted, there were people behind us yelling.

By wearing religiously symbolic clothing, Ruqayyah and January illustrate how information is carried on, and communicated through, the body. Materials such as head coverings are a form of what Annemaree Lloyd calls "corporeal information" (Lloyd 2010)—"information that is experienced through the senses as the body interacts with the world" (Gorichanaz 2015). Experiences such as wearing a particular clothing item or participating in a specific form of adornment are informative. These acts tell others something about the person wearing the item. They are also a material resource that helps the person wearing the item to publicly self-identify with a particular religious group. Viewers may "read" and interpret information carried on converts' bodies in a way that resembles visual representation in other religious contexts, such as iconography (Svenonius 1994; Walsh 2012).

The comments above from January and Ruqayyah reveal that, especially for Muslim women, decisions about what information to materially express to others through clothing items such as the *hijab* and *niqab* is a key consideration in defining religious identities. Such items display adherence to Islam not only because of an individual's decision to wear them but also due to widely accepted norms about how Muslim women and men are expected to dress. As religious studies scholar Géraldine Mossière observes, especially for "new Muslims, dress codes help to ensure the external embodiment of discipline and thereby reinforce the process of internalizing disciplinary practices" (2012, 116). Norms about materially expressing Muslim identity are reinforced at events such as religious convention bazaars and by online authorities such as *hijabista* bloggers,[3] who share information about how to dress in accordance with both religious codes of conduct and the latest fashion trends. In their efforts to present themselves as authentically faithful, Muslim converts may embrace and

embody these norms at a rapid pace. For instance, Ruqayyah recalled that "by the end of the first year [after taking the *shahadah*], I was fully in abaya, fully in niqab, I was wearing the veil." This is not to suggest that decisions about how to dress are static. Dahlia explained:

> For a long time, I wore the abaya. And I wore the hijab but in a more, I guess traditional way. The prescribed way. And I mean there were bumps along the way where I took off the hijab for a bit, but for the most part I was more conservative for a long period of time. And now I'm less conservative in my appearance. . . . But I don't necessarily believe this is what traditional Islam represents. It's just how I've kind of changed over time.

Dahlia's reflections reveal that religious conversion is an evolving process that involves conscious choices about clothing styles to convey personal beliefs and aesthetic preferences.[4] Decisions about whether to subscribe to norms and ideals are informed by "corporeal" (Lloyd 2010; Gorichanaz 2015) experiences and reflections about how one wishes to be perceived by peer believers, family members, colleagues, and the general public. These decisions are also guided by the tension between internal faith (i.e., what an individual personally believes) and outward performance (i.e., what an individual presents in public). For example, Kelly admitted that she occasionally feels self-conscious that peer believers may perceive her to be superficially projecting her piety if she prays for longer than others in the room. In a similar way, clothing choices may be understood variously as a personal decision, adherence to religious prescriptions, or a combination thereof. Whatever the motivation for choosing to wear certain styles, choices about material aesthetics are acts of information sharing.

Another embodied form of information sharing is speech—the verbal repertoire used in daily conversations, the responses and opinions conveyed through one's voice. The nature of information that a person expresses and exchanges is partly tied to the site in which this information is shared, and the expectations, norms, and routines by which these sites are bound. Muslim converts may invoke what they consider to be authentic religious vocabulary to demonstrate their identities (a process known in linguistics as code switching). Throughout fieldwork, I noticed that participants often inserted Arabic terms into conversations to express feelings of gratitude, praise, joy, and hope. Invoking these terms (which were learned through social engagement with Muslim peers) is one way that converts may align their personal experiences within an accepted religious framework or worldview.

In addition to sharing information in everyday conversations, Muslim converts' participation in contexts of teaching, public speaking, and invitations for others to embrace Islam allow them to produce information and develop expertise. For instance, Abdullah studied Islam in the Middle East and regularly gives sermons and teaches religious education classes

in his local community. January collaborated with a friend to start a religious discussion group, inviting peer believers to explore sacred texts and theological scholarship through collective reflection and conversations. Other participants spoke about sharing information about their beliefs in less formal ways. Instead of circulating evangelical information through printed pamphlets, several participants advocated for leading "by example." Aisha talked about how "the best thing to do if you want to show someone your religion" is

> just to be good to them. Operate with good Islamic etiquette, operate with good values. And that's really what my friends did. . . . I was definitely attracted to Islam, just from seeing, what is this foundation that makes people so good and so lovely to one another?

These comments suggest that sharing information through embodied values (such as kindness, generosity, and hospitality), rather than merely distributing written publications, can lead to a more meaningful exchange. While the practice of adopting certain values may not be represented through physical materials (in the same way, for example, that wearing a head covering may signify religious affiliation), it can be represented through embodied signs such as gestures, mannerisms, and vocal tones. The idea that inviting others to embrace Islam can happen through action over printed documents problematizes the emphasis that much of existing information practice literature places on accessing and presenting information through recorded media—including printed books and documents, blogs, and websites (Neal and McKenzie 2011; Ochola et al. 2015; Savolainen 2008). It also affirms the notion that documents are socially constructed evidence that carry human emotions and experiences (Buckland 1997; Gorichanaz and Latham 2016).

