

ABSTRACT

BOGDANOFF, HELENE REBECCA. *Women in the Rabbinate and in American Fiction: A Literary and Ethnographic Study*. (Under the direction of Steven B. Katz).

The purpose of this research has been to describe the conflicts of gender and Judaism in American Fiction containing women rabbis as central characters. Jewish women for centuries have accepted their roles in Jewish life and observances. Jewish women of the twentieth century questioned why they too could not be rabbis, which led to the ordination of the first women rabbi in 1972. The fiction written on women rabbis faces the challenges to portray the spiritual and social equality of the women rabbis while keeping in tact and honoring the parts of Jewish tradition that appear to be most crucial or defining.

This thesis presents Jewish laws and traditions having to do with women, showing the conflicts between Jewish tradition and female rabbis in the plots of six novels and two short stories written on the subject. The sexual nature of the fiction written on this subject presents contemporary Judaism with a number of problems. I describe the representations of innovations in Judaism surrounding these issues, and then I relate the issues in Judaism back to the novels and short stories.

For this thesis, I interviewed three female rabbis from the North Carolina Triangle area. The interviews reveal certain unresolved anxieties and issues in Judaism and how American Judaism might react to the presence of women as viable members of the rabbinate in the future. Thus, this project provides a discussion of the inherent and new issues in American Judaism that are brought about by the ordination of female rabbis and portrayed in American fiction.

WOMEN IN THE RABBINATE AND IN AMERICAN FICTION:
A LITERARY AND ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

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For Imma,
Who always believed in me.

BIOGRAPHY

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

From the earliest moments in Jewish history, we find strong and capable women who serve as precedents for the religion to ordain women as rabbis centuries later. The women of the Torah¹ and of Jewish history provide models of strength and power that today's female rabbis can look to as examples for their own inspiration and empowerment. The first woman of the Torah, Eve, acts with independence and freedom of thought as she chooses to eat from the fruit of the Forbidden Tree. The matriarchs of Judaism, Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah each make their own choices regarding their lives and families, and are considered equal to men in the eyes of their husbands.² Miriam, sister to Moses and Aaron, was a prophetess and a co-leader with her brothers to deliver the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt and into the land of Israel. Deborah, whose name is derived from the Hebrew *d'var* meaning "word," was a spiritual and judicial leader in Israel who used the power of language to become a prophetess. In Judaic history, Beruria, wife of Rabbi Meir, became a great Talmudic scholar during the Roman occupation and the destruction of the second Temple.³ Beruria is known to have contributed to many *halakhic*⁴ decisions during her life. Beruria is an example of a great scholar, but her story also reveals that men and rabbis were not averse to women studying Torah and Talmud.⁵

¹ The five books of the Torah include Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

² The patriarchs of Judaism are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

³ The late 4th Century C.E.

⁴ *Halakhah* is Jewish law from the legal part of Talmudic literature and an interpretation of the laws and scriptures. See footnote 5 for further detail.

⁵ Written 2nd century B.C.E. through the 6th century C.E. Sixty-six volumes of commentary on the Torah: Composed of the *Mishna* (oral law) and *Gemara* (commentary on the *Mishna*).

Although there are many strong women in Judaic scripture and history, women were not able to be ordained as rabbis in the United States until 1972. Since then, the numbers of women in the rabbinate have increased, and women rabbis have overcome many obstacles, although they continue to struggle for acceptance and equality within Jewish communities. Recent non-literary analyses of women in the rabbinate have been focused on demographic studies and personal testimony of women rabbis themselves. But so new and rare is the phenomenon of women rabbis that there are only six novels and two short stories written about female rabbis in American fiction. This body of fiction has not yet been examined for how the authors use Judaism to portray women rabbis. I will describe how each of these novels and short stories employ different facets of Judaism and the issues of gender in contemporary Judaism. In these six novels and two short stories, the characters, as rabbis and as women, grapple from a Jewish perspective with contemporary issues that reveal a conflict between gender and Judaism that female rabbis contend with in their pulpits.

1. The Fiction

Six novels include a woman rabbi as a main character. They are in order of publication: Rhonda Shapiro-Reiser's A Place of Light (1983), Alex J. Goldman's The Rabbi Is A Lady (1987), Joseph Telushkin's The Unorthodox Murder of Rabbi Wahl (1987), Erich Segal's Acts of Faith (1992), Roger Herst's Woman of the Cloth (1998), and Jonathan Rosen's Joy Comes in the Morning (2004). In addition to these novels are two short stories: Eileen Pollak's "The Rabbi in the Attic" (1991) and Glenn and Jeanne Gillette and David J.

Legally binding parts of the Talmud are called *Halakhah*; other portions are the *Haggadah* (the first part of the Talmud without the authoritative law). The Talmud contains Jewish law of how to shape and rebuild Judaism in post biblical times. The Talmud is also considered to be the basis for rabbinical Judaism.

Zucker's "Here and Now" (1996). Only one of the novelists is female, Rhonda Shapiro-Reiser, and both of the short story authors are female, Eileen Pollak and Jeanne Gillette, as co-author. All of the authors of the novels and short stories are Jewish, and many of the male writers are actually rabbis themselves. Despite the gender of the writer, the novels and short stories all raise particular contemporary issues in Judaism and in the rabbinate regarding the leadership of women in Judaism. I will describe, for a future study, the reactions from characters and members of the synagogues in the novels and short stories that set up for a discussion of unresolved historical and contemporary issues and anxieties within Judaism regarding women.

2. The Issues

Today, women hold senior posts at contemporary American synagogues. They are widely accepted by both men and women in their congregations; however, the depictions of women in the rabbinate in American fiction reveal many historical and contemporary issues about women in Judaism. The fiction suggests that there are issues in Judaism concerning women due to their ordination as rabbis. These novels reveal these conflicts in American Judaism by positioning fictional female rabbis up against Jewish law and tradition. I will be using data from interviews⁶ with three female rabbis in the North Carolina Triangle to describe the conflicts of gender and tradition in Judaism. The interviews of women rabbis will offer definitions and depictions of the issues in Judaism and the rabbinate regarding women's ordination and their services to their congregations.

⁶ See Appendix A for interview questions.

3. The Chapters

Chapter 2 will provide a background of the movements in Judaism and their treatments of women that led to the ordination of women as rabbis. In the thirty-four year period since the first woman rabbi was ordained, American Judaism has evolved and changed significantly, but not without a struggle by those who have wished to uphold tradition. American Judaism is represented by four primary movements that represent different attitudes toward *halakhah*, customs, rituals, liturgy, and the ordination of women. By defining and explaining these Jewish traditions and women's participation in these movements, I will explore the transition of women into the rabbinate as of 1972, when the first woman rabbi was ordained, to show how American Judaism has dealt with women's ordination. Thus, this chapter provides a background to American Judaism in order to introduce the issues about women in Judaism raised by the ordination of women that are brought up by the authors of the novels and short stories.

Chapter 3 will focus on the novels and short stories⁷ written in the United States about women rabbis, describing their plots and characterizations with an emphasis on how Judaism and Jewish issues are utilized by the authors. The authors of the novels and short stories each rely on similar aspects of Judaism in order to reveal conflicts of gender in the rabbinate. The interviews with the female rabbis in the North Carolina Triangle will provide meaningful insight into the various aspects of Judaism, including responses to the ordination of female rabbis by reflecting on their own personal experiences. I have asked questions that are centered on the issues raised by the fiction such as the Jewish life cycle, the issues that exist from being a working professional and a mother, and what they feel are some

⁷ Full summaries of the novels and short stories can be found in Appendix B.

unresolved issues and anxieties in the rabbinate to name a few. This chapter will serve to describe how the authors of the novels and short stories utilize the social and historical gender roles of women to define the women in rabbinate.

By drawing on Judaism through Biblical, historical, religious, cultural, and stereotypical notions, I will describe issues of gender in the rabbinate and American Judaism to provide a base for a future study of how Judaism and the American Jewish people have reacted in various ways, including questioning the abilities of women to be in the demanding professional job of the rabbinate. The women of the novels and short stories react to Jewish issues by drawing on their knowledge and personal ethics in regards to *halakhah* and contemporary Jewish thought. The Torah, Talmud, and *Mishna*⁸ all provide the female rabbis with a Jewish traditional base to rely on, yet they must look to values in the American Jewish movements to provide answers for the contemporary issues that they face. I will be describing how the fiction uses Jewish tradition and rituals. By doing so, I will reveal issues about women in Judaism raised by the ordination of women to be examined in a later study.

⁸ See footnote 5 for definition.

CHAPTER 2

WOMEN RABBIS IN THE MOVEMENTS OF JUDAISM

In modern synagogues across the United States, the women rabbis of the Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist movements, the movements will be discussed later in this chapter, all confront issues regarding their gender and performance capabilities. One of the central challenges on the modern movements of Judaism is how to accommodate the spiritual and social equality of women while keeping intact and honoring the parts of Judaic tradition that appear to be most crucial or defining. While female rabbis represent such an accommodation, women's experience as rabbis continues to be a place where the tensions between tradition and innovation manifest themselves. There are diverse opinions on what a female rabbi is or does. Ellen M. Umansky suggests in "Women and Rabbinical Orientation: A Viable Option?" that female rabbis have to "break down the psychological barriers which have prevented women from considering the Rabbinate as a viable option" (65). In order to minimize gender distinctions, Marjorie S. Yudkin asserts that the rabbinate holds the opinion that it "is incidental to who we are as persons in relation to G-d" (89). More generally, David J. Zucker defines a rabbi in his Proceedings of the 37th Annual Convention of the Association of Jewish Libraries as "leaders of religious services, preachers, teachers, and pastoral counselors. Their satisfaction and frustrations come from working with people" (1). Zucker continues to explain that a rabbi, above all else, is a symbolic figure. The Jewish community looks to the rabbi for their religious leadership as well as an epitome of moral and ethical ideals. Some see the rabbi as their connection to G-d, while others view the rabbi as a teacher and guide to Judaism (1-2). Jews often expect the rabbi to uphold the Jewish tradition and commandments for them, rather than using a rabbi as simply a model.

Rabbis are expected to uphold tradition as well as be the example of a perfect Jew to the Jewish community by serving their own congregations and being models for their non-Jewish community. Yudkin asserts that the women of the Reform and Reconstructionist movements “do not wish to represent women, or to examine possible implications of being a woman in a formerly male role. They seek to be regarded as equals of their male counterparts. [...] Some women seek to experience and record the feminine experience to counterbalance the masculine model, and are working to recover and express the essential feminine perspective” (90). Female rabbis struggle to maintain Jewish tradition as well as create a niche within the rabbinate for females to be accepted. Rabbis of the United States fill a variety of roles including the pulpit, educational leaders and directors, social work, administration, chaplaincy, and Hillel⁹ to name a few. Often women rabbis will choose to leave a pulpit position for one of these less demanding jobs.

Traditionally, Jewish women’s participation was limited in Jewish life in some contemporary movements and they did not participate in leadership roles in synagogues.¹⁰ They were often seen in the confines of home life. The modern world has opened its doors to women in Jewish life and the rabbinate, but aspects of Jewish structure and tradition has not yet accepted women as leaders in Jewish life. Umansky states, “What is desperately needed is the right of these women to choose for *themselves* the ways in which they can best serve their own spiritual needs, their families and G-d” (66).

⁹ The foundation for Jewish campus life that provides opportunities for Jewish students at colleges and universities to explore and celebrate their Jewish identity through its global network. Hillel is working to provoke a renaissance of Jewish life and learning by creating an environment of Jewish students where they are encouraged to grow intellectually, spiritually, and socially.

¹⁰ The ways women are excluded from Jewish life as well as ordination will be discussed in detail in this chapter.

American Judaism has grown because of its willingness to change and accommodate modernity into its religious practices; however, often those involved in Jewish life wish to also retain a sense of Jewish tradition and its malleability at the same time. Women are at the forefront of this battle for accommodation as well as an acknowledgement of Jewish traditions alongside Jewish innovations. The feminist movement began during the 1960s in the United States as well as within Judaism by women demanding equal status and opportunity, which we will see has a profound influence on the role of women in the rabbinate. Traditionally, Judaism is accustomed to relying on gender roles to define educational, occupational, and social roles. In the past, Jewish tradition has decided, to some degree, that a woman is not a rabbi. Seidler-Feller suggests, “the fundamental obstacle to the ordination of women is the men who control the access to ordination” (79). It is those that are involved in synagogues and Jewish life and those who identify themselves as Jews in the United States who create this structure that relies so heavily on past tradition. The Jewish feminist movement reformed Jewish religion, culture, education, religious leadership, synagogue life and worship, rites of passage for both boys and girls, the Jewish household, liturgy, language, theology and spirituality, literature, teaching, and Jewish identity.

