

**YOU'RE WEARING THAT? A REIMAGINATION OF TZNIUT  
FOR THE CONTEMPORARY, PROGRESSIVE JEWISH  
ORGANIZATION**

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## **The Development of Tzniut: An Academic Analysis**

### **Introduction:**

Clothing plays a significant role in our sense of self, personal expression, and identity. However, the line between appropriate and inappropriate attire often becomes blurry when determining dress code. Societal values related to dress and external presentation have become a significant factor for how we assess and perceive one another, most significantly for women. We live in a world where “What was she wearing?” is a legitimate and frequent question asked during sexual violence court proceedings. If clothing can be used in court, certainly it plays a role in our day-to-day interactions. Religious organizations also are subject to the impact of clothing and dress. These organizations contend with the influence of both societal standards and additional religious expectations. Religious texts that delineate standards of dress and physical appearance were not created in a vacuum. The authors of these texts wrote about these topics while deeply embedded in their cultural contexts and time periods. The written expectations and visual images of Jewish dress from these different eras reflect this reality and highlight cultural moments that impacted religious and secular communities alike. In late antiquity and the medieval period in particular, the rabbis and sages codified male dominance and the structure of the larger patriarchal society within Judaism. They embedded societal expectations of gender roles into religious texts through the development of regulations that dictated the dress and behavior of Jewish men and women. These regulations established specific roles for men and women in the rabbinic tradition and continue to play a significant role in gender relations and both the internal and external self-expression of men and women, especially within traditional Jewish communities, until today.

While progressive Jewish communities may not feel bound to the regulations found in Jewish legal texts, they are nevertheless influenced by societal standards that manage to embed imbalanced gender dynamics and male dominance into their communities as well. These communities largely reject or ignore the codified understandings of dress found in more traditional communities, but some of these same principles discussed in Jewish texts can be found in these organizations' dress codes and policies because of the influence of the secular society. Consequently, some progressive Jewish institutions express similarly imbalanced gender dynamics and commentary around women's bodies and clothing, yet they cannot justify these behaviors as being due to their adherence to Halakhah, as more traditional communities are able to do. Liberal Jewish communities would benefit from exploring Jewish texts around clothing to see which principles are applicable and which are problematic. This process would allow these communities to develop organizational standards around modesty and dress that are informed by Jewish tradition as opposed to secular standards that seem to dictate most of their current dress codes. Additionally, a re-evaluation of these texts could present a different understanding of the principles as utilized by traditional communities and help liberal Jewish communities feel more connected to these roots. Progressive communities utilize Jewish values for other core principles and should consider including dress code and modesty in these conversations. Creating dress code policies can be challenging and messy, and utilizing these texts and principles as a framework provide a basis for discussion. While some of these regulations may feel outdated to a progressive community, their underlying ideals elicit important discussions and self-reflection, even if the communities ultimately do not agree with all of their implications.

Understanding the history and development of regulations around dress and ethics within Judaism provides insight into the ethos of the time of the text and how the Jewish community engaged with society around them. Jewish texts and traditions include a long history of discussions around dress and self-presentation, though the application of the rules and regulations that emerged from these discussions is only found within the most traditional denominations of Judaism. The focus on the physical aspects of Tzniut is a relatively modern concept in its expansive reach, as “there is nothing in the Talmud, Rishonim, or pre-1800 Acharonim that dictates a specific dress code.”<sup>1</sup> While discussions of nakedness, appropriate dress for the performance of Mitzvot, and the value of non-flashy attire appear in earlier texts, strict regulation around dress is a primarily modern concern as “mainstream” clothing has become flashier and focused on minimizing instead of maximizing coverage.

Additionally, while the principles of Tzniut apply to both men and women, much of the focus of rabbinic literature and its contemporary applications focus almost exclusively on women and aim to control female outward appearance and interactions with others in an effort to mitigate the “inevitable” male gaze. This concern aligns with traditional gender roles that influenced non-Jewish and Jewish communities for centuries. The Jewish legal tradition has not only accepted these gender roles, but it has also perpetuated them by instituting a difference between the nature of men and women’s relationship with and obligation to the commandments. Women are seen as holier and purer, while men need Mitzvot to be managed. Furthermore, the exemption of women from the observance of certain

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<sup>1</sup> Booth, Rabbi David, Rabbi Ashira Koninsburg, Rabbi Baruch Frydman-Kohl. “Modesty Inside and Out: A Contemporary Guide to Tzniut.” The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly. <https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/Modesty%20Final.pdf>. 11

commandments has also influenced the regulation of men and women's dress, appearance and interactions.

This paper will provide an overview of some of the Jewish texts that discuss modesty and female bodies from Tanakh through contemporary Responsa literature. These texts highlight the imbalance of regulation between female bodies and male bodies and the inherent biases and confusion that dominate textual discussions of female bodies and emissions. Additionally, these texts highlight larger societal beliefs around gender, sexuality and physical appearance while also drawing upon conceptions of holiness and connection to God as rationales for regulation. Underscoring much of the text is a muted but powerful belief that men cannot control their natural sexual urges around women, so women's bodies must be covered and minimized to help men successfully live a life of Mitzvot, study, and prayer.

### **Precursor/Foundational Texts in Tanakh:**

The term for modesty, Tznua, is not found in Torah, and is found only twice in Tanakh as a whole. The idea of internal and external modesty does emerge in a few places in Tanakh but the idea of physical modesty is not heavily present. However, later commentators use these few citations and other mentions of related terms like nakedness and (im)purity to discuss and establish a concept of physical modesty in Jewish law and custom. Even though the original intention of the texts in Tanakh may not connect to external self-presentation exclusively, we see an elevation of physical modesty as a value and a significant focus on distinguishing between purity and impurity with regards to the body.

The very opening chapters of the Torah reflect the value of physical modesty and present nakedness as a source of shame. In the Adam and Eve narrative, the first humans initially exist together without clothing and without shame.<sup>2</sup>

Genesis 2:25 - And both of them were naked, the man and his wife, and they were not ashamed.	וַיְהִיו שְׁנֵיהֶם עֲרוּמִים הָאָדָם וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וְלֹא יִתְבַּשְׁשׁוּ:
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After Adam and Eve eat from the tree of knowledge, their eyes are opened in a new way.

They realize again they are naked, but react differently this time.

Genesis 3:7 - And the eyes of both were opened and they knew that they were naked, and they put together fig leaves and made themselves girdles.	וַתִּפְתָּחֵנָה עֵינֵי שְׁנֵיהֶם וַיֵּדְעוּ כִּי עֲרֻמִּם הֵם וַיִּתְּפְרוּ עֲלֵהּ תְאֵנָה וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם חֲגֹרֹת:
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When Adam and Eve realize they are naked this time, they cover themselves up with clothes, specifically their genitalia. In Genesis 2:25, the Torah text states that nakedness does not cause shame. However, in Genesis 3:7, Adam and Eve immediately clothe themselves once they realize they are naked. The Torah text does not explicitly state that this realization caused shame and thus compelled them to cover themselves, but other commentators make such connections. Rashi, the 11<sup>th</sup> century French commentator, explains their eyes were opened to knowledge and awareness, including a realization that they had sinned. Ramban, the 12<sup>th</sup> century Spanish philosopher, adds on to Rashi's explanation by suggesting that this knowledge of sin compelled them to cover up their nakedness, specifically their genitalia, because this was another potential source of sin. They gave into their physical urge to eat from the tree, and thus needed to cover themselves to lessen the potential they would give

<sup>2</sup> Translations by the author unless otherwise noted.



into other physical urges that could lead to sinning. His reflection on the text highlights fear of unregulated physical and sexual urges, in alignment with 12<sup>th</sup> century beliefs of the body. This reflection on the text becomes one rationale for why bodies must be covered. Later, in Genesis 24, covering up is viewed as a female virtue. Genesis 24:65 states that Rebecca covers her face with her veil upon seeing Isaac for the first time, and this gesture serves as Rebecca's final action before Isaac takes her to become his wife. The juxtaposition connects covering oneself as a positive quality that makes Rebecca a good wife to Isaac. This act becomes codified in the Jewish wedding during the Bedeken, where a groom traditionally covers his Jewish bride's face with her veil before the wedding ceremony. The ceremonial act suggests the same as the Torah text - a modest woman is a woman worthy of marrying.

When nakedness, *Erva*, is mentioned in Torah, it is most often found in discussions of negative or inappropriate behavior. Several discussions of *Erva* in Tanakh continue the message seemingly established in Gan Eden – nakedness and shame are connected. The term *Erva* first appears in Torah in Leviticus 18 as the text discusses illicit sexual relationships. These forbidden sexual relationships are known as *Arayot*, which comes from the same root as *Erva*. After a litany of inappropriate sexual relationships, the text offers a few examples of inappropriate times to uncover another person's nakedness (Leviticus 18:6). For example, it is forbidden for a man to see the nakedness of a woman he is too closely related to (Leviticus 18:7-18) or the nakedness of a woman during her menses (Leviticus 18:19). Notably, the text places the impetus on the male in the dyad to not uncover the woman's nakedness, though punishment for failing to do so lands squarely with both the male and female. Rabbi Dr. Rachel Adler, noting the ever-present similarities embedded in the use of *Erva* in biblical

text, believes that “Erva shames the exposed and opens their boundaries to invasion and conquest. It is no coincidence, then, that in forty-five of the fifty-five biblical instances of the term, the exposed subject is imaged as female.”<sup>3</sup> Discussions of Erva in Tanakh see women as objects that need to be protected. The inappropriate nature of these sexual relationships may seem obvious, but their inclusion in Torah imply that they happened enough that they needed to be regulated against. Finally, while the Torah establishes that nakedness is to be protected, it does not attempt to regulate just how much or how strictly the body should be covered up.

The attempt to regulate how a body should be covered stems from the interpretation of Isaiah 47:2-3, which further connects the nakedness with shame. These verses come in the midst of Isaiah expressing God’s power over all others and foretelling the fall of Babylon through a metaphor of removing Babylon from her throne of power.<sup>4</sup>

Isaiah 47:2 – Grasp the handmill and grind meal. Remove your veil, strip off your train, bare your leg. Wade through the rivers.	קחי ירימים, וטחני קמח; גלי צמתך השפי-שכל גלי-שוק, עברי נהרות
Isaiah 47:3 – Your nakedness shall be uncovered, and your shame shall be exposed. I will take vengeance, and let no man intercede.	תגל, ערותך--גם תראה, תרפתך; נקם אקח, ולא אפגע אדם

The text notes that one must reveal at least some of one’s naked body when wading through a river. This logical action is followed by the phrase “and your shame shall be uncovered.” By juxtaposing nakedness and shame, this verse seems to imply that nakedness and shame are related. Additionally, since you need to bare your legs to wade through a river, it appears the

<sup>3</sup> Adler, Rabbi Dr. Rachel. *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics*. Beacon Press, 2005. 128.

<sup>4</sup> Translation from JPS Tanakh, 1985 Edition

exposure of these parts of the body may be connected to the “shame” mentioned in verse 3. These two verses are used as prooftexts in Berakhot 24a of the Babylonian Talmud for the importance of keeping the legs covered, as this special case of wading through a river is seen as an exception to the rule of coverage. In context, these verses do not refer to an actual person, but rather Babylon as a whole. However, interpreters have utilized these verses as if they were referring to a specific person uncovering herself and re-interpreted its words to highlight the importance of covering oneself unless circumstances require uncoverage. In Berakhot 24a, Rav Chisda notes that the parallel construction of verse 3 connects Erva and Charaf (shame), which links the terms.

While Tzniut becomes the encompassing term for physical modesty, its few inclusions in biblical texts do not discuss dress or modest closing. Tzanua appears twice in Tanakh, and both citations address modesty as an important internal characteristic. In these citations, Tzanua implies an internal sense of modesty and respect towards God. The most well-known and often cited use of Tzanua appears in Micah 6:8 -

Micah 6:8 - He has told you, O person, what is good, and what Adonai requires of you: Only to do justice and to love kindness, and to walk modestly/humbly with your God.	ח הָגִיד לְךָ אָדָם, מֶה-טוֹב; וּמֶה-יְהוָה דּוֹרֵשׁ מִמֶּךָ, כִּי אִם-עֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט וְאַהֲבַת חֶסֶד, וְהַצָּנֵעַ לֵכֶת, עִם-אֱלֹהֶיךָ.
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Rashi interprets this phrase as an encouragement to walk discreetly in fear of God and that God desires humans to return to God even if they falter. When this verse is used as a prooftext in Talmud Bavli Sukkah 49b, it is utilized to discuss the performance of less flashy Mitzvot, including accompanying a poor bride to her Chuppah or being present at the burial

of a destitute or isolated person. In this interpretation, to walk “Tzanua” with God does not refer to dress but instead focuses on behavior. The term highlights the importance of action through purpose, obligation, and desire to do the right thing as opposed to acting justly for the accolades or recognition. The second citation in Proverbs 11:2 offers a similar message:<sup>5</sup>

Proverbs 11:2 - When arrogance appears, disgrace follows, but wisdom is with those who are unassuming.	בְּאִזְנוֹן וַיָּבֹא קִלְיוֹן וְאֶת־צְנוּעִים חֲכָמָה:
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This verse juxtaposes wisdom and modesty with shame and arrogance. Rashi believes this verse indicates that one must take time to acquire wisdom through study and focus. Again, the term Tzanua implies thoughtful, humble action and does not mention of one’s physical self. Other commentaries use these verses to discuss internal modesty and proper behavior, which aligns with their original intent. However, while the term itself is not connected to dress in Tanakh, these verses are often cited when discussing Tzniut in later rabbinic texts and commentaries. Additionally, these texts do not suggest a gender-specific mode of modesty, but instead encourage a general sense of personal modesty and humility as an ideal mode of conduct.

