There are different ways people do interpret Modest in the Orthodox Jewish denomination. Dr. Chana Sosevsky and Chaya Berkowitz have their own two opinions on the way Halakha should be interpreted when it talks about being modest. *Dr. Chaya Sosevsky comes to her definition of modesty through her interpretation about clothing and how it can affect interaction with the opposite sex; while Chaya Berkowitz comes to her definition of modesty through clothing and the problems separation of men and women cause.*

Dr. Chaya Sosevsky is an orthodox Jew who believes that for a woman to be modest, they must follow certain rules about what they wear. She said that “the laws regarding lengths of skirts and sleeves are a set of guidelines which limit the exposure of woman’s body and should be a reminder to her as how to comport herself with dignity (Sosevsky).” She basically is saying that women are giving up their self-respect when they do not wear clothes that cover their bodies. Also, that women should not have any revealing clothing on that exposes any of their body or they will be acting immodest and improper. Dr. Chaya Sosevsky feels it is inappropriate to not follow these guidelines about how to dress correctly. She understands some women will interpret this as an authoritative command to cover up and hide their bodies, but they are missing the true meaning behind why. She believes that “tzniut is meant to de-emphasize the physical in order to allow the intellectual and spiritual aspects of oneself to shine through (Sosevsky).”

When Dr. Chaya Sosevsky says tzniut, it is referring to another word for modesty in the
Orthodox denomination. She is saying that the purpose of wearing these clothes are to make it easier to see whom these women really are. The point is not hiding their bodies from people, but it is expressing a woman’s unique inner qualities that could be over looked by a man. When women are interacting with men, Dr. Chana Sosevsky believes that a strict dress code will help the man look at women for their personal characteristics instead of sexual appearance. She wants women and men to find the right partners based of this.

According to Dr. Chana Sosevsky, women should follow the dress code, so they can focus on their spiritual selves and not their superficial selves. Dr. Chana Sosevsky brings up “the injunction of the Sefer Hachinuch which says ‘Acharei hamassim nimshachim halevavot’ (‘our hearts are influenced by our actions’) (Sosevsky)” when talking about this. She brings this up because she is saying that men and women who dress appropriate will typically act appropriate. She mentioned this because if these girls are required to follow this dress code, they will tend to act more modest. Dr. Chana Sosevsky experienced this stricter dress code in action at the Orthodox school she works at. She has heard her students say they felt restricted; since they were dressing like good Jewish girls. They felt compelled to act less free and more dignified. She has witnessed this first hand, even though they felt restricted, it worked how she believes it should. The point of this dress code is to make women focus less on their superficial selves. This is why Dr. Chana Sosevsky feels that a strict dress is important when it comes to the definition of modest.

Another important reason to Dr. Chana Sosevksy why this dress code is in place is because its benefits women and their society. She calls it “a tool and an advantage to understand why the dress code is important (Sosevsky)”. The advantages of this dress code are to prevent
these women from temptation and from conforming to social norms. It keeps them more focused on their spiritual self.

Dr. Chana Sosevksy believes that the clothes women wear will change the interactions they will have with men. There was a recent broadcast radio program in Israel that talked about the concern about businessmen attitudes towards their female coworkers. A women caller complained that a woman was asked out at the business meeting rather than actually working and taking the meeting seriously. The broadcast team asked the caller about her outfit and makeup she was wearing. Basically, they told the caller that what she was wearing was the reason she was asked out. Dr. Chana Sosevsky uses this example to strengthen her case about why dress attire matters. She believes women need to dress more professional, so they are not just looked at as dates. They are human being with personalities and not just bodies.

Dr. Chana Sosevsky compared the dress codes of businesses in the United States to the proper professional attire of tzniut. She found that they were very similar to each other and found that male-female interaction at work tends to be more professional and less sexualized in the United States. She uses this to strengthen her point on the importance of the modest and the strict rules that come with it. The laws on dressing are there to benefit the woman.

Chaya Berkowitz believes that modest in the Orthodox denomination is too strict when it comes to separation of men and women. She posed a question saying, “How is an eighteen-year-old girl supposed to comfortably talk to a boy about herself when she has not really interacted with a member of the opposite sex before? (Berkowitz)” She says this to question the orthodox method of separating girls and boys at school because they never interact with the opposite sex then. She is trying to say these women and men are not going to be able to find their right partner for them because they will not even be able to hold a conversation and connect. Chaya
Berkowitz believes that women and men need basically a practice run communicating with each other before they start looking for a wife or husband. She did say, “religion should never be the “be all and end all (Berkowitz).” She thinks there should be balance between separation of men and women but doesn’t want them to break their modesty. She approves of everyday normal human interaction, so they can experience a normal reality. However, men and women should wait to have sexual interaction between each other till marriage.

Chaya Berkowitz believes separation is taken to more extremes in Orthodox communities when there are public gathering and community events. She noticed that “we see this extreme separation when weddings halls have separate entrances for men and women, and when my seven-year-old daughter is told not to sit with her father at the Purim Seudah, but to “sit over there with the women (Berkowitz)”. Chaya Berkowitz believes this in an example of a way to extreme case of separation between men and women. She feels that it is ridiculous to have family members separate at social gatherings. This is an example of an abnormal unhealthy men-female interaction, and She also feels this is completely unnecessary.

Chaya Berkowitz believes that looking at what a woman is wearing does not determine if she is acting modest or not. She said that “Judaism defines modesty as focusing less on a person’s outer characteristics and more focusing on their inner personhood (Berkowitz).” She does not think it says a woman must follow certain guidelines when picking clothes. Chaya Berkowitz still believe they should be able to wear clothing they feel comfortable in and rather than feeling forced into wearing certain clothes. She said, “When we limit women to mere body parts, we dishonor them and oversexualize them.” She believes this is wrong because women are more than body parts. She thinks that if a woman decides to reveal their bodies more than
what the orthodox community may feel is appropriate, she still does show her inner characteristics when talking to other men.

Dr. Chana Sosevsky and Chaya Berkowitz definitions of modest differ. They differ because like Marc Brettler said, “we can each have different conception of what the Bible is. Not surprisingly, then we each can interpret biblical in our own way” (Brettler). Dr. Chana Sosevsky definition is more focused on women’s apparel. She believes without the guidance women will lose their dignity and not be focused on their spiritual self. Instead, she thinks they will be focused on their superficial self. Dr. Chana Sosevsky believes that following this strict dress code will help with finding the right partner. On the other hand, Chaya Berkowitz definition is more about intensiveness of the separation of Orthodox men and women. She thinks this separation is too strict that it is causing men and women to not be prepared to communicate with each other when looking for the right partner. She believes that a strict dress code does not determine how modest a woman is and they should be able to wear whatever they feel comfortable in. Every person is going to think about modest differently just like Dr. Chana Sosevsky and Chaya Berkowitz. There is not just one answer.