Jewish women of the twentieth century have had to overcome many obstacles in their roles and duties within Judaism. For example, the Yemenites, a group of Jewish women who immigrated to Israel during the years 1949-1951, led a very difficult life. Similar to Orthodox¹¹ women, they were extremely modest. These women wore both pants and a skirt at the same time to ensure that their entire body was fully covered. These women married at

¹¹ The Orthodox are the most observant and strict sect of Jews who follow all aspects of *halakhah*.

a very young age, twelve to fourteen years old, and were expected to be completely subordinate to their husbands. The men were able to take more than one wife. Usually the women were illiterate and acted as passive spectators in synagogue rather than active participants. Their life was centered on the home, preparing food, keeping the kitchen clean, and preparing for holidays and the Sabbath.

Jewish life is often difficult and restraining for Orthodox women because they must follow all aspects of Jewish tradition and *halakhah*. Sylvia Barack-Fishman provides reasoning for the gender differences between men and women in Judaism by stating, “Jewish law suggests a sweeping array of gender-based differences that seem designed to emphasize those qualities that distinguish and differentiate women from men” (98). Barack-Fishman describes “the purpose of sex and gender distinctions among human beings, according to Jewish tradition, is to enable men and women to enjoy companionship, pleasure, and creativity with partners who complement and complete them” (98). Men and women are expected to pair together and build houses and raise families. It is required that a man and woman create one daughter and one son, as G-d says to Noah in Genesis, “Be fertile, then, and increase; abound on the earth and increase on it” (9:7). Judaism stresses that by having children you are being productive members of society. Barack-Fishman states that “the *halakhah* consistently prescribes that adult Jewish men and women should live in marital unions in which male-female genital sexual activity occurs on a regular basis” (98). Judaism and *Kabbalah*¹² tells men and women to have sex and have it regularly because through this act of sex men and women are taking part in creation. The parts of the Divine come together

¹² Literally means “tradition”; the Jewish mystical movement. Kabbalah is an interpretative key to the soul of the Torah claiming an insight into divine nature.

and become one and through this act of sex one is able to become closer to G-d, also referred to as El Shaddai or G-d Almighty. The Zohar¹³ states:

There is twofold reason for this duty of cohabitation. First this pleasure [a man and woman's] is a religious one, giving joy also to the Divine Presence, and it is an instrument for peace in the world. [...] Hence, a man should be as zealous to enjoy this joy as to enjoy the joy of the Sabbath, at which time is consummated the union of the sages with their wives [...] in gladly carrying out the religious duty to have conjugal intercourse before the Presence. (35)

The purpose of the sexual union is for Jewish sons and daughters to procreate and raise their sons and daughters in the Jewish tradition. The Talmud places great importance on the sexuality of women. A woman's husband must fulfill her sexually before the husband can take pleasure in the sexual act himself. Jewish tradition does not allow a woman not to marry.

However, these traditions hold true in some movements of Judaism and less in others. American Judaism is broken up into four separate movements, Orthodox, Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist. Although the Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist movements within Judaism have offered women equal opportunities in education, prayer, and synagogue participation, it was not until 1972 that a woman was ordained as a rabbi in the Reform movement.¹⁴ Even though the Reconstructionist movement opened its doors to women from the birth of the movement, it was not until 1977

¹³ The Zohar is considered to be the most important book of *Kabbalah*. According to Gershom Scholem, it is a mystical commentary on the Torah containing a discussion of G-d, the origin and structure of the universe, the nature of souls, sin, redemption, good, and evil.

¹⁴ Rabbi Sally Priesand

that a woman became a rabbi.¹⁵ The Conservative movement allowed women into its rabbinate with the ordination of its first woman rabbi in 1985.¹⁶ Since these dates, Jewish women have continued to seek equal opportunity and status within the rabbinate. But the role of women in rabbinate is different within each of these movements of Judaism through the proscribing and defining of separate observances, rules, and customs regarding women and their place in Jewish tradition and in modern society.

The oldest and most strict and observant is the Orthodox movement. The Orthodox movement follows *halakhah* precisely. Orthodox Jews separate themselves from the rest of society through language, actions, beliefs, and clothing. The Orthodox believe that the Torah is of Divine origin and its laws and commandments all must be followed and its doctrines are not able to change to accommodate modernity. The Orthodox maintain the belief that one cannot do any work on the Sabbath, including switching on and off lights, carrying anything besides religious texts, and driving. The Orthodox refrain from “work” on the Sabbath in an attempt to relax. The most observant of the Orthodox are the *Haredim*,¹⁷ which include all of the *Hasidic* sects, who preserve that way of life from pre-modern Eastern Europe. There are over three hundred *Hasidic* groups in the United States that represent the Orthodox movement in different ways. There are various degrees of willingness to compromise on issues dealing with religious texts and study, women, and modernity. In reaction to the Ultra Orthodox *Hasidic* sects, the modern Orthodox maintains that the Western way of life should not only be embraced as a means to earn a living, it is also something that is good.

¹⁵ Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso

¹⁶ Rabbi Amy Eilberg

¹⁷ Literally translated as ‘those that fear G-d.’

The Orthodox maintain that women have certain duties in the home: they must cover their bodies and hair, once married, so as to not distract men, and they cannot pray alongside men in synagogue, but instead must sit behind a mechitza,¹⁸ for example. During morning prayers, Orthodox men recite the following prayer: *Baruch Atah Ad-nai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, shelo asani ishah*, which translates as “Blessed are You, O L-rd our G-d, Ruler of the Universe, Who did not make me a woman.” The Orthodox place great value on their women in the domestic sphere, but have consistently declared that men are superior to women on earth and in the eyes of G-d. Women are considered to be unable to be holy and pure. Orthodox women must follow the laws of purity regarding their bodies. A woman is considered to be impure during the week of her period and the week following. In order to become clean after this period a woman is sent to a *mikveh*¹⁹ and she must submerge herself in the natural flowing water three times. During the time that a woman is considered to be unclean she and her husband cannot have any physical contact and even sleep in separate beds. In today’s society, the Orthodox still do not recognize men and women equally, but they have realized that accessibility of texts, spirituality, and knowledge must be given to men and women equally. In the United States, the Orthodox have refused to change Jewish laws and customs in regards to the ordination of women, but have opened the doors of education to women to provide them with the same education as men, but without the same goals, i.e., rabbinical ordination.

Women cannot be ordained by the Orthodox, as there is no such thing as a woman rabbi according to the Orthodox. In a New York Times article from December 21, 2000,

¹⁸ The divider in a synagogue that separates the men and women.

¹⁹ A bath used for ritual purity; also used by some Conservative women.

Zevulun Charlop, dean of the Rabbi Isaac Eichenan Theological Seminary is quoted as saying, "Orthodoxy is guided by *Halakha*, Jewish law, which is very emphatic about ordination, and ordination is reserved for men and not for women, since beginning with Moses." Women are expected to remain in their home to raise a family and maintain their duties as a wife and a mother. Emanuel Rackman, in an article entitled "Suggestions for Alternatives" published in 1984, suggests that the women of "Orthodox synagogues would not object to her preaching at women's functions or services but they will not permit her to preach when men and women attend the same service" (67). Rackman suggests that allowing women greater access to participatory roles in any synagogue would only decrease membership. This is taken as justification for why the Orthodox do not offer women ordination.

Unlike women of the Orthodox movement, the women of the Reform movement have a more central role that is able to eventually lead them into the rabbinate. The Reform movement began in Germany and other European countries and then came to the United States in the mid 1800s. The Reform movement follows *halakhah* philosophically meaning that Reform Jews view *halakhah* as interpretative and not binding; therefore, Reform Jews are not expected or taught to follow most of *halakhah*. Reform Judaism is then able to dismiss such requirements as dietary laws, purity laws, and clothing regulations. The Reform movement accepts the laws of Judaism that they feel elevate and sanctify their lives and reject the laws and customs that are not suited to modern civilization. However, the Reform movement came to realize that it was becoming too liberal in terms of its practices of

Judaism. “The Columbus Platform”²⁰ of 1937 stated that Reform Judaism would reincorporate some of the discarded practices that had changed over the years and became what modern Jews now embrace as Reform Judaism. The Reform movement allows for innovation while preserving tradition, to embrace diversity, community, and those who choose to question religion, faith, and G-d. The openness of Reform Judaism quickly made it the largest movement of American Judaism. Reform Judaism sees the Torah as a living document that inspires and enables people to confront daily modern life.

Reform Judaism is committed to the equality of women in all areas of religious life, although the movement did not begin this way. The first woman rabbi, Rabbi Sally Preisand, was ordained in 1972 by the Reform movement. Umansky asserts,

The Reform [...] decisions to ordain women have developed out of the recognition that traditional Judaism’s refusal to ordain women reflects the status of women in society more than it does the Will of G-d. They, therefore, have attempted to expand women’s religious options, recognizing the leadership potential which women are displaying in secular society and the demand of many women and men for change, and conceptualizing Judaism as a progressive religion which is able to examine its laws and customs in order to preserve those which are still meaningful. (64)

The Reform movement is committed to progressive thinking and change and is able to adjust Judaism consciously, practically, and morally. Reform congregations are egalitarian, use

²⁰ Asserts that the nature of Judaism is a historical religious experience blended with scripture and laws of nature, there is one G-d who rules the world through law and love, man is created in the Divine image, the Torah, both written and oral, acknowledges Israel’s commitment to G-d and moral law, and Israel is the body which connects Jews to one another. Reform Judaism is centered on ethics, religion, social justice, peace, religious education, and religious life.

English liturgy along with some Hebrew, use neutral language to describe G-d (neither He nor She), include both the patriarchs and matriarchs within their prayers, have the option to wear *kippot*²¹ and *tallitot*,²² and count women as part of a *minyan*.²³ Even though the Reform movement has accepted women into its rabbinate, at first there were still men who had problems accepting women as *the* religious leader. In the first decade of women's ordination, senior rabbinical positions still belonged to men and not to women rabbis. Today, women hold senior posts including rabbinic positions at Reform synagogues and are widely accepted by both men and women in their congregations.

In response to the growing Reform movement, the Conservative movement began in the 1880s in the United States in order to adopt a more conservative and traditional approach to Judaism than the Reform movement, and so it too had a different position on the ordination of women. Rackman states, "The Conservative rabbinate does feel bound by the *halakhah* although it is more receptive to innovation than are the Orthodox" (66). The Conservative movement is committed to *halakhah* only in theory, meaning that they choose which laws to follow, which to follow closely, and which to discard individually and communally. Robert Gordis asserts, "Conservative Judaism regards Jewish tradition as the product of a dialectic between G-d and the people of Israel" (6). The Conservative movement does not use *mechitzas*, and both *Kashrut*²⁴ and purity laws are optional and

²¹ Plural for Kippa: A skullcap worn by observant Jews

²² Plural for Tallis: A prayer shawl with ritually knotted fringes at each of the four corners

²³ A quorum of ten adult Jews required to recite some prayers.

²⁴ *Kashrut*, or Kosher in English, comprises the Jewish dietary laws that are described in Leviticus. Foods are Kosher when they meet all criteria that Jewish law applies to food. Reasons for keeping Kosher include such ideas as preventing the consumption of unhealthy food, differentiating oneself from non-Jews, and instilling obedience.

voluntary. The Conservative movement walks a fine line between commitment to tradition and to change.

As part of a commitment to tradition, the Conservative movement places emphasis on the education of both boys and girls. Children attended Hebrew school together until age ten or eleven when girls no longer were required to attend. The Conservative movement realized that boys and girls needed to be offered equal education. Otherwise, women would look elsewhere for educational and spiritual fulfillment. By the 1980s all Conservative synagogues has egalitarian school systems and *Bar* and *Bat Mitzvahs*²⁵ that created an equal space for men and women in the sanctuary. Traditionally in a Conservative synagogue, the congregation is egalitarian, but with the men participating more in the services than the women. The services are held entirely in Hebrew, and women are counted as part of a minyan. Typically the Conservative movement uses only patriarchs in prayers and liturgy with an egalitarian option to use the matriarchs as well and to use gender neutral language to refer to G-d.

The Conservative movement gave equal status to its women, except in terms of its leadership positions and ordination of women for the rabbinate. The movement used the issue of modesty as a main reason for why women could not be ordained as rabbis. The Talmud places a premium on quiet and modest women, and the Conservative movement subscribed to this belief. It was not until the 1980s that the Conservative movement considered the ordination of a woman, and in 1985 the first woman was ordained as a

²⁵ A ceremony that takes place on the Sabbath (Shabbat) when a thirteen year old child reads from the Torah. After this point the child is considered an adult and responsible for their moral and religious duties.

Conservative rabbi. Robert Gordis suggests in his article “The Ordination of Women – a History of the Question” that “one important by-product of women’s ordination will be the beginning of the end of the psychological reign of terror exerted by contemporary Orthodox over some rabbis and laymen in the Conservative movement” (12). Since then, Conservative women rabbis have held senior rabbinic positions, although more popularly they hold assistant rabbi posts and have been religious school directors. By deciding to allow women to enter into its rabbinate, the Conservative movement declared that it was a liberal egalitarian movement, rather than describing itself as modern Orthodox and observant Reform.