   The ways in which peer Muslims and the broader public respond to converts depends on the information that converts display through their physical appearances and communicate through spoken words, and the perceptions and knowledge on which others base judgments about Muslims with whom they interact or see in passing. Participants' experiences also point to how decisions to share, avoid, and conceal information are heavily influenced by the current political climate, in which surveillance and national security concerns are interwoven with Islamophobic attitudes (Council on American-Islamic Relations 2013; Kanji 2016; Moosavi 2014). For example, Hermione talked about wanting to physically remove herself from spaces where her parents and family friends were discussing current events. As she explained,

> When the Ottawa shooting [at Parliament Hill in October, 2014] happened . . . my parents started talking about it, and I was like, try not to say anything. . . . I keep hoping that . . . we're just going to stick to Netflix and they will never have to watch the news. . . . Every time there's something on the *news* . . . it just makes everything worse. . . . With my

family, or like family friends, I just have to sit through and listen to them pontificate about what's happening in Iraq and Syria.

Participants negotiate their denominational affinities, their stances in debates about public veiling, and their choices about identifying with a religion that is consistently linked to terrorist activities in mainstream North American media and policy discourses. Hermione's example of avoiding the news aligns with research that has found that people often avoid mainstream media "that would cause depression-like feelings" (Narayan, Case, and Edwards 2011).

Along with avoiding media in the home and sharing knowledge in contexts of teaching and public speaking, Muslim converts also produce information through creative pursuits. For example, Ruqayyah explained how making crafts, baking, and doing calligraphy as a homeschool educator helped introduce her older children to the holy month of Ramadan. Additionally, Alexandra described one of her printmaking projects, as follows:

> I made a series of prints . . . sort of vaguely referencing the Soviet poster aesthetic . . . but they featured like, these Muslim characters. . . . I kind of wanted to play on that same idea that, oh, people *fear* the Muslims, and they would see these posters of these *happy* children, these happy *women* in headscarves carrying red flags and with black Arabic writing. And they would think, "Oh my God! These people are scary." And I was just trying to be like, "Hey look, they're just happy, this just means unity and people are just waving some happy flags."

In the process of creating these materials, Alexandra develops her artistic practice, explores her identity as a migrant from eastern Europe, and articulates what it means to her to be Muslim in contemporary North America. This is also an example of how works of art can "perform documentary reference," not only to "observable facts of the world, but deeply felt meanings" (Gorichanaz 2017). These kinds of producer roles may involve written documents, but they are primarily expressed through the physical creation of materials.

The experiences described above highlight examples of what Goffman (1959) called "self-presentation" and what American literary critic and language scholar Stephen Greenblatt (2005) refers to as "self-fashioning." The concept of "self-fashioning" suggests that people actively create and present their selves to navigate the surrounding world and make a name for themselves. Such acts of "self-presentation" and "self-fashioning" affect Muslim converts' experiences of tensions between public visibility and invisibility. Participants' perceptions about their in/visibility as Muslims impacts how they access worship spaces, expertise, and secular public spaces. On one side, participants reflected on being visible as Muslims who do not appear in typically Islamic clothing and are not perceived as members of a predominantly Muslim cultural group. For example, Aisha remarked that as a white woman who only occasionally wore *hijab* at the

time of fieldwork, "I'm the minority in the mosque." She contrasted this experience of relative invisibility with wearing *hijab* on a visit she took to the United States, as follows:

> It's just so beautiful, because people are greeting me "Salamu alaykum" in the streets. It's almost more beautiful to be wearing hijab when you're a minority, because everyone's [i.e. peer believers] greeting each other. And it's kind of like you're looking out for each other.

Other participants described feeling invisible for not conforming to widespread expectations about what a Muslim *convert* in a major North American city should look and sound like (i.e., white, English-speaking, and unaccented). Hermione, a woman with Middle Eastern heritage, accounted for this experience as follows:

> My friend had converted around the same time as me. . . . She's from a Jewish-Scottish background, so she's like, white-passing, or white. So when we would go to things together, people would go up to her and be like, "You're a convert. We want to teach you everything." And she would get very annoyed 'cause I would be standing next to her, and she'd be like, "She is a convert, as well. But you're not teaching her anything." . . . I always have to be like, "By the way, before I have this conversation with you, I'm a convert, so keep that in mind."

The excerpts above support Jarkko Kari's (2007) argument that without material representations, spiritual information is often invisible and ineffable. This can pose challenges to identifying prayer spaces and pursuing religious learning with peer believers. Since spiritual information sources and processes are experiential, they are difficult to show and describe to others who have not undergone similar experiences. Thus, religiously symbolic clothing and other forms of material expression can help to make a person's religious affiliation visible in the public sphere and provoke assumptions from others.