While the texts above are not explicitly female-centric in their discussions of modesty, texts about menstruation in Torah contribute to an increased need for seclusion and regulations of women. Concerns about women’s menstruation become one of the rationales for increased need for women’s physical modesty because of the authors’ confusion and discomfort with this female-specific process and concern about the passage of impurities from women to men. At first, the texts about menstruation appear more matter-of-fact and

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<sup>5</sup> Translation from JPS Tanakh, 1985 Edition.

relatively balanced in the implications of passing impurity and releasing oneself from impurity between men and women.<sup>6</sup> In Leviticus 15:19, the Torah teaches that the onset of menstruation leads to a seven-day isolation and Tame (unclean or impure) period. At the end of the seven days, the woman loses her impure status and returns to her normal state.

Leviticus 15:19 - When a woman has a discharge, her discharge being blood from her body, she remains in her impurity seven days; whoever touches her will remain unclean until evening.	יט וְאִשָּׁה כִּי-תִהְיֶה זִכָּה, דָּם יִהְיֶה זִכָּה בְּשִׁטָּתָהּ-- שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תִּהְיֶה בְּנִדָּתָהּ, וְכָל-הַנִּגַּע בָּהּ יִטְמָא עַד-הָעֶרֶב.
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Leviticus 15:13 offers a relatively similar statement for a male with a regular seminal emission. The text states that after a male with a discharge is clean of that discharge, he also counts seven days, enters the Mikvah, and then is clean. However, by chapter 20 of Leviticus, the concerns about women's menstrual cycles seems more extreme. The text implores individuals to be careful to not make a mistake, because if they do, the consequences are significant for both parties.<sup>7</sup>

Leviticus 20:18 - If a man lies with a woman during her infirmity and uncovers her nakedness, he has laid bare her flow and she has exposed her blood flow; <b>both of them will be cut off from among their people.</b>	יח וְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר-יִשְׁכַּב אֶת-אִשְׁתּוֹ דָּוָה, וְגִלָּהּ אֶת-עֲרֹוֹתָהּ אֶת-מִקְרָהּ הָעֶרְה, וְהוּא, גִּלָּתָהּ אֶת-מִקְוֹר דָּמֶיהָ--וְנִכְרְתוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם, מִקֶּרֶב עַמָּם.
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In later texts, rabbis add many additional expectations and regulations for women and men to comply with around menstruation, including requiring seven additional clean days post

<sup>6</sup> Meacham, Tirzah. "Female Purity (Niddah)." *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*. 1 March 2009. Jewish Women's Archive. (Viewed on January 2, 2019) <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/female-purity-niddah>.

<sup>7</sup> Translation from JPS Tanakh, 1985 Edition.

bleeding before a woman can be considered pure again.<sup>8</sup> The male authors of the text mostly understood their own bodily processes, but female processes, particularly when they were considered to be irregular, were unknown to the male authors of the text. Additionally, it may have seemed more difficult to predict the exact beginning or exact end of a woman's cycle, which was critical to know a woman's pure or impure status. These confusions may be some of the reasons for the imbalance of regulations for women and men in later texts. Even the term used for a woman's menstrual process, Niddah, comes from the root *nun-dalet-dalet*, meaning to make distant.<sup>9</sup> By naming the overall discussion of menstruation with this framing, women's bodies become something to separate from and, by extension, fear.

### **Rabbinic/Medieval Literature:**

Rabbinic and Responsa literature use these few verses about modesty and ideas about a woman's body from Tanakh to develop a whole body of literature about Tzniut. They utilize societal norms and religious language to codify societal standards within a religious context. For example, the potential passage of impurity to a man by a woman in some state of Niddah posed a significant concern to the rabbis. Since there was relatively little understanding about a woman's menstruation at that time (and remained a mystery until the past few centuries), additional requirements to protect men from this potential impurity seemed necessary. Various texts show that women in Tanakh are rewarded for their modesty,

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<sup>8</sup> Discussed in Mishnah Niddah and discussed again in Talmud Bavli Niddah 66a where it states, "Rav Zeira said: The daughters of Israel took it upon themselves that if they see even a drop of blood the size of a mustard seed, they wait seven [additional] clean days."

<sup>9</sup> Meacham, Tirzah. "An Abbreviated History of the Development of the Jewish Menstrual Laws." *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life and Law*, edited by Rahel R. Wasserfall, Brandeis University Press, 1999, p. 23.

which align with secular standards of women's beauty exhibited in their modesty and demure behavior.<sup>10</sup> Women needed male protection and financial support, and living up to these standards of modesty were critical to finding a necessary mate.

Modesty was also viewed as an important quality for all people because of a fear of accidental and intentional sinful behavior. Kiddushin 81b simply states, "Intent is everything... modesty [is a] shield to sin."<sup>11</sup> Immodesty and nakedness are so significant a disgrace that Shabbat 64a-b cites the allure of nakedness as the rationale for why an entire generation of Israel sinned.<sup>12</sup> Unseemly thoughts can be exacerbated by exposure of any part of the female body and thus they should be covered.<sup>13</sup> Physical modesty does not only influence a person's behavior in public, as Rambam's Mishneh Torah suggests that one should remain as covered as possible for as long as possible while using the restroom as well.<sup>14</sup> Rambam's commentary suggests that modesty is not only about covering up for others, but also about covering up for oneself, and thus protects all parties from sin.

These texts clearly indicate that Tzniut is a quintessential value and quality for a Jewish person, especially a Jewish woman. While Talmud and Responsa literature include discussions of male and female internal modesty, nearly all of the discussions about external

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<sup>10</sup> "The Talmud praises the Matriarch [Sarah], who remained in the tent during the visit by the angels to Abraham, "to inform you that the Matriarch Sarah was modest" (Talmud Bavli *Bava Mezia* 87a); Rachel, whose modesty was rewarded by having King Saul as a descendant (Talmud Bavli *Megillah* 13b); Tamar, who covered her face, and was rewarded by having kings and prophets among her descendants (following Talmud Bavli *Megillah* 10b); and Ruth the Moabite, who took care to glean the sheaves in a modest manner ("she gleaned the standing sheaves standing, and the fallen, sitting" [Talmud Bavli *Shabbat* 113b]; Rashi: "and she did not bend to take them, out of modesty"). By virtue of the modest behavior that Boaz saw in her, he took her for a wife." (Yosef Ahituv. "Modesty and Sexuality in Halakhic Literature." *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*. 1 March 2009. Jewish Women's Archive. (Viewed on January 2, 2019) <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/modesty-and-sexuality-in-halakhic-literature>.

<sup>11</sup> Ellinson, Getsel. *Women and Mitzvot The Modest Way: A Guide to the Rabbinic Sources*. Eliner Library, 1992. 51.

<sup>12</sup> (שבת ס"ד א) תנא דבי רבי ישמעאל מפני מה הוצרכו ישראל שבאותו הדור כפרה? מפני (ס"ד ב) שזנו עיניהם מן הערוה.

<sup>13</sup> See Hazon Ish, Orach Chayim 16:8 as example

<sup>14</sup> MT Hilchot Deot 5:6

clothing focuses on the woman's clothing and coverage choices. A male must be dressed appropriately to perform Mitzvot, study Torah, and pray, while a woman should be covered appropriately to pose no distraction to men and show her dedication to Tzniut. Jewish law differentiates between men and women in relation to observance and obligation, which is, in part, dictated by traditional gender roles. Jewish men are obligated to all Mitzvot while women are exempt from many ritual obligations, such as prayer, due to the expectation that they are otherwise occupied within the home and child-rearing processes. The rabbinic concern with the fulfillment of mitzvot prompts the regulation of women, including their dress, appearance and interactions with men, in order to avoid any distractions that would interfere with a man's ability to fulfill the commandments to which he is obligated.

Consequently, while Rabbinic literature includes discussions about dress for both men and women, its texts reflect their perception of women as potential sources of distraction for men. The outer appearance of women is a major focus of these discussions. Ultimately, this distinction leads to guidelines for men that establish appropriate dress during prayer or the performance of commandments in public and private spaces, while guidelines for women discuss the impact of their dress on men and a man's ability to fulfill Mitzvot in a woman's presence. Classical Rabbinic and Responsa literature aim to control female outward appearance and interactions with others in an effort to deal with the inevitable male gaze. The female body is an object to be contained and managed, largely for the sake of the men around it.

Much of the conversation surrounding physical modesty in rabbinic texts focuses heavily on exerting power and control over women in both the public sphere and private



space because of her ability to lead the men around her into impurity and sin. According to Rabbi Getsel Ellinson, an influential 20<sup>th</sup> century Orthodox rabbi, any part of the woman's body can be considered an erotic stimulus, but no equivalent concern appears to exist for the male body.<sup>15</sup> Much of the discourse keys in on the female body as requiring the most regulation because of its unknown and therefore problematic natural state. The laws of Niddah require a woman to not be touched or in close physical contact with her husband or any other man while menstruating and she must immerse in a Mikvah, ritual bath, to be considered released from her impure state. While Torah defines Niddah as any blood emission occurring within seven days of the onset of menses, Rabbinic law lengthens this time frame just in case, sometimes adding up to an additional seven days. If a woman must wait up to seven full clean days after her menstruation to ensure that there is not even a drop of blood, she spends essentially half of her reproductive life in some state of impurity. This buildup of requirements became an increasing means of controlling women and their bodies. The lengthy discussions of and restrictions surrounding female menstruation highlight a discomfort with female bodies and leads to more regulations to contain this unknown entity.

Rabbinic texts also underscore a hierarchy of sex through its terminology for genitalia and other sex-identifying characteristics. While the rabbis use euphemisms to refer to male and female genitalia, as part of their concern for "clean" language, the euphemisms for female genitalia often have negative connotations or associations, which is not the case for the euphemisms used for male genitalia. In the Talmud, female genitalia are often referred to as *Oto Hamakom*, that place, or *Makom Hatoref* (Berakhot 24a), the filthy place. For the

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<sup>15</sup> Ellinson 192.

primarily male audience, these terms demonize and ostracize the woman and her body, and mark the woman as other. On the contrary, the Talmud often refers to male genitalia as Makom Shel Habrit Avraham Avinu, the place of the Brit of Abraham our father/ancestor.<sup>16</sup> Other names for male genitalia include Shamash, helper (Niddah 60b), Panim Shel Mata, lower face (Shabbat 41a), and Evar, organ (Bava Metzia 84a).<sup>17</sup> In contrast to the terms for female genitalia in the Talmud, male genitalia are presented with a connection to history and as the place of the covenant between God and Abraham. The other terms for penis do not include the negative connotations as seen in terminology for female genitalia – some highlight the penis' role in reproduction and others elevate it as one of the most important organs. While the penis is literally the sight of circumcision, which signifies the covenant between Abraham and God, the discrepancy between this name and the name for female genitalia is infinite. It highlights the focus on the penis and male blood as signs of life, covenant, and power, and the vagina as the exact opposite.

According to the Talmud, female genitalia are not the only female body parts that must be covered up due to their concerning nature. Various sugiyot in the Talmud express a need to cover up a woman's body because much of her body is considered Erva. Shabbat 64a-b includes one of the more extreme beliefs around modesty – suggesting that even a woman's little finger is considered to be Erva because it is the equivalent of looking at her genitals.<sup>18</sup> While this opinion is not heavily reflected elsewhere in Talmud, Berakhot 24a

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<sup>16</sup> Adler 141.

<sup>17</sup> "Anatomy." Encyclopaedia Judaica. 2008. <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/anatomy>

<sup>18</sup> אמר רב ששת מפני מה מנה הכתוב תכשיטין שבחוץ עם תכשיטין שבפנים? לומר לך כל המסתכל באצבע קטנה של אשה כאילו מסתכל במקום התורפה:

(translation below)<sup>19</sup> serves as the basis for subsequent laws about women's dress and behavior through its discussion of other female body parts. It moves through various parts of the body and defines them as Erva by utilizing a prooftext that mentions that body part in Tanakh. The prooftexts utilized show how this body part attracts another to the woman, but they are taken out of context. As Dr. Rabbi Rachel Adler discusses in *Engendering Judaism*, pulling these verses out of context to serve as examples of alluring female beauty “systematically reduce[s] women into giant walking genitals”<sup>20</sup> that need to be covered.<sup>21</sup>

Various sugiyot of Talmud align with this values proposition – women's bodies must be covered up and regulated because they are a constant source of concern for men attempting to execute Mitzvot in their homes and out in public. As discussed above, Berakhot 24a suggests that everything about the woman is eroticized and completely about attracting the male sex. In context, the sugiya discusses how one can properly recite the Shema when living in tiny quarters with one's entire family. While it would be necessary for a woman to be covered so that her husband could recite the prayer “properly” and “without distraction” as obligated, the use of these prooftexts to reduce a woman to little more than genitals on

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<sup>19</sup> Translation from Koren English Talmud and the author: The Master said in a Baraita: This one turns his head aside and recites Shema. The Gemara notes a difficulty: Aren't there bare buttocks? This supports the opinion of Rav Huna, as Rav Huna said: Buttocks do not constitute nakedness. Let us say that the following Mishna supports Rav Huna's opinion: A woman sits and separates her Challah naked, despite the fact that she must recite a blessing over the separation of the Challah, because she can cover her face, a euphemism for her genitals, in the ground, but a male, whose genitals are not covered when he sits, may not do so. The Mishna teaches that exposed buttocks do not constitute nakedness. R. Yitzhak said: “An [uncovered] Tefach (handbreadth) in a woman is Erva (nakedness).” Regarding what [did R. Yitzhak say this]? If in regard to looking [at women], did not R. Sheshet say: “... Anyone who gaze even at a woman's little finger is as if he gazes at her private parts”? Rather, [R. Yitzhak said it] regarding one's wife and reading the Shema... R Chisda said: “A woman's leg (Shok) is Erva, as it is written (Isaiah 47:2), ‘Reveal your leg, pass over rivers,’ and it is also written (verse 3), ‘Your Ervah will be uncovered and your shame will also be revealed.’ ... Shmuel said: “A woman's voice is Ervah, as it is written (Shir HaShirim 2:14) ‘... for your voice is pleasant and your appearance is attractive.’ ... R Sheshet said: “A woman's hair is Ervah as it is written (4:1) ‘Your hair resembles a herd of goats.’ (11-12).

<sup>20</sup> Adler 140.