In contrast to the Reform and Conservative movements in the United States, the Reconstructionist movement has supported women’s rabbinical ordination since its inception in 1955, although it was more than twenty years later before a woman was actually ordained. The Reconstructionist movement has always accepted women into its synagogues as equals by allowing women to receive rabbinic ordination. The Reconstructionist movement confronted issues of gender and sexuality openly. They maintained a gender blind attitude and created a curriculum centered on issues of gender and sexuality. At its seminary in Philadelphia, the movement includes courses on women’s issues as well as openly accepts homosexuals into its programs. Reconstructionists observe *halakhah* if they choose to, but not because it is a binding law from G-d, but rather because it is a valuable aspect of Jewish culture. Reconstructionist synagogues use mostly Hebrew but emphasize its use of egalitarian neutral language. Reconstructionist Jews are allowed to accept modern ways of life and question the principles of faith. Reconstructionists do not require the belief in G-d or theism, but rather are centered on community, learning, and compassion. As we will see in

the next chapter, the beliefs concerning Jewish law and gender within these movements come into play in different ways in American fiction about women rabbis.

CHAPTER 3

WOMEN RABBIS IN FICTION: ISSUES AND CONFLICTS OF JEWISH LAW

Within the six novels and two short stories that make up the whole of American fiction centered on women rabbis, the female rabbis each face contemporary issues such as illness, dying, death, sex, sexuality, abortion, and rape. They are also seen struggling with issues of how to lead a religiously observant life while maintaining their contemporary gender and reformed ideals of Judaism. Jewish tradition and *halakhah* maintain strict opinions on these issues; however, modern female rabbis are able to rely on *halakhah* while incorporating modernity into their Jewish practices and teachings. The novels and short stories each invoke Jewish law and tradition to reveal issues about women in Judaism.

1. The Fiction

Rabbi Lynda Klein wants a career and struggles to find meaning in her own life within the confines of Judaism's views of women as subordinate to men. Traditionally, women were not allowed to seek positions of authority within Judaism. In *A Place of Light* (1983), Rhonda Shapiro-Reiser discusses Judaism's views of women through her female protagonist, Rabbi Lynda Klein, as she struggles to find meaning in issues such as illness, dying and death, politics of a synagogue, and the choice to have children while being a working professional. Judaism contains specific ideologies in regards to these issues and how a person should cope and react to them, which will be described later in this chapter.

In her duties as rabbi, Rabbi Sara, of Alex J. Goldman's *The Rabbi is a Lady* (1987), discusses sex, abortion, homosexuality, AIDS, and feminism all within the structure of Judaism. Her congregation, students, and the Conservative synagogue board create judgments and opinions of Rabbi Sara as she presents the Jewish opinion of these issues.

She is consistently open and honest with her students and does not fear the judgment of the community, synagogue, or Conservative movement that is deciding her fate as a rabbi.

Rabbi Sara struggles with Judaic issues while she attempts to gain ordination and serve as the Conservative rabbi to a large synagogue²⁶ simultaneously. Rabbi Sara is a modern thinker who is aware of Jewish tradition and how it applies to contemporary issues and teenage children. Goldman depicts Rabbi Sara as a risk taker and extremely dedicated to her work and Judaism.

Rabbi Myra Wahl of Joseph Telushkin's The Unorthodox Murder of Rabbi Wahl (1987) is a strong feminist rabbi who, along with a radical nun and female minister, argues to support feminist issues on Rabbi Daniel Winter's radio show. Rabbi Wahl defines the Jewish opinion on issues such as abortion and women's rights on the radio. Because of her extreme feminist views, Rabbi Wahl is murdered, but not before she presents the problems of being a Jewish woman in a position of authority faced with Jewish tradition. Telushkin centers the opening of his novel on the difficulties of openly discussing issues concerning *halakhah* and gender in contemporary Jewish American society.

Rabbi Deborah Green, of Jonathan Rosen's Joy Comes in the Morning (2004), is a Reform rabbi who serves her synagogue as the assistant rabbi. Her duties include officiating at life cycle events, serving as the hospital chaplain, and leading the congregation in prayer. Along with her duties as assistant rabbi, Rabbi Deborah struggles to utilize Jewish tradition and create meaning for her community while maintaining a religious life of meaning for herself. Throughout the novel, Rosen is able to reveal that life cycle events are changed and

²⁶ A large congregation is generally believed to have 800 member and member families.

possibly improved by the presence of a female rabbi. Rabbi Deborah approaches her duties with compassion and nurturing care, which are traits that Rosen attributes to gender.

Roger Herst presents Judaism within the Reform movement in his novel Woman of the Cloth (1998) by presenting issues such as sexuality, feminism, and G-d. Rabbi Gabby Lewyn is in the midst of a struggle to become the senior rabbi of a large Reform temple. As part of her busy schedule, Rabbi Gabby teaches Jewish philosophy and feminism to a college class and solves the mystery of how and why her colleague mysteriously and suddenly left. Herst utilizes many aspects of Judaism that allows Rabbi Gabby to appear knowledgeable within the Reform movement as she attempts to discover the meaning of Judaism in terms of feminism, sex and *Kabbalah*, and gender issues in liturgy throughout the novel.

Rabbi Deborah Luria of Erich Segal's novel Acts of Faith (1992) struggles to find a balance between the strict Orthodox life that she grew up with and the Reform movement that she finds acceptance within. The gender roles in the Orthodox movement are restraining and confining compared to the freedoms women have found in the Reform movement. As Rabbi Deborah transitions into the traditions of the Reform movement, she is able to find a refreshed belief in Judaism and a purpose for women outside the home. Rabbi Deborah is able to live as a single mother in a position of Jewish authority, although she struggles to find balance within each of these roles. Segal presents Rabbi Deborah grappling with the Jewish traditions in the grieving process and struggling to balance her time between being a mother and a community leader.

Through the experiences of Rabbi Marion Bloomgarten, a Reform rabbi, Eileen Pollack's short story "The Rabbi in the Attic" (1991) is able to confront issues in Judaism concerning the Orthodox movement and the Reform movement and the ordination of women.

Rabbi Bloomgarten, who is recently ordained, is assigned to an Orthodox congregation that does not accept her authority as a rabbi because she is a woman. She is forced to accept her role as rabbi as merely ceremonial while continuing to embrace Judaism and its traditions. Pollack reveals the conflicts within the current practices of Judaism concerning gender and Jewish tradition.

Glenn and Jeanne Gillette and David J. Zucker's short story "Here and Now" (1996) uses the historical event of the Holocaust to present the importance of preservation and memory for the Jewish people. Although there is no synagogue or congregational setting in this short story, the authors present the female rabbi as something that is shocking and abnormal to American Jews. Rabbi Sarah Pollock introduces herself to a Holocaust survivor who is surprised that the rabbi is a woman. These two characters work together to return a Torah to its Ark²⁷ using a time machine. Rabbi Sarah struggles with consoling a victim of the destruction and devastation of the Holocaust while maintaining her authority as a female rabbi.

2. The Interviews

I conducted three interviews with female rabbis in the North Carolina Triangle region. The rabbis comment upon Judaic tradition and the modern practices in their prospective synagogues in respect to gender and contemporary Jewish issues. Rabbi Lucy H.F. Dinner is the senior rabbi at Temple Beth Or, a Reform temple, in Raleigh, North Carolina. Rabbi Raachel Jurovics is the assistant to Rabbi Dinner at Temple Beth Or. Rabbi Sharon Mars is the campus rabbi for North Carolina Hillel in Chapel Hill. Before serving as NC Hillel's rabbi, Rabbi Sharon took a pulpit at a Reconstructionist synagogue in Chapel

²⁷ The Holy Ark where the Torah is kept in a synagogue

Hill. Although Rabbi Sharon is ordained as a Reform rabbi, she considers herself to be an “evolving Jew” by relying upon all practices of Judaism in her work as a rabbi.

3. CONFLICTS BETWEEN TRADITION AND GENDER

3.1 Illness and Death

In A Place of Light, Rabbi Lynda Klein’s colleague, Rabbi Aaron Stern, becomes ill with terminal cancer. Rabbi Klein must cope with his illness and respect his wishes on how he wants to treat his illness. Rabbi Sharon explains that Jewish tradition requires that “if you have the possibility of preserving life you have to do it” through seeking medical care for the duration of their illness. Rabbi Sharon continues to explain that compassion and sensitivity are required when consoling a person who is ill or dying. These traits are what make women perfect for their leadership roles in the rabbinate, according to Rabbi Sharon. Prayer is supplementary, but necessary. The preservation of life²⁸ is considered to be of the highest importance, surpassing all other commandments in the Torah.²⁹ For example, a person may violate Yom Kippur,³⁰ break the Sabbath, or eat non-kosher food if there is a chance that human life may be prolonged and saved by such an act. Judaism suggests that the quality and duration of human life is irrelevant and that life is not relative, but rather infinite. Judaism rejects the notion of personal autonomy, but instead considers our bodies to be given to us by G-d, and so they are not ours to do with what we will. G-d decides to give humans life and when that life should cease to exist. Judaism does not judge a person because they are impaired, but values every life as important and worthy of living for as long as possible.

²⁸ *Pikuach nefesh*

²⁹ There are 613 commandments in the Torah.

³⁰ This is the “Day of Repentance” for which a person fasts for an entire day. Also known to be the most Holy day on the Jewish calendar.

Judaism also suggests that the use of advanced technology to sustain human life is not against G-d's will. Scientific innovation and technology are to be used for the benefit of mankind, and if they can be used to prolong human life, then it is G-d's will that this should be done. Reform Judaism allows a sick or dying person to choose how they want to treat their illness. The contemporary movements of Judaism are able to look to female rabbis for compassion and understanding at these difficult moments in life.

Jews follow Jewish tradition in a number of different manners. Reform Jews, who are not required to follow all of *halakhah*, are also not required to follow Jewish laws in relation to illnesses. Although a Reform rabbi may ensure that a person understands traditional Judaism's opinion on such matters, Rabbi Sharon explains that whatever decision a person makes she is going to support and defend their right to make their own decisions on how they are going to live out their life. Rabbi Klein is told about her colleague's illness in confidence and is asked to not intervene with Rabbi Stern's choices for medical care. Rabbi Stern chooses to not utilize medical care to treat his cancer, but rather decides to live out his life naturally. Rabbi Klein finds it extremely difficult to not intervene, as she wants him to get medical care so he can live as tradition dictates, i.e. for as long as possible. Rabbi Sharon offers her opinion that "I don't feel like as a rabbi I would ever be within my purview to unplug someone who is on life support, but I certainly feel like it would be within my purview to try to empathize with that person and just be there for that person. And if it came right down to it, maybe even try and defend that person's right to do what he or she decided to do with his or her last moments in life."

There is a *mitzvah* in the Torah that says that Jews must attempt to alleviate pain and suffering; however, Rabbi Klein is specifically asked to not help her friend and colleague.

Rabbi Klein struggles to determine if prolonging Rabbi Stern's life is the appropriate thing to do, or if by treating his illness only pain and suffering would be prolonged. Judaism recognizes this discrepancy and notes that a life filled with pain is one that may be too difficult to fully live, and that "life is so sacrosanct, but quality of life is also really quite important. Ultimately we are not the arbiters; it's the One above" (Rabbi Sharon Mars). The choice of action is not easily made as Rabbi Klein struggles with Rabbi Stern's choice to not treat his illness, and she knows that there is nothing she can do to help ease his pain. She chooses to support his decision concerning his life knowing that he is aware of his options for care. Although women are considered to be nurturing and caring, Rabbi Klein's concern for life and her colleague's chance at life almost overtakes her duties as a friend and as someone who, in contemporary Jewish society, is able to support and defend the right to choose how to treat an illness.

Erich Segal's novel Acts of Faith deals with the Orthodox practices concerning sickness and the process of dying. As *Rebbe*³¹ Luria gets older and his son, Daniel, makes the decision to not take his father's place as the next great Silzcer *Rebbe*, *Rebbe* Luria becomes ill from the pain and sadness of his failure to be a mentor to his son and for the loss of his daughter, Deborah. *Rebbe* Luria dies and Deborah returns to her Orthodox home to mourn the loss of her father. Traditionally, Jews follow a strict and extensive period of mourning, although the Orthodox movement does not allow women to participate in this mourning process. The mourning periods allows for a full expression of grief, while allowing the mourner to gradually return to a normal life. The first seven days after a funeral

³¹ *Rebbe* is the Yiddish word for rabbi. They are Jewish spiritual leaders or rabbis, especially of an Orthodox sect.

is called *shiva* (seven in Hebrew). Then, there is a thirty-day mourning period called *shloshim* (thirty in Hebrew). Finally, if one is mourning the loss of a parent, the period of mourning extends for twelve months and requires the recitation of the *Kaddish* prayer³² every day for eleven months. In the Orthodox tradition, only men are able to say *Kaddish*, and women are not required to do so. If a woman wants to say *Kaddish*, she is required to ask a man to say it for her. Deborah is not able to say *Kaddish* for her father in the Orthodox tradition of her childhood, but she is able to go to the Reform synagogue and say the prayer as required by Jewish tradition. Deborah feels left out of Jewish rituals and traditions in the Orthodox movement, but she is able to find comfort and acceptance in the modernity of the Reform movement.

