



*Reprinted from Moment Magazine, July/August 2008, "Ask the Rabbis" column*

*This response was edited down by the magazine to just include the final paragraph.  
What follows is the original full answer.*

## ***Who Cares What Women Wear (or Don't Wear)?***

***Response by Rabbi Peter Schweitzer***

In the spirit of asking questions and in keeping with the theme of freedom, I brought this question to my Seder guests. The immediate response was a deafening silence. Practically to a person, we were stunned by the topic and disturbed by the way the question was framed, and surprised that it was even asked at all.

The question is remarkably sexist and uniquely casts women as sex objects and tempresses. Do we not care what men wear too? It is also classist. Are married people in a different category than singles? Do older people need to abide by a different dress code than younger people? It also makes an arbitrary distinction between the synagogue and the street that many of us don't recognize. In my congregation, it is perfectly acceptable to show up for services in blue jeans as long as they're clean. The dress-up "Sunday School wear" that I knew in the 1950s and 60s is also long gone and not missed.

The question of dressing modestly is really code language for not dressing revealingly, seductively, or sexually. And, according to some, sinfully. But what is off limits and transgressive in some cultures or families seems quite normal, attractive, and appealing in others. Of course even within the boundaries of each culture, what is comfortable for one person may not be for another. Ultimately, this is for each of us to figure out individually, not because of peer pressure, taboos, or limitations that are imposed on us from outside, but from those we discover within and how at ease one is with one's body. That's also part of the story of freedom and personal emancipation that we treasure.