<sup>21</sup> Adler 140-144.

display is highly problematic. It allows for religious authorities to argue that even a visible collarbone constitutes Erva because the entire female body is eroticized. Rabbi Yehuda Henkin, a contemporary American Orthodox rabbi who wrote extensively about Tzniut, argues that it is impossible to avoid forbidden gazing if any skin is exposed, which would impede on the male's ability to recite Shema and complete the Mitzvah.<sup>22</sup> The Talmud even prohibits a man from walking behind a woman in case he becomes sexually attracted.<sup>23</sup> The rabbis feared that even a small amount of a woman's flesh "might distract men from their religious duties" and do not believe men can control their sexual desire.<sup>24</sup> In his book on religious dress, Eric Silverman describes the difference as "men who violate Tzniut insult God and erode the boundary between Jew and Gentile [while] immodest women endanger men."<sup>25</sup> He further adds that while men are afflicted with sexual hunger, women "are expected to count their blessings [that they are not afflicted with such thoughts] and enlist themselves sympathetically – if secondarily – in the war against [men's] misguided desire by muting whatever parts of themselves men claim to find arousing and therefore threatening."<sup>26</sup> Berakhot 24a may specifically discuss the context in which a man may recite Shema, but this passage of the Babylonian Talmud is frequently cited in discussions around the legal precedents for modesty.<sup>27</sup> Maimonides cites Berakhot 24a as his rationale for the statement,

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<sup>22</sup> Henkin, J. H. *Understanding Tzniut: Modern Controversies in the Jewish Community*. Urim Publications, 2008. 22.

<sup>23</sup> Talmud Bavli Eruvin 18b: ר' יצחק מסתברא דזכר סגי ברישא דתניא ולמאן דאמר פרצוף הי מינייהו סגי ברישא אמר רב נחמן בר יצחק מסתברא דזכר סגי ברישא דתניא לא יהלך אדם אחורי אשה בדרך ואפילו היא אשתו נזדמנה על הגשר יסלקנה לצדדין וכל העובר אחורי אשה בנהר אין לו חלק לעולם הבא:

<sup>24</sup> Silverman, Eric. *A Cultural History of Jewish Dress*. Bloomsbury, 2013. 38.

<sup>25</sup> Silverman 86.

<sup>26</sup> Hartman, Tova. "Modesty and the Religious Male Gaze." *Feminism Encounters Traditional Judaism: Resistance and Accommodation*, Brandeis University Press, 2007. 53.

<sup>27</sup> Ruttenberg, Rabbi Danya. "Towards a New Tzniut." *ZEEK: A Jewish Journal of Thought and Culture*, 25 July 2014, [zeek.forward.com/articles/118306/](http://zeek.forward.com/articles/118306/).

“Kol Guf Haisha Erva – The entire body of a woman is nakedness.”<sup>28</sup> The Shulchan Aruch agrees – anything visible is nakedness and improper.<sup>29</sup> Interpreters take this text about a specific case of modesty and use it to rationalize a much larger body of laws and expectations surrounding women’s dress and external presentation.

Despite this general understanding that the female body is Erva, commentators go into great detail about defining exactly which aspects of a woman’s body are problematic. Several commentators note that while the actual body part may not be considered erotic, it leads to or is connected to a part of the body that is considered Erva. Therefore, the non-erotic body part must be covered because it leads to uncovering of the body part that is actually considered to be Erva. For example, Rashi argues, in his commentary on Yerushalmi Gittin, that while he agrees it is unclear how much of the upper arm must be exposed to be considered Erva, the upper arm is near the armpit, which is close to the breasts, which are considered Erva, and thus the upper arms are considered to be Erva.<sup>30</sup> Defining which aspect of the Shok (leg) is Erva has a similar argument. Rav Avraham Alshvili’s commentary believes that since the lower leg leads to the thigh which leads to the genitalia, it is considered Erva.<sup>31</sup> However, other commentators disagree about what defines Shok,<sup>32</sup> highlighting the lack of common standard for what is considered Erva. This lack of a singular standard may be one of the rationales for the extreme standards that emerge in contemporary practice out of an abundance of caution.

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<sup>28</sup> Mishneh Torah Kriyat Shema 3:16.

<sup>29</sup> Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim 75.

<sup>30</sup> Henkin 24 referencing Rashi on Yerushalmi Gittin, Chapter 9, Halakha 11.

<sup>31</sup> Henkin 19 referencing R. Avraham Alshvili on Berakhot 24a.

<sup>32</sup> Mishnah Berurah 75:1 defines Shok as upper leg, not below the knee. Mishnah Ohalot 1:8 and Nidah 8:1 define Shok as the entire leg including below the knee.

## Secular Dress and Religious Dress

As discussed previously, Jewish dress and the accompanying regulations did not emerge in a vacuum and were informed by the surrounding cultures. While aspects of external presentation were discussed in sacred Jewish texts, “there is nothing in the Talmud, Rishonim, or pre-1800 Acharonim that dictates a specific dress code.”<sup>33</sup> In fact, even by Late Antiquity, “Jewish clothing was not very Jewish at all”<sup>34</sup> and the Jewish communities tended to adopt the dress of the majority culture even while some were required to wear a distinctive Jewish marker on clothing. The rabbis of that era tended to encourage strictness in dress as a counterbalance, particularly when the societal costumes involved opulent attire and immodest apparel. However, unlike many of the Tzniut principles discussed above, these rules applied to both men and women. As a means to avoid acculturation, some rabbis utilized the decree against Chukkat HaGoy (walking in the ways of other nations) as one rationale for not participating in the lavish dress of their surrounding communities.<sup>35</sup> These decrees continued into the Middle Ages and even into contemporary times as this desire to remain distinctively Jewish continues to be significant to religious communities. Religious leaders feared that Jews who blended into the larger community through dress would naturally assimilate and acculturate to the majority culture and lose their connections to Judaism. Various texts highlight this concern by noting the customs of the local community

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<sup>33</sup> Booth, Rabbi David, Rabbi Ashira Koninsburg, Rabbi Baruch Frydman-Kohl. “Modesty Inside and Out: A Contemporary Guide to Tzniut.” The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly. <https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/Modesty%20Final.pdf>. 11

<sup>34</sup> Silverman 26.

<sup>35</sup> Silverman 33.

influencing Jewish women's behavior in their discussions of proper Jewish dress.<sup>36</sup> The increasing concern with Tzniut emerged most prominently within Judaism as the world around the traditional communities changed. Just as the rabbis of the Talmudic period wrote about a world they only dreamed of living in, modern and contemporary Orthodox leaders became increasingly interested in writing about Tzniut because of the "progressive erosion of even the most basic standards of modesty within contemporary Western culture."<sup>37</sup>

Contemporary literature around dress still focuses on and highlights the impact of women's clothing choices on men. Some argue this literature is "appropriately" written by men primarily because "only men know what men find arousing; women's role are simply to receive this knowledge as it is transmitted to them and demurely accede."<sup>38</sup> Though couched in language about the high morality of women themselves, expectations of action and appearance are still framed within their impact on men. *Modesty: An Adornment for Life*, a significant volume about Tzniut written in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century by Rabbi Eliyahu Falk, a 20<sup>th</sup> century British Orthodox scholar, summarizes the dress of a properly modest woman as one who "dresses in unassuming yet cheerful and tidy outfits that please, moreover, her husband."<sup>39</sup> He also argues that women's fashion choices are important for the greater community. For example, in Rabbi Falk's discussion of the concern about slits in skirts, he rationalizes his vitriol against the fashion choice by stating that women who wear skirts with slits "cause many to sin and it is they who thereby invite serious retribution on the

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<sup>36</sup> For example, the Ben Ish Chai on Parshat Bo 12 writes, "Women in European cities are accustomed to always going bareheaded. Since such is the way of all the women there, we may recite the Shema in their presence." (Ellinson 205).

<sup>37</sup> Hartman 46.

<sup>38</sup> Hartman 55.

<sup>39</sup> Silverman 88.

community.”<sup>40</sup> Women wearing this clothing cause men to sin because they cannot control their urges, and thus women must cover up to not bring problems into the community.

Nowhere in his text does he wonder if women make clothing choices for their own sense of self or identity and believes all their choices about dress relate to their desire to attract the male sex unless they are regulated by Tzniut principles. Therefore, women’s clothing becomes not only responsible for male behavior but also the ethical failings of an entire community. While Falk does not excuse the too-readily aroused male sexual interest, he does believe that women’s “dignity, personhood, and autonomy are entirely subordinated to the demands of neutralizing the potentially inflammatory aspects of her very physicality.”<sup>41</sup> Again, there is little focus in these descriptions about women’s agency or self-importance in the matter of dress, only continued mention of her outward expression’s impact on the men of her community.

While there is a great focus on women’s dress in discussions of Tzniut, some Orthodox authorities do argue that the detailed focus on dress misses the larger point of Tzniut altogether. Rabbi Norman Lamm believes “the concept of Tzniut is discussed in rather technical terms: how low or how high a hemline, the length of sleeves, the form of dress, the number of square millimeters of skin that may be exposed... it would be a pity to limit our understanding of Tzniut to that which can be measured by a ruler.”<sup>42</sup> This challenge to the details seen in lists and codes created for women’s outward appearance highlights a fear that the essence of the practice will be lost in the specifications. Rabbi Yehuda Henkin agrees

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<sup>40</sup> Falk, Rabbi Pesach Eliyahu. *Modesty, an Adornment for Life: Halachos and Attitudes Concerning Tznius of Dress & Conduct*. P.E. Falk, 1998. 323.

<sup>41</sup> Falk 238.

<sup>42</sup> Lamm, Rabbi Norman. “Tzniut: A Universal Concept,” in *Haham Gaon Memorial Volume*, ed. Marc Angel. Sepher Hermon Press: Brooklyn, 1997, 151. (found in CJLS Teshuvah on “Modesty”)



with this line of thinking as he fears that such focus on Tzniut and attempts at standardization (a somewhat ironic point as he has written volumes on the topic) could lead to “los[ing] site of the real basics of modesty – not to mention being so concerned about not thinking about women that one can think of nothing else.”<sup>43</sup> Specific regulations without a greater understanding of the why miss out on the point of Tzniut in essence – that one dresses and acts in a manner that shows a sense of personal self-respect and self-worth.

In practice, dress codes in Orthodox communities and institutions tend to align with some of the stricter guidelines addressed above. A review of many dress codes from Orthodox schools across the United States highlight certain patterns of language and expectation. Most codes begin with a general explanation of the school’s understanding of Tzniut, and the more modern schools include language that connect this principle to internal spiritual growth over a focus on external presentation. Some schools include this explanation with the outline of the dress code for male and female students, while others only include this description in the section about their female students’ dress. The details of the standards often have a gendered tone and include more restrictions and regulations for female-identified students. In line with many of the classical rabbinic texts, the standards for male students focus on cleanliness and religious-related attire such as Kippot, Tzitzit, and Tallit when appropriate. These guidelines follow the prescriptions outlined in Mishneh Torah Hilchot Tefillin 5:1 and 5:5 that see proper clothing and control of self as some of the requirements for prayer. Female clothing standards primarily discuss coverage to a more significant level. Some schools require skirts to the ankle, even as some acknowledge that Halakha only

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<sup>43</sup> Henkin 72.

requires coverage of the knee. While some include text citations for their requirements, most dress codes discuss the details of what is required for clothing instead of the rationale behind the choices.

The values presented in these Orthodox dress codes highlight the larger values of the institutions they represent. These institutions believe in elevating oneself internally and externally for prayer and study. Gender roles in school and the home dictate different expectations for men and women. However, many of the regulations in place at Reform and Conservative institutions do not necessarily reflect the wider values these groups claim to promote. The codes delineate specific gender roles for general dress and some compel only male-identified individuals to wear Tallit, Kippot, and Tefillin. These organizations desire to be more gender expansive and accepting of different identities, yet the codes do not necessarily align with these principles.

### **Feminist Conceptions of Tzniut – Moving Forward**

In contemporary times, as women become increasingly sexualized and defined by their bodies, Orthodox feminists view Tzniut as an opportunity for self-preservation and autonomy. Orthodox feminists believe observation of Tzniut can enable women to “reclaim their bodies and sexuality and shelters them against the inevitable self-loathing that arises from comparison with the impossible, fantasized standards of secular beauty... [and] lends a woman control over when, where, and to whom she reveals her attractiveness.”<sup>44</sup> By not conforming to Western standards of sexuality and beauty, traditionally-dressed women

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<sup>44</sup> Silverman 111.

dictate the beauty standards within their own communities. However, this rationalization still places most of its focus on external presentation as an individual's expression of self-containment and awareness. It also primarily places the focus on women as men are seen still as sexual beings incapable of controlling their urges. Still, as Western culture focuses on undressing and viewing the female body for the purpose of male sexual pleasure, feminists within cultures with a practice of modesty, including Orthodox women, see covering up as an act of rebellion. Many of these women see the act of dressing and acting modestly as distinctively countercultural. They view modesty as an empowering switch of focus from external presentation to spiritual and internal self-actualization as the measure of one's self worth.<sup>45</sup> In this rationale, religious modesty "highlights inner beauty and moral substance, not superficial appearances."<sup>46</sup> Ideally, this rationalization for modesty externally and internally is highly appealing for some women because it focuses on individual awareness and choice and lacks an inherent gendered lens.

The Orthodox feminist rationale for observation of Tzniut can be a strong basis for an ethic within non-Orthodox movements as well. If one is distracted by someone else's attire, the distracted individual is responsible for controlling the distraction without impinging on the rights and freedoms of others.<sup>47</sup> It may be true that a person cannot control what is attractive to himself or herself, but that person can and should be held responsible for how they engage with that attraction. The focus in Talmud Bavli Berakhot 24a on the problem of a woman's presence within the male prayer's point of view places the problem on the woman

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<sup>45</sup> Hartman 47.

<sup>46</sup> Silverman 87.