In Rosen's Joy Comes in the Morning, Rabbi Deborah Green's main duties as the assistant rabbi include serving as the hospital chaplain and officiating at Jewish life cycle events including *Bris*³³ and *Shalom Bat*³⁴ ceremonies, *Bar* and *Bat Mitzvahs*, weddings, and funerals. Many female rabbis choose to serve their Jewish communities as assistant rabbis. Like Rabbi Deborah, Rabbi Jurovics serves her congregation as the assistant rabbi at Temple Beth Or in Raleigh. Rabbi Jurovics comments that in her duties "I staff a committee or two, hospital visits. I do all of the life cycle events that roll along, teaching, and have some administrative responsibility. So, I think that I really have been blessed to truly be able to function as an assistant. I have thought of myself for a very long time as being, in the best

³² A prayer that glorifies the name of G-d. By reciting this prayer, a person is consoled by recognizing that deceased's soul was gathered in by the One who created and provided it at the beginning of their life.

³³ Male circumcision, which is performed on the eighth day of life.

³⁴ Literally means, "welcome daughter," a ceremony to welcome a baby girl into Judaism and a community in which she will receive her Hebrew name.

sense of the word, her [Rabbi Dinner's] backup.” Jewish life cycle events take place to commemorate specific moments in life and to publicly recognize the significance of life. Given the traditional importance of women in the home, female rabbis are expected to be more attentive and caring while officiating during life cycle events. Drawing on her own experiences with life cycle events, Rabbi Sharon comments that “the tradition is brimming over with ways of approaching moments in life that are important that should be treated with delicacy; and also tradition is always trying to infuse meaning into every moment, but particularly those life junctures that are critical.”

As a female rabbi, Deborah recognizes that it is her duty to officiate at these events without overtaking the significance of them. For example, Deborah recognizes the need to mourn for the family of the deceased, but she recognizes that death is a natural and inevitable part of life in which the Jewish process of mourning helps to work through pain in order to regain a normal life. Jewish tradition marks major transition moments in life that highlight meaning for individuals, families, and communities. Rabbi Deborah performs these functions with ease; however, she also unexpectedly performs them with a sense of detachment. Because Rabbi Deborah is a woman, she is expected to perform better than her male colleagues do; however, Deborah finds the busy nature of the rabbinate to be a hindrance to meet this expectation. Deborah has prepared speeches and progression of the services, and she leads them without attachment to the meaning of the prayer or ceremony. In contrast, Rabbi Sharon of NC Hillel spends a lot of her time getting to know the family and gathering details for the event that she will be officiating. Rabbi Sharon explains that she does “have a formula because you can’t reinvent the wheel every time. I have to have the psalms that I’ll say, what I will chant in Hebrew, and what I will say in English.”

However, Rabbi Sharon mentions that she approaches these critical junctures in life with the attention and time that they deserve.

Rabbi Deborah spends most of her time serving as the hospital chaplain. Historically hospital chaplains are thought of as existing in Christianity, but in the last few decades the growing need for spiritual assistance in the hospital has risen, and Rabbis have entered hospitals to care for the needs of Jewish patients. While serving as a hospital chaplain, Rabbi Sharon shares that she worked with an Orthodox rabbi “who felt that women rabbis were the wave of the future and the perfect people to be in the role of chaplain” because of their gender. Hospital chaplains not only counsel the sick and their families, but they are also there to provide spiritual guidance and help patients and doctors answer questions in regards to human life. Women are seen as being suited for the role of chaplain because of the traditional gender roles of nurturing and caring for children and the family. Chaplains spend most of their days in hospitals visiting with patients and their families and providing assistance and care when needed. They pray with patients and teach them religious doctrines at this crucial time in life.

Rabbi Sharon of NC Hillel shares that the Jewish “tradition actually instructs me to sit on the same level as the person who is in a sick bed, and to make room for the *shekhina*, G-d’s holy presence above us both, so I could make eye contact, and there could also be G-d in the room.” In Rosen’s novel, Rabbi Deborah is often seen with patients, praying and acting as a friend and confidant. Displaying the need for compassion in this role, Rabbi Sharon comments, “I felt that my role as a rabbi was to have the perfect thing to say at all times and you just can’t... when a person is dying or really sick know what to say. [...] There’s that potential to steer people in a direction where they feel comfort and hope, and hopefully

buffered or cushioned by their tradition, which I think so many people need in that moment of vulnerability.” Rabbi Deborah is dedicated to this aspect of her job, but becomes overwhelmed by its demands on her time and spirituality as a woman.

While Rabbi Deborah is constantly helping others, she stops making time for her own spiritual needs and growth. Rosen utilizes Jewish life cycle events to reveal the busy nature of the rabbinate and to reveal the hardships that a rabbi endures because they rarely have time for their own spiritual development. Rabbi Dinner of Temple Beth Or in Raleigh finds time for her own spiritual needs “through study, through setting aside time for study at different times, and sometimes enrolling in classes or meeting with colleagues. There have been times that I have set aside time for personal meditation. I think for me renewal is about making sure that I set aside the time. [...] You have to build those things in.” Rabbi Deborah finds the rabbinate extremely difficult as she struggles to continue to care and provide for the needs of her Jewish community and her responsibilities as a woman to nurture her own spirituality in order to nurture others.

3.2 Female Rabbis and Children

Rabbi Klein struggles with the commandment in Judaism to have children in A Place of Light. Jewish tradition states that a woman must have children. To have children is the first commandment given to Adam after he was created. G-d commands Adam in Genesis 1:28 to “Be fruitful and multiply.” Isaiah 45:18 states, “He did not create the world to be desolate, but rather inhabited.” Once a woman has a son and a daughter, she has fulfilled her commandment to have children. Then, the duty of the mother is to raise the child in the Jewish faith and teach them so that they may be able to live their life according to the

commandments of the Torah. Family is extremely important in the Jewish tradition, and by having children, women ensure that the Jewish faith continues.

Rabbi Klein wants to have children, but also wants to have a successful rabbinic career. She does not see the possibility of fulfilling both goals at the same time. The rabbinate is an extremely demanding job, and Rabbi Klein feels that if she were to have a family that she would not be able to fulfill her aspirations of being a senior rabbi because she is a woman, and therefore the one responsible for the family. Rabbi Dinner explains that she has two children who are now sixteen and ten years of age. She has set up boundaries for herself with her synagogue to ensure that she eats dinner with her family every night. She also recognizes that it is a “challenge for any family with two careers, with one being in the rabbinate.”

Rabbi Klein becomes pregnant and then battles within herself whether or not she should keep the child. Her husband does not see abortion as an option, but Rabbi Klein does not see that it would be possible to be a mother and a senior rabbi at the same time. Abortion is permitted in Judaism if there is a direct physical or psychological risk to the mother’s life. Judaism sets a precedence that an autonomous life is of greater importance than an unborn life, although a fetus is recognized as a human being. Rabbi Klein’s life is not at risk in the novel; however, as a Reform Jew she is able to make decisions outside of *halakhah*. Rabbi Klein continues to work long hours as she pursues the senior rabbi position, and in doing so, puts her unborn baby at risk. Knowingly taking this risk, Rabbi Klein feels fatigued and confused about her life and the choice she is making for a career over motherhood. She keeps her pregnancy a secret from the synagogue board because she feels that it would affect their decision about her future. Rabbi Klein is aware that the synagogue board has never had

to consider maternity leave for its senior rabbi, and she does not know how this will affect her chance of becoming the senior rabbi.

3.3 Issues of Sex and Sexuality

Alex J. Goldman presents Conservative Judaism on the cusp of allowing women into the rabbinate in the novel The Rabbi is A Lady. Rabbi Sara Weintraub is attempting to gain ordination from the Conservative movement while serving as the temporary senior rabbi in a large Conservative synagogue. Because Rabbi Sara is female, her students, the synagogue, and Jewish community expect her to approach any issue with compassion and delicacy that they may not have found with her male colleagues. While teaching the confirmation class at her synagogue, Rabbi Sara answers questions regarding contemporary issues relating to teenage children and attempts to explain them in terms of Jewish tradition. Rabbi Sara teaches children about sex and the Jewish opinion of it, but also contemporary attitudes regarding sex and premarital sex. Similar to Rabbi Sara, Rabbi Dinner conducts a retreat for 9th and 10th grade students to teach them about sex and sexuality. Rabbi Dinner explains how she teaches sexuality in Jewish tradition that allow the children to openly discuss their sexuality:

If they can talk about it in front of me, then hopefully they can talk about it with a guy or a girl because most of the time I think they're not talking about it. The communication process isn't there at all, and if the communication process is there, it is less likely they are going to be involved in risky behaviors. So, instead of just saying, don't have sex, sex is all wrong, or never till you're married, what we say is we know what reality is. We explain what Judaism teaches in terms of the spectrum because Judaism doesn't really speak directly to premarital sex. We explain that you

need to be in a relationship that is a loving respectful relationship that is respectful of the fact that you are created in G-d's image.

Jewish tradition places great importance on sex as both a means to express love between a husband and a wife and as a means to create new life. Sex is supposed to take place only within marriage. In Hebrew, marriage is called *kiddushin*, meaning holiness. Within marriage, sex is a pleasurable and necessary act. Rabbi Sara explains the pleasures of sex to her class and emphasizes that it is only something that takes place within a marriage. However, just as Rabbi Dinner explains to her students, Rabbi Sara recognizes that sex does occur outside of marriage and among teenagers; therefore, she feels that it is also necessary to explain choices such as contraception.

As a female voice of the Conservative movement, Rabbi Sara explains the issue of sex and abortion in terms of *halakhah* and contemporary ideals. When a teenage girl in her confirmation class becomes pregnant, she is comfortable enough to confide in her female rabbi. Female rabbis serve as role models for Jewish girls and young women who previously might not have had a Jewish female authority figure to look to in critical moments of life. Rabbi Sara confronts the girl's parents with the option of abortion. Rabbi Sara claims that because the girl is so young that it is permissible to have an abortion because her future would be completely altered by bringing a new life into the world. Rabbi Dinner comments, "If there were psychological reasons then I would say that Judaism offers that [abortion] as an alternative. On the other hand, if it's a matter of it's easier for me today to have an abortion rather than to keep the baby or give the baby for adoption, I would gently push them toward other alternatives, but again not force that upon them. [...] And, accompany them if they choose, or [if] what they're choosing is within Jewish law or not, accompany and

support them through that process.” Rabbi Sara teaches that a Jew should not have an abortion or use contraception for selfish reasons, but in our contemporary world, the Conservative and Reform movements hold a more liberal opinion in respect to such issues.

Homosexuality and AIDS are considered within the different movements of Judaism from traditional and contemporary viewpoints. According to the Orthodox movement and *halakhah*, homosexuality is forbidden; however, the contemporary movements within Judaism place an importance upon the individual in a committed relationship based on love regardless of gender. The Conservative movement holds the position that homosexuality cannot be judged according to traditional *halakhah*. In the Conservative movement, a homosexual cannot be ordained as a rabbi and they are not able to marry; however, homosexuals are welcomed as equal participants in all other aspects of synagogue life and community. The Reform movement allows homosexuals to be ordained as rabbis in its seminaries, and they may get married. As a female Reform rabbi, Rabbi Dinner explains that people have interpreted the Jewish texts as very negative towards homosexuality because they are associated with idolatry.³⁵ However, today “it is very clear that homosexuality is part of how some people are created. So, if you are created in G-d’s image, and this is how you are created, then this is something that we don’t condemn. We accept it, and we encourage those who are gay or lesbian to be in monogamous relationships, just like we do those who are heterosexual.” As with other issues, Jewish communities expect their female rabbis to approach the issues of homosexuality and AIDS with delicacy and compassion that

³⁵ Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 tell the men of Israel not to “lie with a male as with a woman.” Such an act is referred to as *to’evah*, or an abomination. *To’evah* is also used in the bible to refer to idolatry. By abstaining from homosexual acts, a person was able to maintain ethnic purity and not participate in acts of bestiality or male prostitution. This form of idolatry is also referring to sexual relationships of power or rape.

they see as traits of the female gender. AIDS has stricken the homosexual population of the United States, including the Jewish population. The liberal Jewish movements of the United States respects the rights and needs of AIDS patients and continues to welcome them into Jewish life and community.