DISCUSSION

As anthropologist Sally Campbell Galman (2013) notes in her study of female converts to observant Islam and Orthodox Judaism and Christianity, religious conversion extends beyond a personal spiritual or ontological shift; it entails bodily and social participation among peer believers. The experiences described above illustrate that information practice is more than socially constructed habits and strategies to independently look for, assess, and use written documents to achieve specific needs or goals. They highlight how information practice can be gradual and continuous, as it is affected by a range of emotional, sociocultural, and material elements. Participants' narratives point to how objects such as clothing items can carry information on a person's body—especially for women. Aisha's example of wearing *hijab* while travelling and Ruqayyah's recollection about the public harassment she endured as a result of wearing *niqab*

demonstrate how worn objects have a resounding impact on how others respond to the person carrying that information. These instances of what Mansson McGinty calls "display[ing] transformation" (2006, 41) help to conceptualize information as an object that "expresses and represents" (Gorichanaz 2017) meanings and beliefs.

The findings presented above highlight the relationship between material aspects of information practice and the interplay between the personal and the public, which can be relevant beyond the domain of conversion to Islam to consider other kinds of transitions in which people strive to belong in a new community or define themselves in a different way. (For example, contexts such as migration, and populations such as transgender people, pregnant women, new parents, and people experiencing critical illness and recovery.) Furthermore, these findings build on anthropologist Jean Lave and education theorist Etienne Wenger's ideas about communities of practice in which "embodied understandings" about shared artifacts and styles signify membership (Wenger 1998). These findings reflect the notion that people negotiate their relational identities and transform from novice to "successful participant" (Lave and Wenger 1991) through observing and participating in social practices that involve "the whole person, both acting and knowing" (Wenger 1998, 47). They reiterate that a key process involved in learning (as a way to acquire the skills and resources to form an identity) is "producing or adopting . . . artifacts [and] representations" (Wenger 1998, 95). By demonstrating their awareness of and adherence to normative ways of dressing and speaking, for instance, Muslim converts establish their social capital (Bourdieu 1977). While these ideas are not limited to religious conversion, this context illustrates how information practice involves physical expressions and representations of beliefs and affiliations, in addition to the emotional responses, logical decisions, and search strategies that tend to be associated with cognition-oriented information behavior.

CONCLUSION

This research attempts to contribute to the emerging movement in information research that explores issues of spirituality, materiality, and corporeality (e.g., Gorichanaz 2016; Kari and Hartel 2007; Latham 2014; Lloyd 2014b), by highlighting the bodily and creative aspects of information practice. While participants also referred to the importance of academic publications, magazines, sacred texts, websites, and online forums for learning their religion, they reflected on the significance of practicing postures, wearing particular clothing items and styles, and being physically present in worship spaces and at classes and conventions for learning about Islam and articulating their identities. In addition, this research illustrates how information practice is not a one-sided matter of consuming resources; it includes the ways in which people create and produce materials

to understand who they are and to communicate with others. Furthermore, this research extends an interdisciplinary perspective on identity construction among individuals who are undergoing a critical transition in their lives. Finally, this research has practical implications for libraries, which are becoming increasingly concerned with facilitating information experiences over solving problems and addressing information needs simply by connecting people with written resources (Stevenson, Clarke, and Elmsley 2016). Libraries may consider including more private spaces for quiet contemplation and reading, facilitating conversations through "human library" initiatives and other community meetings, and referring patrons to sources other than print collections—including consultations with relevant subject specialists, chaplaincies, support groups, social workers,[5] cultural centers, conferences, art exhibitions, and retreats. As Marcia Bates writes, people are informed "not just from paper sources, not just from other people, but also from the physical layout of their workspaces, from the design, not just the content, of informational genres, and above all, from the interaction of these various factors in a real situation" (2016b, 60). By taking into account how information is expressed and exchanged through nonwritten sources such as clothing, spoken word, and works of visual art and craft, information professionals can continue to think about alternative ways of designing spaces and providing information services.

NOTES

1. Two participants opted out of this activity, and one participant did not continue with the project after the initial interview.
2. Names referenced are pseudonyms that participants selected.
3. Defined as "Muslim women who dress 'fashionably' and/or design fashionable clothes, while orienting toward what is being prescribed by their religion in terms of dress" and who are prominent in online settings including "hijabista blogs, online stores, YouTube videos, and Facebook pages" (Blommaert and Varis, 2015, 161).
4. Muslim women's religious dress as an ongoing negotiation has been addressed elsewhere, e.g., by Géraldine Mossière in her article (2012) on how female converts to Islam in Quebec, Canada, and France represent their religious identities in ways that align with their personal interpretations of the *Quran* and the contemporary western social contexts in which they live.
5. For more on social work in libraries, refer to Dali (under review).

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