<sup>47</sup> Grushcow, Lisa. "Issues, Ethics, and Boundaries." *The Sacred Encounter: Jewish Perspectives on Sexuality*, CCAR Press, 2014. 667.

instead of the man. Women should not be held responsible for nor required to modify their behavior or appearance for the sake of men's prayer. However, in current society, religious or secular, the bulk of societal expectations on gendered clothing falls onto women. Therefore, contemporary use of these expectations should aim to shift the focus from our human relationships to our relationship with God and our higher sense of self. Community expectations should aim to educate about the value of clothing as a representation of the internal self with an acceptance of and eye towards allowing for individuality and self-preservation. Instead of throwing out traditional conceptions of Tzniut altogether because of their heavily gendered nature, we can return these texts to their original context and reflect on how a relationship with God and a higher sense of purpose empowers one to focus on a personal and internal sense of Tzniut. This new ethic sees individuals as the subject of an intimate and honest relationship with God, which becomes the impetus for external expression that honors this sacred and personal relationship. Women need not follow an extreme dress code to avert the male gaze, but instead can employ a strong sense of identity, self, and spirituality as she chooses to dress in a manner that honors her role and place in her community. A contemporary ethic of Tzniut should aim to exist between the extremes of measuring millimeters of skin and the unrealistic belief that external presentation does not matter at all.

After reviewing and reflecting on the principles of Tzniut over the centuries, it seems the details have overpowered its original intent. Biblical, Talmudic, and Responsa literature build increasingly strict standards for female external presentation, and many appear to be focused on the influence of the female body on men because of an inability of men to control

their sexual urges and thoughts. However, at the core of many of these texts appears to be a desire to minimize dress as the defining feature of an individual. Their original intent focuses on internal self-value. While rabbis replicated the patriarchy and reworded its influence in religious terms, they also highlighted important concepts about the value of a person coming from within instead of what appears on the outside. In secular and Reform communities that reject rabbinic standards, many of the problematic elements still exist. Secular societal expectations still struggle to expect individuals to control their urges and often blame the wearer of the “problematic” clothing when something goes awry. These communities may reject the idea that the female body is a source of impurity and danger from a Halakhic standpoint, but does not accept the female body as a space that the woman truly owns. Thankfully, recent events, including the #metoo and feminist movements, have begun to open society’s eyes around the problems of such gendered body expectations. Societal expectations have not only entrenched a binary gender system but also enabled an epidemic of gender-based violence and power imbalance between the sexes. As seen in their use in the Orthodox feminist movement, aspects of Tzniut and modesty principles can serve as empowerment to women and men who seek to minimize the objectification of the body and elevate the self-worth of the individual occupying that body.

# Organizational Guide to Dress Code Creation

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## Rationale

Clothing plays a significant role in our sense of self, personal expression, and identity. However, the line between appropriate and inappropriate attire becomes blurry when determining dress code. In a world where “what was she wearing” is a legitimate question to ask during sexual violence court proceedings, clothing is weaponized and scrutinized. In our Jewish institutions, we desire to create a safe and welcoming environment where self-expression is elevated, yet often balk at determining what type of clothing aligns with our values and is appropriate within the walls of a religious institution. With our desire to honor Jewish tradition and values in addition to the societal norms and expectations of our time, we often get stuck. This problem is not new, as Rabbi Lisa Grushcow writes:

Ever since the Garden of Eden, human clothing has been an issue; after we realize we need to wear something, the question becomes, what to wear, and what not to wear. One might expect the Reform Movement would be silent on this question, leaving it in the realm of individual choice. However, clothing is not merely in the realm of individual choice... This is apparent in synagogue life.<sup>48</sup>

With the changing ethos of clothing, identity, and sexuality, Jewish organizations need to create dress codes that honor the changing times and acknowledge that religious spaces may be held to a different standard than the average space and institution.

Jewish texts and traditions include a long history of discussions of dress and self-presentation, though much of their current inclusion is only discussed in the most traditional movements in Judaism. To a liberal audience, its observance appears to be an exercise in control over both men and women, with a higher desire to police women’s outward

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<sup>48</sup> Rabbi Lisa J. Grushcow. “What Not to Wear: Synagogue Edition” in *Sacred Encounter: Jewish Perspectives on Sexuality*, ed. Lisa J. Grushcow. CCAR Press: New York, 2014. 663.

appearance as a means to control the male gaze. While Tzniut objectively applies to both men and women, much of the focus of rabbinic literature and its contemporary applications focus almost exclusively on women and aim to control female outward appearance and interactions with others to be as mute as possible. In our liberal institutions, discussions around dress code desire to be different than the conversations amongst our more traditional colleagues. However, we need to acknowledge the influence on societal and secular expectations of dress, gender, and sexuality influence how we develop these guides as well. In this guide, we ask the following questions - How does an ethic of clothing, particularly one that incorporates and understands the idea of modesty (Tzniut), engage a contemporary, liberal, Jewish audience? How could a dress code empower women and men instead of seeming like a practice of control and minimization of the individual, especially the female-identified individual? To answer these questions, liberal institutions do not need to ignore the plethora of texts and conversations within other movements that address this issue.

Recently, student dress codes have made headlines because many students across the country – primarily female-identified students – have publicly questioned and expressed frustration at guides that seem to unfairly target female students and send messages that aim to cover, shame, and regulate the female body. Many dress codes include more regulations and requirements for female dress than male dress and others have imbalanced expectations for male and females. Additionally, dress codes that are heavily based in the gender binary of male and female exclude and persecute against those students who identify as genderqueer or gender non-binary.

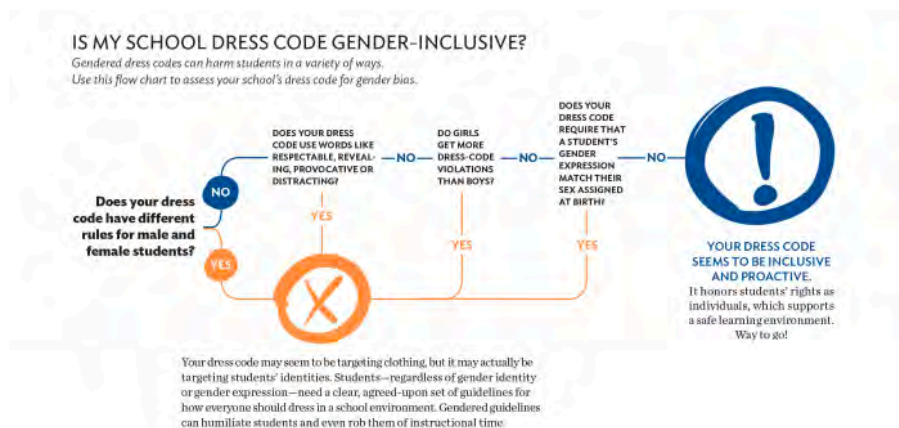


This guide aims to serve as a starting point for a Jewish organization (synagogue, institution, school, camp etc) to re-think and/or develop a dress code policy both rooted in Jewish text and tradition and the contemporary Jewish and secular values of the organization. It provides conversation guides, text studies, and activities to enable a group to discuss gender-based expectations, Jewish understandings of modesty and body, contemporary self-expression, the power of dress, and more. Ideally, the group utilizing this guide will be comprised of a diverse group of stakeholders – students/campers/participants, parents, administrators, lay leaders, and community members. Through this process, an organization can develop a dress code that honors the needs of their community and the self-efficacy of the individuals impacted by the policy.

This guide provides two site models - one for a camp setting and one for a synagogue/day school setting - that can be adapted for different organizations and scenarios as necessary. The programs, conversations, and activities are applicable for the leadership of an organization to work through a dress code (re)development process and provides ideas for how to engage the constituents (campers, staff, and/or students) with the new policy during and after the development process.

## General Suggestions/Guidelines

1. No major changes to any dress code should take place without consulting stakeholders from all of the relevant groups (participants, staff members, parents, community members, administration, board members etc). You know your community best - make changes that feel appropriate for your community at the right time and keep the process and implementation as transparent as possible.
2. As much as possible, the dress code should not be divided into separate clothing requirements for male-identified and female-identified participants.
3. If types of clothing are listed, note that many clothing items are worn by individuals with a variety of gender identities.
4. The value of modesty is not inherently problematic. It becomes problematic if it is only named as a value for women and becomes about clothing's impact on other people as opposed to a focus on one's own body and self-expression.
5. While individuals cannot control what is attractive to them, they can control how they act on that attraction. Therefore, suggested guidelines for dress do not suggest a lesser degree of responsibility for the actions of individuals toward others.
6. Helpful language framing includes focusing on the activities required during the camp/school experience and developing categories like "must wear," "may wear," and "cannot wear" to differentiate between levels of expectations.
7. All staff and participants should be trained to understand the purpose and spirit of the dress code as well as related enforcement procedures. All enforcement should focus on having the least impact on student self-confidence, experience, and learning.<sup>49</sup>



<sup>49</sup> Image from <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/spring-2017/controlling-the-student-body>

## What is Tzniut? An Overview

The term צניע (Tzadee-Nun-Ayin) first appears in Tanakh in Micah 6:8. Micah is found within the section of Tanakh called Nevi'im, the books of the Prophets.

<p>“He has told you, O person, what is good, and what Adonai requires of you: Only to do justice and to love kindness, and to walk modestly/humbly (Tznua) with your God.</p>	<p>הִגִּיד לְךָ אָדָם מִה־טוֹב וּמִה־יְהוָה דּוֹרֵשׁ מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי אִם-עֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט וְאַהֲבַת חֶסֶד וְהִצְנִיעַ לְכַת עִם-אֱלֹהֶיךָ:</p>
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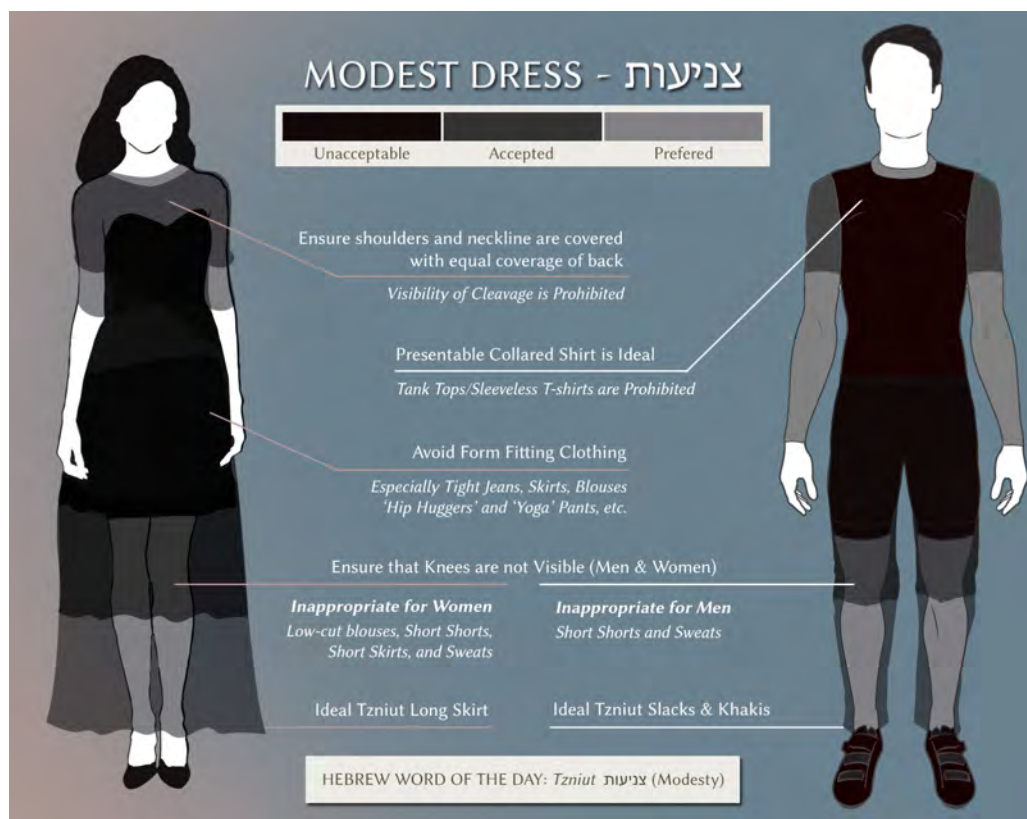
This phrase serves as a foundational text for discussions of Tzniut (the noun form of the word bolded above), the general term used for the practice of and regulations surrounding physical modesty, primarily in dress. This verse discusses how one acts in the world in relationship to others, oneself, and God. In context, it appears to focus on internal presentation. However, it is most often used in Rabbinic literature and religious-based texts to discuss external coverage of the body.

Discussions of Tzniut do discuss the importance of internal presentation and behavior. Even when discussing clothing, these texts operate under the fundamental belief of the inherent Kedusha, holiness, of the human body. The body, like the Torah scroll and other holy objects, should be covered as much as possible because it is a sacred object to be respected. Chasidic Rabbi Zalman Posner expresses this belief:

Tzniut is not a question of a bit of cloth, it is a life-mode, perhaps the bedrock of Judaism. It has not to do with just hemlines or head coverings, but with thought, speech, sexual relations – our sense of who and what we basically are, a sense that our personhood is Kadosh, inviolate. The body is not a piece of property, an object to be disposed of casually; it, too, is an integral part of the sanctity of personhood, the Kedusha of the Jew.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Handelman, Shaina. “The Paradoxes of Privacy,” Sh’ma, November 1978.

While the belief in the Kedusha of the body underscores these texts, the bulk of the literature about Tzniut focuses on clothing and coverage. Many variations and sets of guidelines exist; however, in general, Tzniut principles zoom in on which parts of the body must be covered and how. There is nearly infinite literature about the expectations for modest dress, with different rabbis developing their own set of principles and requirements based on their surrounding society and their interpretation of text. The image below summarizes the stringent but widely accepted principles of Tzniut in much of the Orthodox Jewish community.<sup>51</sup>



<sup>51</sup> Image from <http://rabbiyeshua.com/services/more/dress-code>

While principles of Tzniut apply to both men and women, most of the discussions and regulations focus on women's clothing and bodies. This imbalance of focus stems from two major rationales. First, the presence of women might negatively influence or disrupt a male's ability to perform Mitzvot. In Halakhic (Law-abiding) Judaism, men are obligated to perform many more Mitzvot than women, including positive time-bound Mitzvot. Women are not obligated to observe positive time-bound Mitzvot, though they may choose to observe some of them. Given the many obligations on Jewish men, the distraction of a woman could become problematic and impinge on their ability to observe the Mitzvot in the appropriate time and place. Second, rabbinic authorities did not believe men could control their sexual arousal. If a man becomes aroused by an uncovered woman, he might ejaculate and become ritually impure. This lack of control terrified the Rabbis of many eras (including the authors of the Mishnah, Talmuds, Codes and more), who channeled this fear into regulations and rules around female external appearance with the goal of tempering or eliminating the opportunity for men to be aroused by their presence.