3.4 Issues of Rape and Sex

Rabbi Gabby of Roger Herst's Woman of the Cloth becomes a public figure in her community when she is asked to serve as a character witness in a very public rape trial. Orthodox Judaism only considers rape in the context of marriage because sex is forbidden outside of marriage. Forced sexual relations within the context of marriage are considered rape and are not permitted. Traditional Judaism regards marital sex as the woman's right and not the man's. The contemporary movements of American Judaism recognize that rape occurs both within and outside of marriage. Some believe that it is permissible to have an abortion if a pregnancy is the result of rape. While making the difficult decision of whether or not to serve as the character witness in the rape trial, Rabbi Gabby is accused of not being a feminist and of being against women's rights. However, Reform Judaism is dedicated to social justice and *tikkun olam*.³⁶ Feminism and women's rights both become important aspects of these notions. Herst explores Jewish feminism in an attempt to recognize the bonds of communal structures that bring Jewish women up against opposing social, religious, and political realities. Rabbi Gabby wants to help her friend in need, but must consider her own fate as a woman in the rabbinate first. By testifying to the character of a possible rapist, Rabbi Gabby would be deserting the women who look to her for spiritual growth and

³⁶ Literally means, "repair of the world." Reform Judaism strives to bring peace, freedom, and justice to all people of the world.

professional empowerment. She does not want to abandon women, but must consider what she believes to be the truth. Rabbi Gabby chooses to testify at the trial; however, she is able to remain true to Judaism by following the law and the justice system. Reform Judaism allows Rabbi Gabby to consider the rape trial using contemporary ideologies while still relying on Jewish traditions of justice.

As a contrast to the feminist idealism and contemporary issues, Herst uses the *Kabbalah* as it relates to the union between man and woman in order to attain spiritual ecstasy by attaining a connection with G-d. Herst refers to G-d as El Shaddai or G-d Almighty. In Genesis,³⁷ G-d is referred to as El Shaddai numerous times in relation to sex. It is written:

May God Almighty [El Shaddai] bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers.... (Gen. 28:3)

I am God Almighty [El Shaddai]: be fruitful and increase in number. (Gen. 35:11)

By the Almighty [El Shaddai] who will bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies beneath, blessings of the breasts [shadayim] and of the womb [racham]. (Gen. 49:25)

Herst uses this concept of G-d, El Shaddai, and sexuality as part of the mystery that Rabbi Gabby must solve in order to understand the rape trial and to understand why her senior rabbi suddenly left his pulpit. Herst utilizes the *Kabbalistic* understanding of the union between man and woman being holy and sex as a repairing act, or a *tikkun*, of the divide that exists between humans. *Kabbalah* suggests that the coming together of opposites creates the whole; hence, male and female energies create a whole. Rabbi Jurovics explains that

³⁷ The first book of the Torah

there is a great deal of Kabbalistic teaching, particularly around *Shabbat*, that places sexual union at the high point of the arc of what transpires throughout the twenty-five hours of *Shabbat*, as the point at which the ecstasy of married lovers is one that models and permits, makes possible, the ecstatic union of the *Kodesh Barechu*³⁸ and the *Shekhina*.³⁹ There's a great deal about that that enriches and gives great honor to the way that every aspect of our lives can be lived as being in the Divine image; that the Kabbalistic sense of "as above so below" and vice versa is very powerful.

Herst explores the joining of man and woman in order to complete creation, and through sexual ecstasy to create a connection to G-d. It is this philosophy that Rabbi Gabby's senior rabbi understands and attempts in his counseling of middle age postmenopausal women in his congregation, which then causes him to suddenly disappear. The accused rapist also subscribes to this *Kabbalistic* philosophy with his wife and other women. Rabbi Gabby uses her knowledge of Judaism and *Kabbalah* in order to understand the actions of her friend and colleague, and regain the respect and confidence of her synagogue board, the congregation, and community. Rabbi Gabby is constantly judged and criticized because of her gender and must prove to her congregation and community that she deserves the senior pulpit position and that she is capable of performing all of its duties as a woman, even under extreme pressures and circumstances.

3.5 *Halakhah* and Women in the Rabbinate

Rabbi Klein, of *A Place of Light*, is portrayed as an extremely career-oriented and driven woman. Historically, Judaism has placed women in the domestic sphere and has not

³⁸ The Holy call to worship

³⁹ G-d's Holy presence

had to consider women's careers, specifically rabbinical careers. *Halakhah* is not written with the consideration of women coming to power. Rabbi Klein chooses to live a Jewish life that fulfills her own goals and purposes. Shapiro-Reiser creates *halakhically*-centered issues using Jewish tradition and contemporary sentiments in her novel. Reform Judaism does not command that a person must follow all aspects of *halakhah*, but as a religious leader and a person dedicated to Judaism, Rabbi Klein feels that she must consider *halakhah* philosophically⁴⁰ in order to pursue her own goals.

As an outspoken feminist, Rabbi Wahl confronts the issues of women's rights in religion and the workplace by defending a woman's right for abortion in *The Unorthodox Murder of Rabbi Wahl*. She displays that a woman can be in a position of authority in a religious institution and openly supports women's advancement in contemporary society. Historically, Jewish tradition and *halakhah* have placed women in the home raising a family and men as scholars and businessmen. Women were discouraged from pursuing higher education or religious authoritative positions, but this was primarily believed because it was thought that women who engage in such endeavors might neglect their primary duties as wives and mothers. Male rabbis were not concerned that women were not spiritual enough; rather, they were concerned that women might become too spiritually devoted.

Women required equal access to religious texts and authoritative positions by proving that they are equal to men in scholarly and business realms. By obtaining positions of power, women have changed and added to the liturgy, provided compassion and insight, and have

⁴⁰ Rabbi Dinner adds, "I find frankly that 98% of American Jews live their lives philosophically as Reform Jews. Meaning that they choose what rituals are meaningful to them and live those rituals. And, they may change what ritual they accept. Reform Jews are just upfront about it, and we say there are rituals that don't have meaning and it doesn't make sense to make these rituals as part of who we are."

brought their unique perspectives to the rabbinate. Rabbi Sharon comments, “we’re [female rabbis] also creating this new way of thinking about Judaism that is so innovative and exciting. I think it’s a great time to be a feminist, and I think it’s a great time to be breaking into these roles that men have always occupied.” Female rabbis’ perspectives are sought in order to develop new statements of belief. Rabbi Sharon feels that it is important to have females on the *bimah*⁴¹ who bring their caring and nurturing souls to their rabbinate.

Although Rabbi Myra Wahl is represented as an extreme feminist, she exhibits power and opportunity for women within the rabbinate. Rabbi Dinner feels that “my rabbinate is not about feminism, not that feminism won’t be a part of my rabbinate, but I am here because of a love of Judaism. I theologically and philosophically believe that if we create a community, we can make the world into a place that is more receptive, communal, and loving. Therefore, feminism isn’t necessarily my goal, although feminism fits into those goals. It was always my position that I went into a place not as a woman rabbi, but as a rabbi.”

In The Unorthodox Murder of Rabbi Wahl, the (all male) synagogue board chooses to not renew Rabbi Wahl’s contract because they do not approve of her ultra feminist opinions and public persona. Rabbi Dinner comments that “the board [...] and the congregation isn’t focused on women’s issues, per say, except for as a sub issue of Judaism. We’ve got to focus on Judaism first.” Myra Wahl attempts to pursue both the rabbinate and her feminist ideals and ultimately fails to uphold both. Judaism both aids and restrains Rabbi Wahl as she continues to pursue feminist ideals within the rabbinate, but she is not able to persuade the minds of her male colleagues at the synagogue in order to change their gendered customs and

⁴¹ An elevated area or platform in a synagogue that is intended to serve as the place from which the Torah is read and services are led.

rituals. Contemporary American Judaism has allowed for the advancement of women, but the politics and traditions of a synagogue also have to be taken into account. Rabbi Wahl's synagogue could not ultimately welcome an ultra liberal feminist who desired changes in Judaism, and instead preferred to go back to the Jewish traditions and customs of male rabbis and liturgy.

Segal's novel begins in the home of the great Orthodox *Rebbe* Luria's household and his attempt to control his daughter's life by forcing her to follow Orthodox tradition and become a wife and a mother. *Rebbe* Luria's daughter Deborah has other plans for herself as she escapes the confines of the Orthodox movement and discovers the contemporary and welcoming nature of the Reform movement. Deborah goes through her life trying to find a balance between the strict traditions of Orthodox Judaism that she knew as a child and the contemporary freedoms she finds in the Reform movement. As a child, she knows the life that is already chosen for her: to be a wife and a mother of a large family just like her own mother. Deborah is sent to live in Jerusalem at a young age and quickly escapes the horrors that she encounters in the home she is placed in. Deborah escapes to a secular Kibbutz where she discovers equality and friendship among a secular group of Jews.

Deborah grew up in a strict Orthodox home and once she is on the Kibbutz she struggles with breaking the 613 commandments of the Torah including breaking the Sabbath⁴² and keeping *kashrut*. Because the Orthodox believes that all 613 commandments of the Torah are binding, Deborah finds it difficult to stray from the commandments and traditions she has been taught to uphold. The Orthodox believe that the Sabbath is a day of rest in which a person is required to cease from all elements of work. Deborah finds it

⁴² The fourth commandment states, "Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy."

extremely difficult not only to perform manual labor on *Shabbat*, but also to do things such as drive, cook, and use electricity. *Shabbat* is described as having three purposes, which are to commemorate the redemption of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, to commemorate G-d's creation of the universe,⁴³ and to bring us back to messianic times. Jewish tradition treats *Shabbat* as a holy day that is to be celebrated. In contrast, as a Reform rabbi, Rabbi Dinner explains, "I drive on *Shabbat*. I think that that's a reasonable interpretation of what *Shabbat* is about. It's not about me walking, knocking myself out when I can drive here and be much more presentable and really enjoy *Shabbat* for what *Shabbat* means. I try and choose observance in a way that has meaning for me and for the community." Deborah does learn to interpret *Shabbat* and to choose rituals that make sense for her in order to find meaning in Judaism for her own life.

Deborah also struggles with the Orthodox restrictions of modesty and clothing. The Orthodox movement requires that women cover their entire body with clothing so as to not distract men from study and prayer. Women are not allowed to wear clothing that is considered to be men's clothing and their legs and arms must be covered. The modern Orthodox practice is for shirts to reach the elbows and cover the collarbone, skirts to cover the knees, and to wear stockings. Once an Orthodox woman marries, she is then also required to cover her hair in the presence of non-family members in an act of modesty. The degree to which a woman must cover her body varies between the different Orthodox sects; however, all women are expected to accept modesty as part of their daily lives. Segal's story reveals the women of the Luria family all observing the rules of modesty both inside and outside the home. Once outside the strict lifestyle of the Orthodox movement, Deborah

⁴³ On the seventh day, G-d rested from his work.

struggles to accept that she does not have to adhere to these rules. In one instance, Segal depicts Deborah struggling with the decision of breaking the Sabbath to go swimming with the members of the Kibbutz. Not only would Deborah be breaking the fourth commandment, but she would also be seen in public wearing a bathing suit. Deborah learns to break free of the Orthodox restrictions and finds freedom for women and happiness in the secular and Reform Jewish world.

Deborah begins to study Talmud, Torah, and literature at a college near the Kibbutz, and it is here that she then finds her passion for learning and teaching. She discovers that she can follow her family's rabbinical tradition and become a Reform rabbi. With the help of her brother, Deborah, along with her young son, moves to New York so she can attend rabbinical school. Deborah chooses to live a more traditional Jewish life than her Reform congregants as she continues to observe *Shabbat* and the laws of *kashrut*. Deborah finds happiness in her modern lifestyle and acceptance in a synagogue that serves multiple communities. Deborah finds herself very busy and discovers the hardships of being a full time Reform rabbi and trying to live a traditional, although contemporary, Jewish life.

Similar to Rabbi Deborah Luria, Rabbi Deborah Green of Rosen's novel is often seen struggling with issues of observances within the Reform movement as she tries to find a balance between her own traditions and those of her family and friends. Rabbi Deborah also chooses to observe a more traditional Jewish lifestyle compared to her contemporary peers and members of her Reform congregation. Joy Comes in the Morning begins with Rabbi Deborah enveloped in a private moment of prayer. She is alone and reciting daily prayers as required by Jewish tradition for men. The Reform movement opens this opportunity to women as equal participants in religious life. Although the Reform movement does not

require men and women to recite daily prayers, Deborah chooses to do so as part of her own private spiritual development. Congregational prayer services in the Reform movement have changed Jewish liturgy, creating a new service with new traditions and prayers that suit the spiritual needs of a contemporary congregations. The Reform movement has removed the majority of traditional prayers and replaced them with English prayers and translations. This is because Reform Judaism recognizes the need for freedom and choice in liturgical and spiritual needs. Deborah recognizes the potential in Reform Judaism to create a service that uses a new liturgy to suit her own needs as well as the spiritual needs of her community that creates equality among men and women.

Within the freedoms that the Reform movement provides, Deborah struggles to find a balance of observances to maintain a religious life, and still have freedoms to maintain a contemporary and fulfilling life without too many religious hindrances. Deborah chooses to observe the laws of *kashrut* and *Shabbat* and observe minor and major holidays. Deborah finds herself in the homes of people not observing kosher laws and driving on the Sabbath; however, Deborah is able to justify these instances to herself because the Reform movement does not forbid such actions. For instance, Rabbi Jurovics explains that she observes a form of *Kashrut* called “eco-*Kashrut*, and that’s a form of biblical *Kashrut* that’s gives particular attention to concern for the well being of animals who give their lives to us for food. And, it does not meet all of the subsequent *halakhic* guidelines, its pretty biblically based. I think I am probably more *Shabbat* observant than most of my congregants, but I don’t have the sense that being a rabbi per say has had that much of an effect.” One can make the personal choice to be more observant of *halakhah* in accordance with traditional Judaism. Although at times in the novel these observances are compromised for Deborah, she is able to maintain

an observant Jewish life that reveals a rabbi's commitment and connection to Judaism, both in traditional and modern ways.

In "The Rabbi in the Attic," Rabbi Marion Bloomgarten is assigned to be the senior rabbi at an Orthodox synagogue, a movement that does not accept women as rabbis. Pollak presents Rabbi Marion as a woman of intelligence and ambition; however, once she encounters the Orthodox traditions of the congregation, she is not given respect or attention as a person in a position of authority. The Reform movement contains a modern and ever-changing liturgy and believes that *halakhah* is not binding by committing to the spirit of Jewish law by allowing it to change and reflect modern times. In contrast, Orthodox Judaism treats *halakhah* as binding and incapable of change. The Orthodox consider women to be inferior to men which gives them subordinate status in terms of prayer and access to Jewish learning. A woman is not permitted to be ordained as a rabbi in the Orthodox movement and Pollak places a woman directly into the rabbinic and authoritative position where she is vulnerable and unwelcome.

Rabbi Marion presents herself to the congregation as the rabbi and the authority figure through such actions as leading prayer services and reading from the Torah. The congregation laughs at her because she is a woman in the position of a man's job. The congregation soon chooses to ignore Rabbi Marion as she learns tolerance for a tradition that does not allow her to participate fully. Rabbi Marion concentrates on her own spirituality by continuing to study religious texts and engage in private prayer.

In this representation of an Orthodox congregation, Pollak is questioning the purpose of a rabbi. Rabbi Marion serves her congregation even when they choose not to listen to her as an authority figure. The Reform movement looks to the rabbi as a dominant figure in their

congregation, as a leader and guide. Rabbi Jurovics explains that “balancing the maternal inclinations with the rabbinic role has been tricky for a lot of people and there has been a lot of expectations in terms of nurturance and spirituality, and frankly I think in most cases those expectations have been confirmed. I think its good for the Jewish people to hear Torah in female voices.” The Reform rabbi can become the link into Judaism for some congregants as they learn and grow within the traditions. Rabbi Dinner adds, “whether we like it or not in American Western culture, the rabbi is held to this priestly standard, and whether its Jewish or not Jewish we need to accept it because it is a part of who we are. I joke and say that there’s me and then there is the rabbi that people know.” Women rabbis are able to serve as this rabbinic role model to their congregations, but also serve as role models to women of all ages by providing a spiritual path in Judaism that welcomes the participation and inclusion of women in synagogues and liturgy. The Orthodox are guided by their own prayers and do not seek guidance from a rabbi if they do not see that they are fit for the job. An Orthodox *rebbe* is viewed as more than simply a rabbi, but as a direct link to G-d. Rabbi Marion does not fit this purpose for the community because she is a woman, and, as a result, she becomes a structural piece for the congregation rather than an integral part of the community.

“Here and Now” by Glenn and Jeanne Gillette and David J. Zucker presents Rabbi Sarah who meets Hersh, a Holocaust survivor, who is battling memories of the day that the Nazis forced him to place a Torah in a burning fire. Hersh is surprised to find out that the rabbi is in fact a woman. Rabbi Jurovics of Temple Beth Or comments that

I don’t have in recent memory any such reaction from someone Jewish. I think this is fairly old news. But I do sometimes. Particularly if I’ve been asked to meet with elderly parents of congregants who they have just relocated to be near their children,

they may not have ever met a woman who has been a rabbi. They may be coming here to be with their family, but they may come from a more traditional Jewish environment in which there's not a lot of direct experience with women in the rabbinate. And I can't say I've ever had a particularly negative experience, just a certain amount of bemused surprise sometimes. [...] Whatever they may think about women in the pulpit, they probably make their determination about whether it's okay or not based on if they are comfortable being with you individually.

Rabbi Sarah is accepted by Hersh and is able to move on to discussing the reason for her visit with no comments or concerns based on her gender. Part of the duties of a rabbi is to counsel their congregants, and even though Rabbi Sarah was not in the Holocaust herself and even though she is a woman, she is still able to relate and comfort a Holocaust survivor.

4. Tradition and Gender

The American fiction about female rabbis presents issues of gender in Jewish tradition. American female rabbis have responded to these issues by relying on *halakhah* and contemporary American Jewish practices in the Reform and Conservative movements. The conflicts of tradition and gender exist because traditionally women have been subordinate to men in the Jewish religion; however, today women are continuing to seek and take authority positions in Judaism. Women are sought to serve Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist congregations of all sizes across the United States and provide service equal to their male colleagues, but also add to the Jewish faith by offering new insights and interpretations on issues for which gender is a problem in Judaism. This study provides a description of female rabbis and traditions, which can then provide the basis for a future

study of the implications for women, Judaism, and American fiction. These notions will continue to change as Judaism progresses into the future as it resolves some of the issues and anxieties due to gender in American Judaism.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

American fiction about women in the rabbinate presents conflicts about gender emerging in the Jewish tradition. Women rabbis are characterized as struggling to maintain professional and personal personas while trying to create a place for themselves in Judaic tradition. The six novels and two short stories written about women rabbis are preoccupied with gender and sex, and suggest that female attributes in the rabbinate are unrabbinic. The Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist movements of Judaism have ordained women rabbis as a progressive step toward moving beyond Jewish tradition and *halakhah*, which does not exclude women from the rabbinate. Although Jewish women know this, the female rabbis of the novels and short stories all grapple with a place for women of authority in Jewish tradition. Women rabbis, Judaism, and American fiction now face the implications for Judaism's future to overcome these unresolved issues and anxieties.

The sex and gender roles in the Orthodox movement place women solely in the domestic sphere of life. In the Orthodox tradition, raising a large family and taking care of the home are women's main duties. This is not unlike the lives of the Biblical heroines in Jewish history. Rachel and Leah, for example, were forced to bear as many children as they could. Jacob's love for them was determined by their childbearing capabilities. Although Biblical women display great attributes of power and strength, they also reveal the dominance of Jewish tradition and the male authoritative desire to maintain traditional gender roles that are still evident in modern society. The plots of the novels and short stories reveal this conflict of traditional gender roles in Judaism and of women breaking through these gender barriers.

Although the Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist movement of Judaism have opened its doors to women, some aspects of modern Judaism maintain that women are subordinate to men. Reform Judaism, by ordaining the first women rabbi in 1972, broke through gender barriers, but as seen in the novels and short stories, Reform Judaism still questions the authority of a women rabbi. The fiction questions the capability of a woman to be a mother and a rabbi, and, at the same time, maintain authority in a large congregation or community. The Orthodox movement, which strictly adheres to *halakhah* and Jewish tradition, relies on important aspects of women's roles in tradition, such as childbearing and modesty, to maintain their strict adherence to Judaism. For example, some women work in shops during the day so that their husbands have the freedom to devote their time to the study of Torah and Talmud rather than to business. Women have broken through gender barriers in the Orthodox movement by gaining access to education and business beyond the home; however, women are still not granted equal access to prayer and leadership. Jewish tradition values women as nurturing, caring, and modest people who ensure that Judaism is passed from one generation to another. The movements of modern American Judaism have allowed women to surpass these roles, although they are still considered to be important components of Jewish familial life.

A component of modern American Judaism revealed in American fiction written about female rabbis is the depiction of a female rabbi as sexually charged. The female rabbis in The Rabbi Is A Lady, Woman of the Cloth, and Joy Comes in the Morning are described as single, attractive, and sexually-alive women who happen to be rabbis. In addition to the texts mentioned above, A Place of Light and Acts of Faith also portray the female rabbis as beautiful women who are aware of their own beauty. The authors of Woman of the Cloth

and The Rabbi Is A Lady describe their perfectly placed nipples and shapely bodies that are attractive to men, particularly the men in the women's congregations. The women rabbis of The Rabbi Is A Lady and Joy Comes in the Morning consider what they are going to wear to synagogue and wonder if they are too sexy for the rabbinate. They question if they are allowed to be seen on a public beach in a bikini because they are a rabbi. These women also recognize that they are women who are allowed to have sexual desires; however, the plots of the novels and short stories depict them as overwhelmingly sexual. Rabbi Sharon of NC Hillel shares: "I remember one time I was told to put my hair up because I had it down, and it looked too hippie, too sexy, or too something that made people not think about the Torah I was reading, but about the hair that was falling in my face when I was reading." Sharon's experience relates to gender, tradition, and sex. The person who commented to Sharon about her hair was appalled by it and found it distracting, which reinforces the ideologies behind modesty found in Jewish tradition.

The women's rabbinate are affected by their gender because people question their abilities to accomplish the high demands of the job. Rabbi Dinner of Temple Beth Or in Raleigh mentions that she has created boundaries between herself and her rabbinic duties to maintain a personal life that is fulfilling and allows her to feel renewed. The American fiction written on the subject of female rabbis, on the other hand, does not move beyond gender, but instead suggests that the female attributes of gender and sexual desires are a part of being in the rabbinate. Jewish tradition never considered that women would want to become rabbis, and in the twentieth century women have questioned tradition and broke through traditional gender barriers in order to gain ordination; however, women still must consider Jewish tradition and that they are not included as authoritative figures in it.

Women have been ordained as rabbis for thirty-four years, and in this time liturgy has been changed, prayers have been created, life cycle events now include the celebration of moments in girls' and women's lives, and religious life has been opened to women in the contemporary American Jewish movements; however, equality is still not felt by women rabbis in America, or is it depicted in American fiction on this subject. Rabbi Sharon asserts that, "so much of the time we are called upon to talk about what your opinion is as a woman rabbi on this or that subject, and I think we will really taste the equality when that question is irrelevant."

The conflicts between gender and tradition that still exists today affects how Jews celebrate Judaism in America. Rabbi Jurovics of Temple Beth Or in Raleigh asserts:

I don't mean to say this in a cold hearted way, but it wouldn't bother me if we went through a couple of hundred years where Jewish practice and learning and the public face of Judaism became predominantly female. I think it is less the case that women who have spiritual leadership positions seek to exclude men in the way that men have sought to exclude or control the participation of women. If it's a side affect that men self select out for a while, I think we need a bit of a corrective to the last two thousand years. And, I don't think that Judaism in any effect is going to be the same a couple hundred years from now in any means. I think we are in a kind of a *yavneh*⁴⁴ period, and that we have not yet come to grips fully with what was lost in the *Shoah*⁴⁵ and what it takes to recover from that kind of a wound. And, I think that Judaism is,

⁴⁴ Refers to a transitional period. *Yavneh* first referred to the period before the *Mishna* was written. It extended from the fall of the Temple in 70 C.E. to the second Jewish revolt in 135 C.E.

⁴⁵ The Holocaust

as it was after the fall of the Second Temple, at a turning point, where what it will be like a couple hundred years from now will be considerably different. It doesn't mean that it will be deracinated from the tradition, but its not going to look the same. It may be a blessing that there will be more input from women in this transition than there might have been in the last one.

The future of Judaism lies in the changes that have taken place over the last thirty-four years, and in the demands that women are making on the Jewish people through actions such as the female presence in the rabbinate. The conflicts of tradition and gender that are raised in the novels and short stories will continue to be tested and understood by the Jewish community as women continue to play a larger role in shaping Judaism's future.

By providing descriptions of the issues in American fiction about women rabbis, I have provided the implications for the analysis that can take place for women rabbis, Judaism, and fiction. The summaries and background information sets up for the study of why these novels and short stories portray women rabbis the way that they do. One is now able to explore the ideologies that underpin such issues as childbearing and modesty that are presented in fiction.