In liberal Jewish communities, other concerns become more significant when discussing dress and self-presentation. These institutions may not be concerned about the timing of Mitzvot, but there is concern about how dress can be distracting, suggestive, or too revealing. Society scrutinizes the physical body, particularly of young women, while making the body the defining feature of a person's identity. The values behind texts that discuss Tzniut, even when some of them get stuck thinking about inches and hemline, can help us determine how to develop dress codes that honor the person, not the clothing. Instead of rejecting texts because they seem antiquated or against our values, we can use them to think

about what is appropriate to include, what to ignore, and what to adapt to meet the values we truly wish to engage with in these dress codes and conversations.

## Essential Questions

*These questions should be answered at some point during the dress code development process. They can occur independently as separate conversations or in conjunction with one of the text studies or programs provided within the guide.*

### **Preparation/Reflection on Current Policy**

1. What is our current dress code policy? How is it enforced?
2. What values does our current dress code express?
3. How do our constituents engage with the dress code? How do we teach about the dress code?
4. What are the core values of our institution?
5. What changes do we need to make to align our core values with the values of our dress code?

### **Gender Expectations**

1. What gender-based education do our participants receive at our institution? In their homes? In our community?
2. How do gender-based expectations play a role in our institution?
3. How do we engage with our students gender identities? Do we create space for students to explore their gender identities?
4. Do we have policies that disproportionately impact male or female-identified participants? How do non-binary identifying participants engage with these policies?

### **Jewish Values**

1. What are our organizations key Jewish values (may or may not be in alignment with core values discussed previously)?
2. How do we understand Jewish principles of Tzniut? Which of these principles apply for our organization?
3. What (if any) Jewish texts would we like to include or allude to in our dress code policy?
4. How does Judaism (text, values, practice, ethics) influence how we discuss dress, body, and self-presentation?

### **Development of Dress Code**

1. Should this policy have separate expectations/lists of acceptable clothing for different gender identities?
2. What is the mission statement of the dress code?
3. How specific or general should our language be?
4. How/do we include Jewish text and justification for our choices?

**Evaluation/Revision of Dress Code**

1. Does our language reflect our values?
2. How will we solicit feedback about the dress code?
3. How do we plan to educate our community about the dress code?

**Six Months After Dress Code Implementation**

1. How does the community engage with the dress code?
2. What have been some challenges? Successes? Areas for improvement?
3. Does the community understand the changes we made? What additional education could we provide?

*Revise and adapt as necessary, continuing to accept and encourage feedback from participants, staff, board members and other stakeholders.*



# Guide for Jewish Camp Setting

## Overview

Camp is a unique setting to develop a dress code standard. On the one hand, many campers and staff express a sense of being their best selves at camp. They feel free and safe to express themselves as they wish in a manner that is irreplaceable in any other setting (especially school and/or work). On the other hand, the active and outdoor nature of camp requires clothing to be flexible and supportive of a diversity of activities. Jewish camp is also not immune to the influence of gender-based expectations and power imbalances. Based on anecdotal evidence and conversations, the rates of sexual assault and inappropriate comments about body and appearance at camp mirror the non-camp world. Acknowledging this reality must be part of a dress code creation process. Ideally, this process will involve camp leadership along with parents, staff, and campers. This section of the guide provides opportunities for these constituent groups to work together and separately to develop and understand the implementation of a new code.

## **Process Guide for Dress Code Committee**

*The activities/ideas that follow are for a committee of stakeholders and participants to walk through a process of developing a new/adapted dress code policy for a camp. Each activity and/or conversation can be held as a separate meeting or multiple activities can occur in a single meeting. Each activity should include ample time for discussion in small and large groups as well as a space for questions. The leaders of the task force can either answer these questions themselves or seek experts to teach the group about the communal curiosities. Additionally, the information gathered from program participants (see *Teen and Staff Participants Process Guide*) can be incorporated at various points throughout this process.*

### **Goals:**

- To articulate the values of the camp that relate to dress
- To evaluate the current policy and determine opportunities for change and growth
- To understand the needs and desires for dress code of the various stakeholders, including campers, staff, board members, and the community as a whole
- To develop a dress code that reflects the values of different constituent groups and our organizational secular and Jewish values

### **Introduction:**

The camp director and/or committee chair describes the rationale for this project and why it is important for the organization at this time. Leadership can share stories when the dress code succeeded or failed in its current iteration and feedback they have already received from stakeholders.

### **What are our Values?**

Project/provide copies of the mission statement and vision statement to the entire group. Utilizing the set of values in Appendix A (or others the participants come up with), ask each participant to create two lists of values - their top 3-5 personal values and what they view to be the top 3-5 values of the organization. If participants need more guidance or focus for the organizational values, encourage them to select the values of the organization that may be reflected in a dress code policy.

In small groups, participants discuss both lists of values. After a few minutes, create a combined list of the entire committee of both sets of values and notice the diversity and similarities of the list. When focusing on the list of the organization, try to develop a united list of 5-8 values for the organization through discussion and compromise.

### **Judaism and the Body:**

As the group understands their own values, have the group complete the text study in Appendix B.1. This text study highlights how Judaism views the body. Ensure the group notices where the texts come from in Tanakh and what values and judgements seem to be present and/or absent in its references to the body. The texts show that shame is one of the key associations with nakedness. Reflect on how this ideology has influenced personal and

communal relationships to our bodies. This understanding and conversation can inform a discussion of the current dress code policy.

### **Evaluating Current Dress Policy:**

Once this list has been developed, discuss how these values should be reflected in the dress code policy. In small groups or as a committee, evaluate the current dress policy. First, determine what values the current policy expresses. Then, using the values determined in the first activity as guides, think about where the policy is in and not in alignment with these values. Reflect on how the policy is enforced and taught to the community. Do these policies also align with the values determined by the group?

### **What does Judaism Teach about Dress?**

Study the texts in Appendix B.2 that offer central ideas about Jewish modesty - the sexualization of women's bodies and the importance of appropriate attire for prayer and daily activities. Reflect on what values emerge from these texts.

Question to Consider (in addition to the questions on the source sheet):

- Do these values align with the values discussed in the previous activity?
- How does this camp agree with or disagree with the values presented in the text?
- How might different constituent groups reflect on these texts? How can we include these different perspectives in our future policy?
- Where is the agency about dress found in these texts? How do we want agency to play a role in our dress code policy?

### **How do we Utilize and Understand Modesty?**

Review the text below about Orthodox feminists' response to contemporary conceptions of female body. This community views Tzniut differently than contemporary liberal communities tend to engage with the concept. Discuss the text and reflect on the value or lack of value in re-engaging with a conception of modesty from a more liberal perspective.

*In contemporary times, as women become more overly sexualized and defined by their bodies, Orthodox feminists view Tzniut as an opportunity for self-efficacy. Orthodox feminists believe observation of Tzniut can enable women to “reclaim their bodies and sexuality and shelters them against the inevitable self-loathing that arises from comparison with the impossible, fantasized standards of secular beauty... [and] lends a woman control over when, where, and to whom she reveals her attractiveness.”<sup>52</sup> By not conforming to Western standards of sexuality and beauty, traditionally-dressed women dictate the beauty standards within their own communities. However, this rationalization still places most of its focus on external presentation as an individual's expression of self-containment and awareness. It also primarily places the focus on women as men are seen as sexual beings incapable of controlling their urges. As Western culture focuses on undressing and viewing the female body for the purpose of male sexual pleasure, feminists within cultures with a practice of*

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<sup>52</sup> Silverman, Eric. *A Cultural History of Jewish Dress*. Bloomsbury, 2013. 111.

*modesty, including Orthodox women, see covering up as an act of rebellion. Many of these women see the act of dressing and acting modestly as distinctively countercultural. They view modesty as an empowering switch of focus from external presentation to spiritual and internal self-actualization as the measure of one's self worth.<sup>53</sup> In this rationale, religious modesty "highlights inner beauty and moral substance, not superficial appearances."<sup>54</sup> Ideally, this rationalization for modesty externally and internally is highly appealing for some women because it focuses on individual awareness and choice and lacks an inherent gendered lens.*

Questions to Consider:

- How do our participants tend to view requests for modesty? How do their parents understand modesty?
- How is modesty viewed to a contemporary non-Orthodox audience?
- How do Orthodox feminists re-conceptualize modesty?
- What aspects of this understanding and/or what values might we incorporate into our dress code?

### **What do Our Participants Have to Say?**

Review the feedback from the teen and staff task force participants based on the conclusions they derive from their various programs. Each of these programs ask the teens or staff to come up with a few guidelines and principles related to dress code from their perspective. The programs encourage teens and staff to think beyond their own experiences at camp through a discussion of gender norms, power dynamics, and positive and negative cultural aspects of camp.

### **Reviewing Current Examples**

See Appendix D for various examples of dress code policies from Jewish and secular institutions. These examples utilize a more individual approach that is values-focused. The group may note that these policies are more minimal than many current policies and focus on what is most important to include as opposed to regulating every aspect of dress.

Questions to Consider:

- What key values appear in these policies?
- What aspects of these policies would we like to include in our policy?
- What aspects of these policies do we not want to include in our policy?
- What type of format would we like to use for the new policy?

### **Writing our New Dress Code**

Using the examples provided, the information gathered from the teen and staff participants, and the conversations held thus far, slowly develop a new dress code policy. This code should include a values/mission statement, rationale for the new policies, values-based

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<sup>53</sup> Hartman, Tova. "Modesty and the Religious Male Gaze." *Feminism Encounters Traditional Judaism: Resistance and Accommodation*, Brandeis University Press, 2007. 47.

<sup>54</sup> Silverman 87.

explanations for major changes, and opportunities for discussion and evaluation with the impacted groups (staff, participants, parents etc). Appendix F provides a worksheet to use during this process.

## **Process Guide for Teen and Staff Participants**

*Gather a group of 10-15 members from each constituency and separately guide them through a process that will end with the participants offering a set of principles they would like to see incorporated into the new dress code. As the groups most impacted by a new dress code policy, the input of these groups is critical and vital to achieving buy-in of these larger groups as the policy is being implemented. The members of these groups should be integral to helping share this new policy with their communities through leading programs about the new policy, sharing of the process, and soliciting feedback from their communities as well.*

### **Introduction:**

The camp director and/or other senior staff members describes the rationale for this project and why it is important for the organization at this time. Thank participants for their participation!

### **What are our Values?**

Provide each participant with a folder/water bottle/some item they can place stickers on. Project/provide copies of the mission statement and vision statement to the entire group. Utilizing the set of values in Appendix A (or others the participants come up with), ask each participant to select the 3-5 values most important to them. Have the participants place these stickers on their folder/water bottle/etc as decoration. Ask participants to discuss these values with one another. Why are they important to them? How do they express them in their daily lives?

Next, ask each participant to choose the stickers that represent what they view to be the top 3-5 values of the organization. If participants need more guidance or focus for the organizational values, encourage them to select the values of the organization that may be reflected in a dress code policy.

### **How Does Clothing Influence Us?**

Lead You're Wearing That? Part 1 (Appendix C.1). In this program, participants reflect on their clothing choices and how these choices influence how they appear to themselves and the world. They also engage in text study to reflect on how Judaism understands clothing choices.

### **Let's Change the Dress Code!**

Lead You're Wearing That? Part 2 (Appendix C.2). This program allows participants to share stories about their experiences with dress codes and then utilize their core values to develop new principles they would like to see in a new policy. At the end of this program, participants will develop a motto and/or set of guidelines they would like to see in the policy.

### **What's Next?**

Keep the teen/staff participants informed of the committee's progress and invite a few of the participants to serve on the general task force. As drafts of the policy come out of the

committee, task force participants should solicit feedback from these larger groups of participants. As the new policy emerges, these participants should be called upon to lead programs for their consistent groups. See Appendix E for an example of a program to use with staff or teens to discuss the policy in the context of gender dynamics at camp.

## Appendix A: Lists of Secular and Jewish Values

**Create set of stickers with these words (Feel free to add others and to use both lists combined or separated for different activities.)**

Acceptance	ahavah/love
Beauty	ahavat yisrael/love of all Jewish people
Communication	areyvut/mutual responsibility
Compassion	bal tashchit/preservation of environment
Creativity	cherut/freedom
Democracy	chesed/loyalty-kindness
Dignity	chochmah/wisdom
Diversity	daat/knowledge
Equality	emunah/faith
Family	hachnasat orchim/welcoming people into your home and community
Love	hakarat hatov/recognizing the good in others
Honesty	hiddur p'nai zaken/respect for elders
Integrity	kehillah/community
Opportunity	kibbud av va'em/respect for parents
Respect	rachamim/compassion
Responsibility	refuah/healing
Service	simcha/joy
Simplicity	shalom/peace
Consistency	tikkun olam/repairing the world
Open-mindedness	tzedek/justice
Courage	tzelem elohim/all people are created in God's image
Education	tzniut/modesty
Modesty	



## Appendix B.1: Text Study (Physical Modesty in Tanakh)

### Physical Modesty in Tanakh

*Tzanua (modesty) appears only twice in Tanakh (Once in Prophets and once in Writings, never in the Torah). This term becomes the overarching term for physical modesty in later texts and conversations, so it is important to understand its original citations.*

Proverbs 11:2<sup>55</sup>

When arrogance appears, disgrace follows, But wisdom is with those who are unassuming (Tznuim).	בָּא-זָדוֹן וַיָּבֹא קָלוֹן וְאֶת-צְנוּעִים חֲכָמָה:
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Micah 6:8

“He has told you, O person, what is good, and what Adonai requires of you: Only to do justice and to love kindness, and to walk modestly/humbly (Tznua) with your God.	הֲגִיד לְךָ אָדָם מִה-טוֹב וּמִה-יְהוָה דּוֹרֵשׁ מִמֶּךָּ כִּי אִם-עֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט וְאַהֲבַת חֵסֶד וְהַצְנָע לִפְנֵי עַם-אֱלֹהֶיךָ:
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*The more common term associated with physical modesty in Tanakh is Erva, meaning nakedness. While the term is not used in the Adam and Eve episode cited below, these verses represent the first time humans noticed a lack of coverage. What do we learn from their reaction to this realization?<sup>56</sup>*

Genesis 2:25 - And both of them were naked, the man and his wife, and they were not ashamed.	וַיְהִיו שְׁנֵיהֶם עֲרוּמִים הָאָדָם וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וְלֹא יִתְבַּשְׁשׁוּ:
Genesis 3:7 - And the eyes of both were opened and they knew that they were naked, and they put together fig leaves and made themselves girdles.	וַתִּפְקַחְנָה עֵינֵי שְׁנֵיהֶם וַיֵּדְעוּ כִּי עֲרֻמִּם הֵם וַיִּתְּפְרוּ עָלֶיהָ תְּאֵנָה וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם חֲגָרֹת:

### Questions:

- What does Tzanua seem to mean in the first two texts?
- What is the value/connotation of modesty in the texts?
- What change does the awareness of nakedness cause for Adam and Eve?
- What does this connotation of nakedness teach us about the perspective of the biblical author?