Judaism has changed over the last several thousand years, but the inherent roles for women are still somewhat antiquated. Women rabbis are an important factor in modern Judaism as they continue to struggle to gain the authority and reverence of their male colleagues, and in doing so are changing what has been called American Judaism.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What do you think women's roles and purposes in the rabbinate are?
2. What do you see as the role of women in Judaism?
3. What do you see as the future of women in the rabbinate?
4. What do you see as the future of women in Judaism?
5. Do you feel that there are unresolved issues within Judaism when it comes to women being in the rabbinate?
6. What do you see as the relationship between the rabbinate and the feminist movement?
7. Do you feel that the rabbinate has changed since 1972 when the first woman rabbi, Rabbi Sally Priesand, was ordained?
8. How do you try to represent Judaism to your congregation?
9. The novels that I read drew on biblical, historical, religious, cultural, and stereotypical notions in order to expound upon practices of Judaism. They then used women rabbis to exemplify the fact that the rabbinate has changed because women have been ordained and therefore Judaism has changed as well. Do you agree or disagree with these notions?
10. How have women changed Judaism (and the rabbinate) during the late twentieth century and into the twenty-first century?
11. Have men, women, and families been affected by the presence of women rabbis?
If so, how?

12. What do you see as the main differences between rabbinical styles of men and women, if there are any?
13. How do new or potential congregants react when they come to your synagogue and see a woman rabbi?
14. Are women in the rabbinate treated fairly within different movements?
15. How does the general public react when you tell someone that you are a rabbi?
16. Do you feel you have to prove yourself to your congregants in a way that would be different from a male rabbi?
17. Do you feel you have to dress a particular way because you are a rabbi and female?
18. As a female rabbinical student was it difficult to find a pulpit position?
19. What are some of your goals within the rabbinate? How have your goals changed since taking a pulpit?
20. How do you maintain spirituality within your own life?
21. Memorable/Powerful experiences you can share with me?
22. Would you comment on the following issues in terms of Judaism and your rabbinic experiences: illness, dying, death, politics of a synagogue, choice to have children, abortion, sex, rape, homosexuality, AIDS, feminist issues, women's rights, the death penalty, living by the commandments of the Torah, *Kabbalah* and sexuality, liturgy, and chaplain duties.

APPENDIX B

CONFLICTS OF JEWISH CHARACTER(S)

Despite the prevalence of knowledge and strength of the women in Biblical history, very little American literature has paid attention to the emergence of female rabbis, and this becomes problematic because the novels and short stories that do represent female rabbis are erroneous. The literature containing of female rabbis present issues in relation to performance capabilities and gender related themes. The literature suggests that women's lives are filled with complications that do not leave time and a proper devotion that is required to be a full time rabbi. There are only six novels to date that feature women rabbis as central characters. They are, in order of publication: Rhonda Shapiro-Reiser's A Place of Light (1983), Alex J. Goldman's The Rabbi Is A Lady (1987), Joseph Telushkin's The Unorthodox Murder of Rabbi Wahl (1987), Erich Segal's Acts of Faith (1992), Roger Herst's Woman of the Cloth (1998), and Jonathan Rosen's Joy Comes in the Morning (2004). In addition to these novels are two short stories: Eileen Pollak's "The Rabbi in the Attic" (1991) and Glenn and Jeanne Gillette and David J. Zucker's "Here and Now" (1996). The women of these novels and short stories all share similar challenges within the rabbinate that are separate and unique from their male rabbi counterparts.

In these novels and short stories, four of the women serve their congregations as head rabbis and four serve as assistant rabbis. All of the women rabbis of the novels and short stories face gender issues within their duties as rabbis. These issues include acceptance by their congregation, their community, and their male peers, managing the dual roles of being a rabbi and a mother at the same time, maintaining their own spiritual needs while leading and guiding the spiritual needs of their congregation. The rabbis of the novels and short stories

all face these gender specific issues, resulting in the issue that gender related issues have never applied to a male rabbi as a single man or single father or any other authority figure within a synagogue. The authors of the novels and short stories are familiar with the duties and hardships of pulpit rabbinical life, but they imply that a woman, simply because of her gender, will not be able to fulfill the duties and demands of a pulpit rabbi. These writers suggest that a woman is questioned on her abilities to find a balance between being a rabbi and a mother, between living her own life with spiritual fulfillment and empowerment and providing these things to others, and maintaining a personal intimate life free of judgment and controversy in many particular instances.

In Rhonda Shapiro-Reiser's A Place of Light (1983) Rabbi Lynda Klein struggles to find balance between her rabbinical duties and pressures to find time for herself and family. Rabbi Lynda Klein transitions from being a student of Talmud in Jerusalem to a rabbinical student in the United States. Before ultimately deciding to enter the rabbinate Lynda discusses the choice with Madeleine Stern. "I think I want to become a rabbi," Lynda said. "Maybe I have to try and see." "If you fail, you'll have nothing," Madeleine said. "Why? Why is it so important, for G-d's sake? Why a rabbi?" "I don't know!" Lynda paused to quiet her voice. "I don't know. No one ever asks a *man* why." (211). After struggling to justify her desires to everyone and trying to work out a relationship with a man who does not think that women should be ordained as rabbis, Lynda leaves this man and Israel and gains ordination from the Reform Movement in the United States to become the assistant rabbi to a reform temple under Rabbi Aaron Stern. While serving as assistant rabbi, we see Rabbi Klein struggling to balance her professional and personal life. She struggles for the approval of her colleague's wife, Madeleine Stern, who struggles herself to find empowerment and

purpose all while acting as a rebbetzin.⁴⁶ Lynda meets a doctor and from the very beginning of their relationship Lynda feels the need to justify what she is doing, “I am in my last year of rabbinical school. I am going to be a rabbi. Furthermore, I do not want to spend the night discussing religion, nor do I want to discuss why I am becoming a rabbi, nor why you do or do not believe in G-d. And I have no intention of going to bed with you” (233). Lynda feels the need to immediately tell those that she meets what she is doing and why because she is a woman.

Rabbi Stern accepts Rabbi Klein as a colleague and assistant at first, but soon finds himself threatened by her acceptance and popularity among the congregation. “She was good at her job. Most of the membership of the last few years had come because of her. They came and participated because of her. Had she been a man, not even Aaron could have stopped her from becoming the head rabbi” (237). Rabbi Klein gains acceptance and popularity easily and through the experiences of her character, Shapiro-Reiser creates power struggles among women, between the female assistant rabbi and the rebbetzin, and a rabbinical power struggle between a male rabbi and a female rabbi. Rabbi Klein struggles not only for power and acceptance from Madeleine, but also for a balance in her own life as she questions if she can be a rabbi and still have a family. Lynda marries the doctor, Elliot, and when she does become pregnant, her husband pressures her about how much time she will have to be a mother and even threatens her with abandonment.

Rabbi Stern faces a faith crisis of his own during his sudden battle with cancer. He fears Lynda might try to take his place during his illness, but with her pregnancy this fear is lessened. Lynda also realizes during Aaron’s crisis, “She had no time. She no longer knew

⁴⁶ A rabbi’s wife

the way. She couldn't help Aaron to pray when she'd forgotten how herself. She couldn't help Aaron find G-d when she'd wandered from the path. Her soul was withering after trying so long to be free" (238). Lynda continues to struggle with her own faith and the decision of whether or not to keep her baby. Lynda fears what would happen to her professionally if she were to choose to become a mother and remain a rabbi. "She was a woman with too much seniority in the rabbinate and no place to go. She couldn't ask Elliot to follow her to some congregation in some tiny town where the nearest hospital was in the next county. If, even there, could she get a job. She was a woman, and she was pregnant. But no one knew. No one need ever know" (239). Lynda struggles to keep her job as Rabbi Stern's health deteriorates and he tries to make a decision about whether or not Lynda will succeed him as the head rabbi. Madeleine feels threatened by Lynda and wants her to go, but Aaron only wants what is best for his congregation, which may not be Lynda Klein. As the board discusses what to do about Lynda they also discuss what would happen if she did get pregnant, although they had never had to consider the family choices of their rabbi or their consequences before.

Shapiro-Reiser raises relevant questions that are still being asked concerning women rabbis today. Shapiro-Reiser does not let her woman rabbi succeed without a struggle. Rabbi Klein eventually establishes herself as the head rabbi of her synagogue but not without first experiencing great loss and pain. "Lynda glanced at the rabbinical texts on her shelves. Once, long ago, she'd studied the holy words, immersed herself in the black characters and thereby had renewed her spirit. But there was no time for that now. Lynda shook off the melancholy that crept into her thoughts. This was her synagogue, the walled world of her creation. Here she controlled her destiny" (265). Lynda struggles with making a choice

between the rabbinate and motherhood as she works day and night and puts her unborn baby at risk. Madeleine, who is the only one who knows about Lynda's pregnancy, tries to persuade Lynda to allow herself to be a mother and forgive herself for not being born a man who could easily choose to be a rabbi. Her busy schedule in the rabbinate consumes her and she ultimately has to allow herself the time to take care of herself in addition to her rabbinical duties. Lynda remains with the synagogue and rejoins with her husband as they await the birth of their child.

Much like Rabbi Klein of A Place of Light, Rabbi Deborah Luria of Erich Segal's Acts of Faith (1992) struggles to find a balance between her personal life, family commitment, and her duties as a rabbi. Rabbi Deborah is the full time head rabbi of a small Reform congregation serving many communities that for years have not had the stability of a permanent rabbi. Rabbi Deborah comes to this reform synagogue after battling her whole life with her own spirituality and love life. Deborah grew up in Brooklyn as the daughter of the great Orthodox Rebbe Luria of the Silczer line, but at a young age she was sent to live in Jerusalem away from the distractions of a neighborhood Catholic boy who would later become the father of her son. Deborah escapes the Orthodox way of life in which she was raised and goes to live on a Kibbutz in northern Israel where she learns of the power and freedom a woman can have among a group of friends and equals. It is on this Kibbutz that Deborah begins to learn as men learn and ultimately make her way back to New York to enter rabbinical school and become a reform rabbi.

Deborah struggles with the demands of being a rabbi for many communities while remaining a good and attentive mother to her young son. The synagogue rejoices at having Deborah as their full time rabbi: "It was not only the public Deborah they appreciated. It was

also her devotion as a pastoral healer. Sometimes, in the tradition of her biblical namesake, she acted as a kind of judge in marital disputes. At others she counseled the distraught and comforted the bereaved” (391). Even though Deborah is widely accepted as a rabbi, she still struggles to find a balance to make herself happy and create a safe and nurturing world for her son. “Almost by definition, a rabbi’s duties are performed at abnormal hours. This was doubly difficult for a young single mother like herself. [...] Deborah was no longer able to provide her son with a Sabbath even remotely like those that had so formed her as a Jew. [...] They were a weekly affirmation of the values of the family” (392). Deborah continues to struggle to find time for herself, her son, and all of her rabbinical duties. Deborah decides to leave her pulpit to the control of her brother, Rabbi Daniel Luria, and bring her son back to the Kibbutz in Israel, the only place he knew as home. In explaining this to her son and justifying it to herself, Deborah acknowledges the hardships and the truth about her job: “Well, basically I’m a teacher. A rabbi doesn’t necessarily have to put on a robe and give sermons. Bible Studies are part of the general curriculum, and I could teach them in the Regional Kibbutz High School” (428). Deborah chooses the teaching profession over serving as a full time rabbi, and it is in this profession she finds time for her own needs as well as for her son’s.

Erich Segal’s novel comments on the hardships of being a single mother as well as a rabbi. The women rabbis of the novels all struggle with these roles and find it difficult to balance the two roles. In Segal’s novel the woman rabbi has fails in pursuing both her own career and her family. The abnormal hours that the rabbinate demands are very difficult for a rabbi and in particular for a single mother. Deborah realizes, “Sunday is the time favored by most couples for weddings. Also, because there can be no burials after Friday morning and

all day Saturday, there would be a disproportionate number of funerals scheduled for Sunday. So much for the ‘sacrosanctity’ of her parental time” (393). Marriage is never an option for Deborah because she remains in love with the Catholic boy of her youth and she is happy with the life she has received. However, the youthful Catholic love is always in the back of her mind. Deborah does reunite with this man, who becomes a very powerful priest in Rome. Through the experiences of Deborah, Segal raises the question of whether she would have been able to remain in the rabbinate, marry a Catholic, and raise their son who was born out of wedlock. Segal raises many important issues of balance in rabbinical life and interfaith relationships, but never comes to any conclusions regarding women in the rabbinate because at the end of the novel Deborah does leave the rabbinate for the sake of her son.

Another woman rabbi who struggles with the balance to be both a mother and the head rabbi of a large congregation is Rabbi Sara Weintraub of Alex J. Goldman’s The Rabbi Is A Lady (1987). Rabbi Sara is the acting full time rabbi of a prominent Conservative congregation in the North East following her recently deceased husband, Rabbi Sam Weintraub. Rabbi Sara is quickly absorbed into the rabbinate and fully committed to her duties. We see Rabbi Sara at committee meetings, teaching a confirmation class, acting as a counselor, visiting the elderly and the sick, and leading services. Alongside her many duties, Rabbi Sara deals with many issues during the year that is presented in the novel. She discusses such issues as abortion, AIDS, homosexuality, sex, and Jews for Jesus to the children of her confirmation class; she battles in open view of her community and congregation the issues of Black-Jewish relations and nursing home abuse; she encounters the issue of cults with her teenage son; and she battles for women’s liberation and ordination

within the Conservative movement (which has never in its history ordained a woman as a Rabbi up until the present). A congregant comments on the busy nature of the rabbinate: “But do you know how hard a rabbi works? He’s, I mean, *she*, she’s out almost every night, keeps going all day. Most of us don’t know many of the things they have to do” (246).