<sup>55</sup> Translation from JPS Tanakh, 1985 Edition.

<sup>56</sup> Translations from JPS Tanakh, 1985 Edition

- How do you think these texts influenced Jewish perspectives on modesty since antiquity?
- How might these texts influence our work today on dress codes?

## Appendix B.2: Text Study (Basic Principles of Tzniut)

### Basic Principles of Tzniut

*Tzniut, meaning modesty, comes to mean an overarching set of principles and expectations related to external and internal presentation. Below are a few texts from different periods that address aspects of modesty and highlight some of the restrictions placed on women's dress and behavior.*

#### Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 24a (Between 500-800 CE)<sup>57</sup>

אמר ר' יצחק טפח באשה ערוה למאי אילימא לאסתכולי בה והא אמר רב ששת למה מנה הכתוב תכשיטין שבחוץ עם תכשיטין שבפנים לומר לך כל המסתכל באצבע קטנה של אשה כאילו מסתכל במקום התורףאלא באשתו ולקריאת שמעאמר רב חסדא שוק באשה ערוה שנאמר גלי שוק עברי נהרות וכתוב תגל ערותך וגם תראה חרפתך אמר שמואל קול באשה ערוה שנאמר כי קולך ערב ומראך נאווה אמר רב ששת שער באשה ערוה שנאמר שערך כעדר העזים:

R. Yitzhak said: "An [uncovered] tefach (handbreadth) in a woman is ervah (nakedness)." Regarding what [did R. Yitzhak say this]? If in regard to looking [at women], did not R. Sheshet say: "... Anyone who gazes even at a woman's little finger is as if he gazes at her private parts"? Rather, [R. Yitzhak said it] regarding one's wife and reading the Shema. R. Chisda said: "A woman's leg (shok) is ervah, as it is written (Isaiah 47:2), 'Reveal your leg, pass over rivers,' and it is also written (verse 3), 'Your ervah will be uncovered and your shame will also be revealed.'..." Shmuel said: "A woman's voice is ervah, as it is written (Shir HaShirim 2:14) '... for your voice is pleasant and your appearance is attractive.'..." R. Sheshet said: "A woman's hair is ervah as it is written (4:1) 'Your hair resembles a herd of goats.'" (11-12)

#### Mishneh Torah Hilchot Deot 5:9 (1170):<sup>58</sup>

מלבוש תלמיד חכם מלבוש נאה ונקי. ואסור לו שימצא בבגדו כתם או שמנונית וכיוצא בהן. ולא ילבש לא מלבוש מלכים כגון בגדי זהב וארגמן שהפל מסתכלין בהן. ולא מלבוש עניים שהוא מבזה את לובשיו אלא בגדים בינונים נאים. ולא יהא בשרו נראה מתחת מדיו כמו בגדי הפשתן הקלים ביותר שעושים במצרים. ולא יהיו בגדיו סחובין על הארץ כמו בגדי גסי הרוח אלא עד עקבו וביית יד שולו עד ראשי אצבעותיו. ולא ישלשל טליתו מפני שנראה כגסות הרוח אלא בשבת בלבד אם אין לו להחליף. ולא ינעל מנעלים מטלאים טלאי על גבי טלאי בימות החמה. אבל בימות הגשמים מתר אם היה עני.

The student/disciple of the wise should wear attractive and clean clothes. It is forbidden to have a spot or grease or anything of an unclean nature found on his garment. He should not

<sup>57</sup> Translation from the William Davidson Edition of the Koren Noe Talmud.

<sup>58</sup> Translation by the author.

wear clothes fit for a king including clothes adorned with gold or purple that attract everyone's gaze, nor the clothes of a pauper that put the wearer to shame, but average garments of becoming style... He should not wear patched-up shoes, patch upon a patch, in summer time; but in winter time it is permitted if he be poor.

**Shulchan Arukh, Evan HaEzer 115:4 (1565):**

איזו היא דת יהודית? הוא מנהג הצניעות שנהגו בנות ישראל ואלו הם הדברים שאם עשתה אחת מהם עברה על דת יהודית: יוצאת לשוק או למבוי מפולש או בחצר שהרבים בוקעים בו וראשה פרוע ואין עליה רדיד ככל הנשים אע"פ ששערה מכוסה במטפחות או שהיתה טווה בשוק וורד וכיוצא בו כנגד פניה על פדחתה או לחיה כדרך שעושות העכו"ם הפרוצות...

(4) What is law or customary behavior of Jewish women? It is the custom of modesty that the daughters of Israel have practiced. And these are the things that, if one did one of them, she transgressed the Jewish religion: She goes out to the market, or to an open alley, or in a courtyard through which many pass, and her head is uncovered, and she's not wearing a shawl like all the women, even though her hair is covered with a kerchief; or she spins in the market, and rose or something similar is in front of her face, on her forehead or her cheek, as the promiscuous gentile women do...<sup>59</sup>

**Questions:**

- What (if anything) unites these texts?
- What is different about these texts?
- List at least one principle of modesty highlighted in each text. What might this teach you about the time in which the text was written? How might we adapt this principle for today?
- What do these differences teach us about the evolving nature of Tzniut?

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<sup>59</sup> Translation by the author.

## Appendix C.1: Program for Teen/Staff Participants Part 1

### You're Wearing That?

*Inspiration from Program by Lisa Langer for URJ Kutz Camp Summer 2018*

#### Goals:

- Engage students in conversations about issues that arise around dress and selection of clothing.
- Reflect on how our clothing reflects who we are to ourselves, our peers, and our community.
- Build and discover connections between our values and clothing/dress.
- Address cultural and peer pressure expectations related to dress.
- Examine personal “rules” about clothing.

#### Supplies:

- Magazines, catalogues, scissors, glue (what people wear collages)
- Poster board
- Provocative Propositions
- List of values statements
- List of factors
- Prompts for discussion of factors
- Examples of Camp/NFTY/Synagogue Dress Code
- Values and Guidelines chart sheet (one for each participant)

#### Session 1

##### Set Induction Activities:

##### What People Wear Collages:

Hang posters around the room with each of these activities written across the poster.

Participants can use magazines, markers, and other supplies to add images to the posters that depict what people wear to the following occasions.

- Synagogue service
- School
- NFTY event
- Party
- Maccabiah/song session/camp tradition

After a few minutes, divide the participants into small groups to discuss the following questions:

- What was it like to do this activity?
- Anything striking about the images and clothes?
- Do we wear different attire for different settings? Why? Why not?

### **My Favorite Piece of Clothing or Outfit**

Participants write individually and/or share in a small group about their favorite piece of clothing or their favorite outfit.

- Describe the clothes
- How did you acquire it? (Who gave it to you? Where did you buy it? Did you get it for a specific occasion? Why did you choose to buy it? Who paid for it?)
- When do you typically wear it?
- How do you feel when you wear it?
- What about your parents/families? Is there an outfit they wear that you hate? Why?

Reveal poster with name of session in front of the group. “You’re Wearing That?!”

- How do you react when you hear this question/statement? From a peer? From a parent? From a teacher? From a counselor?
- How could you say this another way?
- How does emphasizing different words convey different meanings?
- Who would say it that way? Under what circumstance?

*Explanation (By Facilitator): This program provides a chance to explore some of the issues that arise for us about clothing and how we decide what to wear. Now that our juices are flowing about clothing and what people wear, let’s spend some time talking to each other about how we think about some clothing-related issues.*

### **Provocative Propositions in Learning Groups:**

*This activity helps participants dive deeply into the topic through a series of questions and statements. These steps are structured to promote careful listening and to give everyone a chance to speak.*

Process for Activity:

1. Form groups of 4-6 people.
2. Invite everyone to introduce themselves to the group by describing a favorite article of clothing and explaining why it is a favorite in 1-2 sentences.
3. The facilitator gives instructions for the exercise:
  1. Each group will get a statement to discuss for 3 minutes.
  2. Everyone in the group should have a chance to talk.
  3. The group should try to reach consensus about their responses about the statement.
4. The facilitator presents the first proposition to all of the groups. (Read the proposition aloud and distribute it on a slip of paper to each group.) All the groups discuss the statement for 3 minutes, allowing everyone to speak and trying to reach consensus.
5. If time permits, the facilitator may choose to ask a question to the whole group, inviting one person from each group to respond (in one minute or less):

1. What are some of the reasons we wear clothes?
2. Does your group agree with the statement?
3. Is a dress code a good idea?
6. The facilitator gives the groups another provocative proposition, and the process begins again.
7. After the process has been completed, analyze the activity with the whole group. What key ideas are you walking away with? What did you learn?

### **Provocative Propositions:**

- A. Why do we wear clothes?
- B. You can always tell something about a person from what he or she is wearing.
- C. It is important to wear clothes that I want to wear no matter what anyone else thinks, no matter how uncomfortable, how expensive or where they are made.
- D. A dress code for school is a good idea.

*Transition: Now that we have a better sense of how we feel about clothing, let's think about what we wear through naming what is important to us. By understanding our values related to what we wear.*

### **What does Jewish tradition say?**

Offer blessing for Torah study and divide into Chevrutah (pairs/small groups no larger than

- 4). Provide questions/steps as guide for text study.
  - A. Retell the story of the text in own words.
  - B. What is the question? What is the answer?
  - C. What questions do you have for the text?
  - D. What is the value reflected in the answer?
  - E. How is this value, as it relates to clothing, still relevant in today's world?

Text 1: Babylonian Talmud Megillah 24b<sup>60</sup>

עולא בר רב מאבוי קטן פוחח מהו שיקרא בתורה אמר ליה ותיבעי לך ערום ערום  
מאי טעמא לא משום כבוד צבור הכא נמי משום כבוד צבור:

Ulla, son of Rav asked Abaye: 'Is a scantily clad minor allowed to read from the Torah?' He replied, "You might as well ask about a naked one. Why is one without any clothes not allowed? Out of Kavod (honor/respect) for the congregation. So here, [in the case of the scantily clad minor, he is not allowed] out of Kavod for the congregation."

Text 2: Babylonian Talmud Bava Batra 57b

בעא מיניה ר' יוחנן מרבי בנאה חלוק של ת"ח כיצד כל שאין בשרו נראה מתחתיו  
טלית של ת"ח כיצד כל שאין חלוקו נראה מתחתיו טפה..

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<sup>60</sup> Translations by the author.

Rabbi Yochanan asked Rabbi Banaah, “How long should the undergarment of a Torah student be?” Rabbi Banaah replied, “Long enough to hide the flesh.” “How long should the cloak of a Torah scholar be?” “So long that not more than a Tefach (fist-size) of his undergarment should be visible...”

*Transition: These two texts give us a glimpse into the lives of the rabbis and to their decision making process. They expose some of the issues of concern to the communities of the time and the rabbinic resolutions to the situation. Today, we have our own concerns that are in many ways similar to those of the rabbis. Next time, we will turn to our lives and study a few cases based on true experiences. If you are interested in providing cases for us to examine, please let the facilitator know before the second program.*



## Appendix C.2: Program for Teen/Staff Participants Part 2

### Session 2:

#### Case Studies

*Before session 2, invite participants to be ready to share (or share with/send the facilitator ahead of time) scenarios related to dress at synagogue, school, and religious school.*

*Scenarios can discuss a time when someone was forced to change, a participant felt someone wore something inappropriate to one of these places, or a time when someone felt their dress choices were not supported.*

Case 1: You're Wearing That...to Synagogue?

Case 2: You're Wearing That...to School?

Case 3: You're Wearing That...to Religious School

Participants share and discuss their own cases.

#### Values - Agree/Disagree

Divide the room in half. One side is AGREE, one side is DISAGREE (allow those who are UNSURE to stand in the middle, though encourage the participants to try and pick one side of the room). Read each of the following statements. Ask everyone to decide if they agree or disagree and to move to the side of the room that reflects their response without talking/sharing with their neighbor (yet). After each statement, ask participants to notice the balance within the room. Then, invite everyone to find a partner to explain why she feels this way about the statement. Ask for a few responses to be shared with the group. Repeat this with each of the statements.

- *Dress with tzniut (modesty).* Never dress to expose your body or to stimulate or arouse the opposite sex.
- *Dress with kavod (dignity).* Be understated, not extravagant.
- *Dress discreetly.* Let your actions speak more loudly than your clothes. Gaudy is not Godly.
- *Dress appropriately.* Be guided by the place and the occasion, not merely by whim... bring Kavod/honor to yourself and to special events with special clothing.
- *Do not dress sloppily.* Recognize the difference between casual and sloppy.
- *Do not dress shabbily.* There is no virtue in wearing the cheapest clothing you can find. You are what you wear.
- *Never wear stained or torn clothes.* Let everything you wear reflect the fact that you were created Talmud Bavlyzelem Elohim.

*Transition: Another way to consider what to wear is by considering some of the factors that relate to a situation or occasion.*

### Factors<sup>61</sup>

There are several factors that we all might take into account when buying our clothes and choosing what to wear:

- The clothes' **functionality** (will they keep me warm if it's cold outside, if I want to dance, will I have room to move),
- The physical **comfort** they provide (related to functionality, but maybe an additional factor)
- The **norms/expectations** of the place and the occasion (it's customary for a couple getting married to dress in fancier-than-usual clothes)
- The message I believe the clothes send about my **values** (I would not wear a fur coat because I don't believe in hunting or growing animals for fur)
- The message I believe the clothes send about my **personality** (I might wear a "power suit" to a job interview)
- **Trends** and fashions (what "looks good" to certain groups of people at certain times)
- The **cost** of the clothes

Ask: *Are there other possible factors that have been left out?*

Given all of these possible factors, discuss the following prompts in small groups:

- When dressing for sports or working out at the gym, the two most important factors to consider are: \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
- When dressing for school, the two most important factors to consider are: \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
- When dressing for a dance, the two most important factors to consider are: \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
- When dressing for a religious service, the two most important factors to consider are: \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
- When dressing for working in the garden or cooking, the two most important factors to consider are: \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
- When dressing for a funeral, the two most important factors to consider are: \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

Ask participants to share the one or two or three most important factors overall. What repeated on your list?

Discuss WHY they might have found that the factors change from circumstance to circumstance, and how they decide in any given situation which factors should outweigh the others.

*Transition: Values, factors and rules play a role in helping us to determine what to wear when. Which of these pieces does our organization's dress code consider?*

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<sup>61</sup> Based on an activity from *Moral Questions in the Classroom* by Katherine G. Simon.

### Our Dress Code

Read the dress code of the organization as a group and discuss:

- Identify some of the values reflected in this dress code.
- Share some of the reasons that this dress code makes sense.
- Share some reasons this dress code is hard to follow.

*Transition: We have considered different kinds of values and guidelines as they relate to clothing and dress. What are yours? What are some of the written or unwritten values and rules about clothing in your family?*

### Values and Guidelines

Distribute the following chart to each person. Invite each person to identify at least three values s/he/they holds about deciding what to wear then write a guideline that aligns with this value:

Value	Guideline
1	1
2	2
3	3

What might your motto or slogan be to describe your point of view about what to wear?  
Write this motto/slogan below your values/guidelines chart.

### Closing

- Share mottos and values in small groups and with whole group.
- Ask for takeaways from the session.
- Invite participants to work with task force in dress code policy re-visioning process.

## Appendix D: Examples of Dress Codes

### **Rabbinical Assembly's Teshuvah about Dress Code (2017):<sup>62</sup>**

*Example Dress Code for Camp Ramah: We at Camp Ramah believe in the value of modesty as a means of encouraging pre-teens, teens, and twenty year olds to find a variety of ways to express themselves and discover their own value as creations of God. Ramah expects of its campers, counselors, and staff, 21 attire that reminds us that our real value comes from who we are as people rather than how we appear to others. As a result, we expect campers to dress in modest and respectful fashion. In particular, no visible underwear, is permissible. Clothing should be of reasonable cut and length and appropriate to the context. Bikinis and tight cut bathing suits (worn by either gender) will not be permitted at the pool or lake areas. Attire for prayer and Shabbat will be more modest and formal to recognize the additional sanctity of the occasion.*

### **URJ 6Points SciTech Academy West:<sup>63</sup>**

*All Camp staff members serve as role models for all our campers. Keeping in mind that campers will want to dress like you dress, please carefully consider your attire for the summer.*

*Clothing worn by all members of the Camp community – and particularly staff members – should be conservative and respectful of others. Appropriate undergarments must be worn at all times. Undergarments should not be visible either through or around clothing. Clothing should not be sheer or see-through.*

*Inappropriate attire not to be worn includes T-shirts bearing ads and/or iconography depicting alcoholic beverages, drugs, inappropriate sexual behavior, foul language, and clothing that is overtly revealing. Additionally, closed-toed shoes must be worn at all times during the day for both campers and staff.*

*On certain days like Opening Days, Closing Days and Trip Days, staff will be required to wear camp shirts identifying all staff. Staff are not permitted to cut or modify the shirts in any way.*

### **Oregon National Organization of Women Model Dress Code Project:<sup>64</sup>**

*The primary responsibility for a student's attire resides with the student and parents or guardians. The school district and individual schools are responsible for seeing that student attire does not interfere with the health or safety of any student, and that student attire does not contribute to a hostile or intimidating atmosphere for any student.*

*Students should be given the most choice possible in how they dress for school. Any restrictions must be necessary to support the overall educational goals of the school and must be explained within the dress code.*

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<sup>62</sup> <https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/Modesty%20Final.pdf>

<sup>63</sup> Language provided by Camp Director Jordanna Cooper Flores. Personal Communication.

<sup>64</sup> [https://noworegon.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2018/01/or\\_now\\_model\\_student\\_dress\\_code\\_feb\\_2016\\_1.pdf](https://noworegon.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2018/01/or_now_model_student_dress_code_feb_2016_1.pdf)

*Districts should set the student dress code and enforcement policies for their entire district and take steps to ensure that all schools in the district adopt and follow it. Too often individual schools create their own student dress codes and enforce them in different ways that result in inequities within districts and in many cases policies and enforcement that are not consistent with the law or the district's intent.*

1. *Basic Principle: Certain body parts must be covered for all students. Clothes must be worn in a way such that genitals, buttocks, and nipples are covered with opaque material. Cleavage should not have coverage requirements. All items listed in the “must wear” and “may wear” categories below must meet this basic principle.*
2. *Students Must Wear (High-school courses that include attire as part of the curriculum (for example, professionalism, public speaking, and job readiness) may include assignment-specific dress, but should not focus on covering girls' bodies or promoting culturally-specific attire):*
  - *Shirt.*
  - *Bottom: pants/sweatpants/shorts/skirt/dress/leggings*
  - *Shoes; activity-specific shoes requirements are permitted (for example for sports)*
3. *Students May Wear:*
  - *Hats, including religious headwear*
  - *Hoodie sweatshirts (over head is allowed)*
  - *Fitted pants, including leggings, yoga pants and “skinny jeans”*
  - *Midriff baring shirts*
  - *Pajamas*
  - *Ripped jeans, as long as underwear is not exposed.*
  - *Tank tops, including spaghetti straps, halter tops, and “tube” (strapless) tops*
  - *Athletic attire*
  - *Clothing with commercial or athletic logos provided they do not violate the principles above.*
4. *Students Cannot Wear:*
  - *Violent language or images.*
  - *Images or language depicting drugs or alcohol (or any illegal item or activity) or the use of same.*
  - *Hate speech, profanity, pornography.*
  - *Images or language that creates a hostile or intimidating environment based on any protected class.*

#### **Kehillah High School (Palo Alto, CA):<sup>65</sup>**

*The goal of the dress code is to create an environment in which all students, teachers, and staff feel comfortable. Students must wear clothing that is neat, clean, and respectful of self and the learning environment. Dress guidelines must be followed while a student is on*

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<sup>65</sup> [https://kehillah.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/StudentParent\\_Handbook\\_20162017\\_FINAL.pdf](https://kehillah.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/StudentParent_Handbook_20162017_FINAL.pdf)

*campus (including lunchtime and after school), and on trips. The school has sole discretion to determine if a student's attire adheres to the dress code.*

- *Clothing should be clean.*
- *Excessively revealing shirts and shorts are prohibited.*
- *Stomachs, chests, and buttocks must be covered.*
- *Undergarments, with the exception of undershirts, should not show.*
- *Any clothing with offensive printing is not permitted.*
- *Footwear is required at all times.*

### **URJ Camp Harlam (Kunkletown, PA):<sup>66</sup>**

*We ask each camper at Harlam to dress in a way that reflects respect for camps' values, ourselves, and other members of our community, and that is safe and appropriate for the activity a camper is participating in. We suggest that parents and campers discuss levels of appropriateness before arriving at camp and use their best judgment to pack clothing that is appropriate for the camp setting – remember that Harlam is a place where we play in the dirt, get wet, and sweat.*

*As you prepare for camp, we ask you to consider the necessity of these items:*

- *T-Shirts or other clothing with inappropriate wording or graphics*
- *Clothing that allows underwear and/or bras to be visible*
- *String Bikinis*
- *Clothing intended to be worn as a costume that objectifies campers themselves or others, including other cultures*
- *Crop tops*

*Camp Harlam reserves the right to ask any participant to change their clothing at any time if it doesn't meet camp's values and/or is inappropriate or unsafe for a given activity.*

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<sup>66</sup> <https://campharlam.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/03/2018-Camp-Harlam-Family-Handbook.pdf>

## Appendix E: Mapping Gender & Dress Code at Camp

### Goals:

- Reflect on pre-existing gender stereotypes in general and specific to institution.
- Understand our own role in solidifying gender-based expectations.
- Express the influence of gender-based stereotypes on personal and communal behavior.
- Learn about the new dress code policy

### Supplies:

- Cardboard boxes (2)
- Post it notes (small, two colors, at least 5/participant)
- Big post-its (10)
- Markers
- Construction paper

### Set Induction: Boy/Girl Boxes

This activity lays the groundwork for a discussion about the messaging of gender stereotypes. Place two boxes at the front of the room. Have students think about the messages either boys or girls receive (from personal experience and what they have noticed) and write each of these messages on a post-it/piece of paper and place it on/in the box.<sup>67</sup> After a few minutes, read the responses. List these responses on the board. Ask about when, from whom and where they heard these responses. Guide the discussion towards a realization that our society, friends and families are, often accidentally, reinforcing gender stereotypes in language, imagery and conversation.

Acknowledge and celebrate counter-cultural answers. Highlight that society is changing, yet many of these messages are so embedded in culture that they are tough to change. Encourage participants to think about the childhood messages they were taught related to these ideas. Acknowledge the binary nature of this question/request. Not all participants may fit into binary understanding of gender, and for this activity participants are asked to lean into stereotypical messaging.

After a few minutes, share several responses on each box. Discuss the themes of the messaging. Ask: How did it feel to receive such messaging? Did you question it as a child? What responses did you get if you questioned such teachings?

After the discussion, symbolically or literally smash the boxes to highlight that this program aims to challenge stereotypes and talk about how we as a community can expand expectations to be more inclusive.

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<sup>67</sup> Examples: Boys – be strong, don't cry, play sports, like violence, play video games, talk/think about sex a lot... Girls – express emotions, like pink, care about appearance

**Introduction/Framing:** Pre-selected individuals read 5-7 stories of school/synagogue/camp realities that highlight gender messaging that has happened at this institution. Stories can include examples of dress code violations and the shaming that occurred from fellow students/administrators/teachers/leadership; imbalanced gender expectations in class/programs; sexually aggressive behavior etc.

*After reading the stories...*

- What did we hear in these stories?
- How did they make you feel?
- Did anything surprise you?

**Why this Program:** While gender-based challenges have existed for years (as heard in the stories and the many others that exist), thanks to many brave individuals this year and the power of the #metoo movement and changing gender expectations, we believe it's time to engage in culture change. One of the ways we will ultimately work towards change is through looking at the new dress code that aims to mitigate some of these existing challenges. One aspect that has often been a challenge with dress codes is the gendered nature of the policy (meaning separate requirements for male and female identified participants). Before we discuss these changes, we need to understand the ways in which such policies and gender expectations have influenced us thus far.

#### **Name and set ground rules**

- Please stay engaged
- No one is being attacked AND it's important to name privileges!
- We can all agree that just because we've participated in this society we are all part of this, this is on all of us to MAKE this institution the safe space we want it to be.
- We are all responsible

#### **Talk about policies and priorities to talk about this through healthy language and giving explanations**

- Consent education – asking permission
- People first language – people are not acquired, people are individuals. Encourage conversation about personality as opposed to focus on appearance.
- *Share policies and procedures that exist in your institution to support this conversation AND those that may be impacted by this conversation*

#### **Activity: Mapping how genders experience areas of camp/school/synagogue etc.**

Today we are going to be speaking about gender codes at camp - how life is different in boys' bunks and girls' bunks and how gender plays a role in areas and activities of camp outside the bunk. We are going to be splitting up into small groups to look at the unspoken messages that campers receive about what it means to be a boy or to be a girl at camp. (Same activity can be used for a non-camp setting. Adjust as necessary).



We are creating a space where we can talk about gender and when we say that "many" or "most" or "a significant number" of boys or girls do something, we assume that not every boy-identified person is doing this – but "many" or "most" or in some cases, "some" are doing it.

And in this discussion, if you think that some patterns of behavior at camp are not gendered at all, you are totally free to express that opinion. Not everything is gendered or based on gender.

Here's an example of the type of small group discussion we are going to have. On a piece of paper will be the words: "Campers are going swimming" and your goal is to write all the things and all the details that you can think of. So....for "swimming" you will start with the questions:

What is gendered about their behavior when they go swimming? What are gender differences in what they are wearing?

- In their towels?
  - What do boys do?
  - What do girls do?
- Are there differences...
  - In their ability to listen to lifeguards?
  - What are they doing in the water that might be different? What are they doing out of the water that might be different? An example of a detailed response might be:
- Well...I've noticed that some boys whip each other with towels.
- And somebody in your group might say: I saw a girl doing that.
- And then someone would say: I don't doubt that girls have done that, but I see it as a pattern with boys. I have seen groups of boys do it many times.

*Post its around the room with different aspects of camp life:*

- *Staff time off*
- *Dining hall*
- *Pool*
- *Cabin time*
- *Shabbat prep*
- *Yom Sport (Maccabiah)*

*Groups meet together and create a list of expected male-identified and expected female-identified behavior. Groups come up with 1-2 ideas as to how to lessen the different expectations extremes at camp this summer. Groups select someone to share the top ideas with the whole group.*

**Dress Code Policy Study:** Invite the staff/teen participants who served on the dress code task force to come forward and talk about the process. Ask them to share about what they learned, how the process went, and how their input was incorporated. Divide the group into smaller groups led by a member of the task force committee. Have the task force participants talk through the dress code and share the rationale of the new policy. During the conversation, the leaders should solicit feedback from the group and answer questions.

**Positive Messaging Activity:** With this new dress code policy, we aim to create a more body positive culture at camp. One major area where we can begin to change language is in the cabin and unit spaces. Divide staff into the age groups they will be working with. In each staff age groups, they will meet together and talk about how they can address this topic in their age group. Groups create posters with helpful phrases and ideas for how to be positive role models for this age group and how to talk about healthy relationships with your age group. Each group creates a sign with a positive message about consent/healthy relationships/self-love appropriate for their unit to be hung in one of their cabin hallways.

## **Appendix F: Roadmap for Dress Code Creation**

**Committee Members:**

**Organizational Mission Statement:**

**Dress Code Vision Statement:**

**Rationale Statement:**

**What policies are you including from the previous dress code?**

**What policies are you eliminating from the previous dress code?**

**What changes do you plan to make?**

**Original Phrasing  
Phrasing**

**Adapted**



# **Guide for Religious School and/or Jewish Day School**

## **Overview**

As opposed to a camp setting, a synagogue-based religious school or a day school serves a different purpose. While we hope the students still feel comfortable and well-supported in this environment personally, socially, and academically, the environment is more formal and thus more guidelines make sense. However, many current school-based dress codes focus heavily on the impact of clothing on other students as opposed to the value of self-expression and body positivity desired by the student. By focusing on the task of learning Torah in its literal and broadest sense, a progressive dress code in this setting can allow for freedom of expression while ensuring that dress does not become a barrier to an individuals learning and full participation. The conversation guide, text studies, and programs suggested in the Camp Guide apply to this setting as well, with the addition of conversations and text study ideas provided in the following pages.

## Discussion: School-Based Dress Code Needs

Goals:

- To identify the different areas/activities to be considered in the development of the dress code policy
- To determine if separate or different categories need to be created in the dress code
- To understand the scope of the dress code project for our institution

### Introduction: Who are our constituents?

Ask participants to list all the groups who are connected to this school. Divide the task force into groups and ask each group to come up with what they believe to be the top three goals related to dress for each constituency group.

### Map the School

Provide printed school maps for the task force. In the same small groups, ask participants to circle/ highlight physical areas on the campus where different dress may be needed. Once these areas are identified, divide into different groups to discuss the needs of that specific activity or area. Include off-site field trips and off-site athletic events as well in this discussion.

### Prayer Garments

Lead a discussion about expectations for attire and ritual objects during prayer (Tallit, Kippah, Tefillin). Using the *Text Study: How Do We Dress to Pray?* sheet, reflect on the expectations for attire during prayer and how students and staff will be expected to utilize personal ritual objects.

Questions to Consider:

- Do we expect students to dress differently during prayer time or is this attire expected at all times?
- How do we engage with Shabbat? Should these expectations be different than the expectation for the rest of the week?
- Are students required to wear a Kippah? Tallit? Tefillin? How do we educate about these choices? Are there different expectations for men and women?

## Text Study: How Do We Dress to Pray?

### Mishnah Berakhot 5:1

אין עומדין לְהִתְפַּלֵּל אֶלָּא מִתּוֹךְ כְּכֹד רְאִישׁ.

A person stands to pray [the Amidah] only in a state of mindfulness.

### Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 98:4

וראוי שיהיו לו מלבושים נאים מיוחדים לתפלה כמו בגדי כהונה אלא שאין כל אדם יכול לבזבז על זה ומ"מ טוב הוא שיהיו לו מכנסים מיוחדים לתפלה משום נקיות:

It is fitting to have fine clothes specifically for prayer, like the garments used by the Kohanim (High Priests), but not everyone is able to afford this. Nevertheless, it is good for one to have special pants for praying, because of [the requirement] for cleanliness.

### Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Deot 5:9

מִלְבוּשׁ תִּלְמִיד חֶכֶם מִלְבוּשׁ נָאֶה וְנָקִי. וְאָסוּר לוֹ שִׁימְצָא בְּבִגְדוֹ כֶּתֶם אוֹ שְׂמִנּוּנִית וְכִיּוּצָא בֵּהֶן. וְלֹא יִלְבֹּשׁ לֹא מִלְבוּשׁ מַלְכִּים כְּגֹן בְּגָדֵי זָהָב וְאַרְגָּמָן שֶׁהִפֵּל מִסַּתְפָּלִין בֵּהֶן. וְלֹא מִלְבוּשׁ עֲנִיִּים שֶׁהוּא מְבֹזָה אֶת לִוְבוּשֵׁיוֹ אֲלֵא בְּגָדִים בִּינּוּנִים נָאִים. וְלֹא יִהְיֶה בְּשָׂרוֹ נִרְאָה מִתַּחַת מְדִיו כִּמּוֹ בְּגָדֵי גִסֵּי הָרוּחַ אֶלָּא עַד עֶקְבוֹ וּבֵית יָד וְשָׁלוֹ עַד רֹאשֵׁי אֶצְבָּעוֹתָיו. וְלֹא יִשְׁלֹשֵׁל טְלִיתוֹ מִפְּנֵי שְׁנִירָאָה כְּגִסּוֹת הָרוּחַ אֶלָּא בְּשִׁבְתָּ בְּלִבָּד אִם אֵין לוֹ לְהִתְלַיֵּף. וְלֹא יִנָּעַל מִנְעָלִים מְטִלָּאִים טְלָאִי עַל גְּבִי טְלָאִי בִּימּוֹת הַחֲמָה. אֲבָל בִּימּוֹת הַגִּשְׁמִים מִתָּר אִם הָיָה עָנִי.

The disciple of the wise should wear becoming and clean clothes, and it is forbidden to have a spot or grease or anything of a like unclean nature, found upon his garment. He should not wear clothes fit for a king such as trimmed with gold or purple which attract everybody's gaze, nor the clothes of a pauper which put the wearer to shame, but average garments of becoming style... He should not wear patched-up shoes, patch upon a patch, in summer time; but in winter time it is permitted if he be poor.

### Questions:

- According to these texts, what is required to appear ready to pray?
- How does the inclusion of prayer at school influence our dress code policy?
- How does prayer influence our learning space?

## **Program: Introducing Dress Code to the Students**

### **Goals:**

- Reflect on pre-existing gender stereotypes in general and specific to institution.
- Understand our own role in solidifying gender-based expectations.
- Express the influence of gender-based stereotypes on personal and communal behavior.
- Learn about the new dress code policy

### **Supplies:**

- Cardboard boxes (2)
- Post it notes (small, two colors, at least 5/participant)
- Big post-its (10)
- Markers
- Construction paper

### **Set Induction: Boy/Girl Boxes**

This activity lays the groundwork for a discussion about the messaging of gender stereotypes. Place two boxes at the front of the room. Have students think about the messages either boys or girls receive (from personal experience and what they have noticed) and write each of these messages on a post-it/piece of paper and place it on/in the box.<sup>68</sup> After a few minutes, read the responses. List these responses on the board. Ask about when, from whom and where they heard these responses. Guide the discussion towards a realization that our society, friends and families are, often accidentally, reinforcing gender stereotypes in language, imagery and conversation.

Acknowledge and celebrate counter-cultural answers. Highlight that society is changing, yet many of these messages are so embedded in culture that they are tough to change. Encourage participants to think about the childhood messages they were taught related to these ideas. Acknowledge the binary nature of this question/request. Not all participants may fit into binary understanding of gender, and for this activity participants are asked to lean into stereotypical messaging.

After a few minutes, share several responses on each box. Discuss the themes of the messaging. Ask: How did it feel to receive such messaging? Did you question it as a child? What responses did you get if you questioned such teachings?

After the discussion, symbolically or literally smash the boxes to highlight that this program aims to challenge stereotypes and talk about how we as a community can expand expectations to be more inclusive.

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<sup>68</sup> Examples: Boys – be strong, don't cry, play sports, like violence, play video games, talk/think about sex a lot... Girls – express emotions, like pink, care about appearance



**Introduction/Framing:** Pre-selected individuals read 5-7 stories of school/synagogue/camp realities that highlight gender messaging that has happened at this institution. Stories can include examples of dress code violations and the shaming that occurred from fellow students/administrators/teachers/leadership; imbalanced gender expectations in class/programs; sexually aggressive behavior etc.

*After reading the stories...*

- What did we hear in these stories?
- How did they make you feel?
- Did anything surprise you?

### **Name and set ground rules**

- No one is being attacked, and it's important to name existing realities and privileges.
- We can all agree that just because we've participated in this society we are all part of this, this is on all of us to make this institution the safe space we want it to be.
- We are all responsible to helping implement this dress code more positively into the school culture

### **Talk about policies and priorities to talk about this through healthy language and giving explanations**

- Consent education – asking permission
- People first language – people are not acquired, people are individuals. Encourage conversation about personality as opposed to focus on appearance.
- *Share policies and procedures that exist in your institution to support this conversation AND those that may be impacted by this conversation*

### **Activity: Mapping Gender at School**

Today we are going to be speaking about gender codes at school - How are our experiences at school influenced by our gender identity? Where do gender roles seem to influence our roles at school?

We are creating a space where we can talk about gender and when we say that "many" or "most" or "a significant number" of boys or girls do something, we assume that not every boy- identified person is doing this – but "many" or "most" or in some cases, "some" are doing it.

And in this discussion, if you think that some patterns of behavior at camp are not gendered at all, you are totally free to express that opinion. Not everything is gendered or based on gender.

Around the room are posters with the names of various locations/activities that take place regularly at school listed on them. There is a “boy” column and a “girl” column. In each column, list the typical/stereotypical realities of male-identified and female-identified individuals in that activity or area.

For example, for Tefillah, participants ask themselves, “What is gendered about how we experience Tefillah? What do boys do? What do girls do?”

*Post its around the room with different aspects of camp life:*

- *Tefillah*
- *Class time*
- *Hafsakah/lunch or snack time*
- *Shabbat celebrations*
- *School performances*
- *Field trips*

*Groups meet together and create a list of expected male-identified and expected female-identified behavior. Groups come up with 1-2 ideas as to how to lessen the different expectations extremes at camp this summer. Groups select someone to share the top ideas with the whole group.*

**Dress Code Policy Study:** Invite the staff/teen participants who served on the dress code task force to come forward and talk about the process. Ask them to share about what they learned, how the process went, and how their input was incorporated. Divide the group into smaller groups led by a member of the task force committee. Have the task force participants talk through the dress code and share the rationale of the new policy. During the conversation, the leaders should solicit feedback from the group and answer questions.

**Positive Messaging Activity:** With this new dress code policy, we aim to create a more body positive culture at camp. One major area where we can begin to change language is in the cabin and unit spaces. Divide staff into the age groups they will be working with. In each staff age groups, they will meet together and talk about how they can address this topic in their age group. Groups create posters with helpful phrases and ideas for how to be positive role models for this age group and how to talk about healthy relationships with your age group. Each group creates a sign with a positive message about consent/healthy relationships/self-love appropriate for their unit to be hung in one of their classroom hallways.

## Supplemental Articles and Resources

Alameda County School District (CA) Dress Code Revision:

- Main Website: [https://alamedausd-ca.schoolloop.com/pf4/cms2/view\\_page?d=x&group\\_id=1514016404908&vdid=ui1o62a1xq2p10q](https://alamedausd-ca.schoolloop.com/pf4/cms2/view_page?d=x&group_id=1514016404908&vdid=ui1o62a1xq2p10q)
- SF Chronicle Article: <https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/Alameda-schools-new-dress-code-Tube-tops-are-13167331.php#photo-16030081>

Anti-Defamation League Resources on Dress Codes: <https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/classroom-conversations/unspeakable-messages-of-school-dress-codes-bias-power>

Evanston Township High School Dress Code Revision: [https://www.chicagotribune.com/lifestyles/stevens/ct-life-stevens-friday-evanston-dress-code-0825-story.amp.html?fbclid=IwAR00arcH9eVEO\\_V-Ku8BfbEbNwCEv8kVLmbMQ3MlGGJ8uyCAgTFNlmAY99g](https://www.chicagotribune.com/lifestyles/stevens/ct-life-stevens-friday-evanston-dress-code-0825-story.amp.html?fbclid=IwAR00arcH9eVEO_V-Ku8BfbEbNwCEv8kVLmbMQ3MlGGJ8uyCAgTFNlmAY99g)

NOW Oregon Model Student Dress Code: <https://noworegon.org/issues/model-student-dress-code/>

Rabbinical Assembly Teshuvah Concerning Modesty (2017): <https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/Modesty%20Final.pdf>

Shalom Hartman Institute Curriculum “Judaism, #MeToo and Ethical Leadership”: [https://hartman.org.il/Programs\\_View.asp?Program\\_Id=235&Cat\\_Id=549&Cat\\_Type=Programs](https://hartman.org.il/Programs_View.asp?Program_Id=235&Cat_Id=549&Cat_Type=Programs)

“Controlling the Student Body” in Teaching Tolerance Spring 2017 Issue: <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/spring-2017/controlling-the-student-body>

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- Genesis 24:64-65
- Leviticus 20:17-19
- Deuteronomy 23:15
- Micah 6:8
- Ezekiel 16:7
- Proverbs 11:2
- Psalms 45:14

### Mishnah

- Niddah 4:3-6

### Babylonian Talmud

- Shabbat 64a-b, 150a
- Berakhot 24, 25
- Sukkah 49b
- Ketubot 72
- Megillah 24b
- Baba Batra 57b

### Mishneh Torah

- Hilchot Deot 5:6-9
- Hilchot Kriyat Shema 3:16
- Hilchot Ishut 24:12
- Hilchot Tefillin 5:1, 5:5
- Hilchot Issurei Biah 21:1

### Shulchan Aruch

- Orach Chayim 53:13, 74, 75, 91, 98:4
- Yoreh Deah 200
- Evan HaEzer 21:1-2, 115:4

### Mishnah Berurah 2, 75:19

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