Rabbi Sara comes to realize in the novel that she is battling a lack of balance in her life. “Mother, teacher, rabbi, student? Her thoughts suddenly turned to Hal. Lover? Her shoulders drooped. Perhaps it was a getting to be a bit much” (143). As she battles to prove that she is worthy of being Conservative Rabbi, Rabbi Sara also struggles with finding time to spend with her children. “Simon [Sara’s son] was not doing very well in school. She blamed herself. She must either cease being a rabbi and become a mother or learn how to be both” (234). She also struggles with her own intimate life as she gets closer to a congregant and an old friend, Hal. This relationship poses problems for Sara as she begins to think about dating and what that means to her children, the synagogue, and to the board of the Conservative movement who will decide the fate of her ordination.

Goldman takes many risks in this novel and makes several assumptions about women and their struggles. Rabbi Sara deals with many various issues in regards to her job, and at the same time is seen dealing with intimate issues of being a single woman. Goldman’s novel not only asks if a rabbi can be a woman, but also poses the question to readers of whether a woman can successfully be a rabbi, a mother, and an object of a man’s affections. From the beginning of the novel the synagogue board questions Rabbi Sara:

I’m sure she’s qualified. She’s dynamic. But there are other questions. Like Stamina. The job of a rabbi is a killing one. And Sara, if she’s offered the position and accepts, will give herself. It’s in her nature. But she has two children to raise.

We all know she's done a magnificent job in that sector, but can she be a good rabbi and a good mother at the same time? Isn't it asking too much of a human being? (21)

Rabbi Sara knows that she is a young, smart, and attractive woman that should be desirable to men, but also feels the pressure of the congregation judging her personal decisions. Goldman questions whether or not a woman can sustain a personal love life with a congregant and be an attentive mother and rabbi. Rabbi Sara seems to want to believe that she can, although she struggles with these issues throughout the duration of the novel.

Although Goldman allows Sara to progress in her rabbinic role, "She could shift concentration from a baby-naming ceremony, to a hospital visit, to a funeral, to a wedding, to a *bris*, to an unveiling, to an engagement party and lecture—all in a day" (258), Sara's duties as a mother suffer in this novel. She is seen teaching and aiding other children and families, but her own children are often only seen complaining to Sara that she works all the time and that they never see her. Sara's son becomes involved with a cult, and while he does not get into any serious trouble, Sara appears an inattentive mother who happens to be in a very public role. Sara teaches children to prepare them for their Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, but forgets her own son's upcoming Bar Mitzvah. Sara's daughter, who is in her confirmation class at the synagogue, is very supportive of her mother and her new role: "'You can be a rabbi and a mother,' Carol had said, 'just like Daddy was a rabbi and a father'" (49). However, Sara's daughter also waits for a time when Sara will be home to help and spend time with her family.

Sex and sexuality are also important topics in Goldman's novel. Rabbi Sara is newly widowed, but soon after her husband's death she naturally finds herself in the arms of a new man. Sara is seen looking at her naked body in the mirror of her bathroom at home admiring

her youthful body and shape. “She liked her body. Every part of it. Her full breasts were evenly distributed and her nipples balanced projectingly. She eased one leg over the other, lowered her head, and a furtive, yet seductive glance responded in the mirror. She enjoyed the self-admiration” (54). Sara’s thoughts go on:

In my new role how could I express my physical desires? [...] How conservative would I have to be? Hide this G-d-given beautiful body because of people, congregants, jealous women? Every man’s visual undressing, lustful gestures, roaming eyes? Will this body ever be held again, loved, caressed, kissed, desired? Do I really want to give up femininity for a role? Will it be worthwhile in the long run? Will I be able to make love again? Am I binding myself? [...] Who would really want a woman rabbi as either wife or partner? (54-5)

This instance of nudity and voyeurism on part of the author and reader leads to questions such as, *Can a rabbi be a sex symbol?* Rabbi Sara asks this question of herself and justifies the answers to her daughter, “G-d created you and gave you a beautiful lovely figure. G-d created us all and I decided I would be a rabbi, and a mother without sacrificing the woman I am. [...] My clothes would have to be feminine. I wouldn’t hide my figure, and I would be proud of me” (57). She finds no problem in allowing herself to explore a new sexual relationship not only with a man, but also with a man that is a member of her congregation and influential with the board. Hal aids Sara in any way that he can and enters into her life and the lives of her children with the support and attention a husband might have given her.

As Sara has struggled with balance and personal issues, she suddenly decides that she wants to quit. “A rabbi has no life apart from the job. Not only are you a spiritual leader, which is in itself a full-time job, but you’re also consoler of the ill, advisor to the perplexed,

arbiter, guide, marital counselor, participant in birth celebrations, Bar-Mitzvahs, weddings and funerals. Your phone rings day and night. You see your children on the run...it's a killing job. [...] And in addition, if you're a woman, the first woman rabbi, you have to prove yourself again and again. Who needs it?" (306). Ultimately Rabbi Sara does not quit her job, but instead decides to accept the position of head rabbi and find a way to work out her issues of balance, love, and spirituality.

Another extremely sexually charged novel is Roger Herst's Woman of the Cloth (1998) in which Rabbi Gabby Lewyn of a prominent Washington D.C. temple is faced with many obstacles in regards to her position as a rabbi and as a single attractive woman. Rabbi Gabby is left to run a large synagogue when her male colleague resigns from his pulpit after having numerous affairs with middle-aged pre menopausal women in the synagogue's sanctuary. Gabby laments on her colleague's departure, "'Seth, you *schmuck*,' she thinks to herself, 'Why the hell have you abandoned me for a few vaginas? You didn't even try unzipping *my* jeans'" (13). Gabby does not yet understand her colleague's affairs and why she was left out of his sexual advances. Rabbi Gabby has to fight for her place as the head rabbi of the large Reform synagogue as she attempts to balance her own life. "No American Jewish congregation with more than five hundred families has a woman in the senior post. Feminism hasn't achieved that much, at least not yet. Still, Gabby's ambition compels her to ask, why not?" (6). Rabbi Gabby is often seen either performing a function for the temple or struggling to keep her personal life together.

After ending a long affair with a non-Jew, Rabbi Gabby enters a new relationship with another man, Noah, who has just been charged with rape. Rabbi Gabby is asked to serve as a character witness during his trial, but also finds herself attracted to Noah and

begins a friendship and later a sexual relationship with him. Herst does not separate Gabby's personal life from her professional life, but rather blends the two together into a web of tangles. As the synagogue continues its search for head rabbi, Gabby finds her life under close consideration by the temple. She is examined for all her actions both public and private, judged for being single, without children, and unpublished.

Rabbi Gabby befriends a lawyer who is working on Noah's rape case and spends some of her time away from the synagogue with her. To add to the complexities of Gabby's situation, she and the lawyer are attacked after playing tennis and defend themselves by beating their attackers with their tennis rackets. Because there were no witnesses, Rabbi Gabby is charged with battery. Rabbi Gabby is forced to explain this situation as well as her relationship with Noah to her synagogue and the public. This is difficult for Gabby to do, as she feels that she is always defending her credentials to the synagogue and community. Her gender makes it difficult for the synagogue board to accept her as their head rabbi, and then her personal life and public struggles further this difficulty. "People immediately jump to the conclusion she has a million dates when the reality is just the opposite. Single men don't know what to do with a female rabbi, so they take the course of least resistance and avoid asking her out" (31).

Herst includes scenes similar to that of Goldman's The Rabbi is a Lady by showing his readers that the women rabbis of his novel are attractive single women. Rabbi Gabby is also seen looking at her naked body in the mirror and thinking that she is an attractive woman. Herst even goes so far as to describe Gabby giving herself a breast exam in the shower. This male voyeuristic view is constant throughout the novel as Rabbi Gabby's struggles are described in sexually charged scenes. Rabbi Gabby questions whether or not

she can be seen wearing a bikini to the beach or if because she is a rabbi she must cover her body in an act of modesty. We are told many times that Rabbi Gabby is young and attractive and is clearly interested in having sexual relationships.

These issues of Gabby's gender and sexuality do not escape the consideration of synagogue board. Herst makes clear within the novel that it is difficult, even for a Reform synagogue, to hire a woman as a head Rabbi. Rabbi Gabby even seeks advice of a lawyer preparing for her case of gender discrimination: "What they don't want is a female Senior Rabbi. Especially a single woman without kids. Is that the kind of case you might take?" (127). The synagogue board sees many obstacles and issues of how a woman would balance her life and perform all the duties of a head rabbi. Herst presents Rabbi Gabby as having many obstacles and problems, not dealing with children, but with her own life and choices, and to the point of even having her escape for a weekend to relax and be away from lawyers, men, and her own synagogue. Much of the novel is spent on the issues that arise in Gabby's life apart from the rabbinate, such as Noah's rape case and her personal relationship with him. She deals with issues of feminism and sex in both her own life and concerning her former colleague. Her personal life and choices along with her duties as rabbi are at times too much for Gabby: "The thought of not going in to work this morning has definite appeal. Plead sickness and head for the beach like many people do when they don't want to face the work day" (189). Rabbi Gabby finally tells the synagogue, "'I need some time off,' Gabby tells him after the preliminary small talk about being inaugurated into office on a raging battlefield. 'You can imagine the pressures. Since Seth Greer's resignation, I've been on a treadmill almost twenty-four hours a day without a holiday. Weekends are work days. Work days are work days'" (305). As Gabby struggles to gain balance in her personal life, the

synagogue finally recognizes her hard work and dedication. Rabbi Gabby ultimately does become the head rabbi, but not after a long battle filled with personal turmoil. Gabby ends her relationship with Noah and at the conclusion of the trial is able to begin to piece back together her life.

Rabbi Deborah Green of Jonathan Rosen's Joy Comes in the Morning (2004) is a young assistant rabbi at a large Reform temple in Manhattan who serves her temple as the hospital chaplain and performs weddings and funerals. Rabbi Deborah also leads synagogue services, but her main role is to deal with these life cycle events. Early on in the novel, Rosen comments on Deborah's duties as assistant rabbi and how her position affects her personally as a woman. Because Rabbi Deborah is often seen in public, she carefully considers what to wear to every occasion. As Deborah is about to officiate at a wedding, the narrator comments, "She was wearing a long pale silk dress with large green and auburn roses. It was important to look good but not too good. The bride needed to shine. Some reform rabbis wore their black robe when they performed a wedding. Deborah did wear her robe in synagogue, but at a wedding it seemed pompous, funereal, inappropriate. Still, it made dressing easier" (57). Rabbi Deborah is seen grappling with issues of time management, her own spirituality, and personal intimate relationships. She is constantly busy, constantly going somewhere, speaking to someone, preparing to speak at a wedding, funeral, or Shabbat. Deborah has no time for herself.

Deborah meets Henry Friedman at the hospital, a Holocaust survivor who has just suffered a stroke that led him to attempt to commit suicide. While visiting Mr. Friedman in the hospital, Deborah meets his son, Lev. Lev, a member at Deborah's synagogue, and Deborah begin a romantic relationship together. Lev struggles with having a Rabbi

girlfriend, just as Deborah struggles with being in a romantic relationship with a nonreligious Jew, although Lev does choose to learn to be more religious as the novel progresses.

Deborah deals with Lev's need for spiritual guidance as well as the spiritual needs of her patients in the hospital. While dealing with other peoples' spiritual needs, Deborah begins to question her faith, her spirituality, and G-d. Rabbi Deborah helps sick patients at the hospital, performing funerals, weddings, Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, Bris and Shalom Bat ceremonies, and Shabbat services. Deborah struggles to find balance in all of her daily commitments and her personal life without losing sight of her own true self and spirit. At the beginning of the novel, Deborah is seen in personal and private prayer beneath her giant tallis; however she quickly becomes overwhelmed by her rabbinical duties and her own personal life and stops praying in her own time.

Sexuality also becomes an issue in this novel when we see Deborah on a weekend trip away at the beach. Deborah goes swimming in the ocean, and like the women rabbis of The Rabbi Is A Lady and Woman of the Cloth, Rosen enters into a scene of nudity and sexuality: "Stirred by a sudden impulse she slipped the top of her one-piece off her shoulders. No one could see her—she was up to her neck in water. She wanted to feel the ocean on her breasts" (117). Rosen presents Deborah as a sexually alive and beautiful young female rabbi who is aware of her surroundings and of her own body.

A few months after meeting Lev, Deborah continues to doubt herself, "Too many things were on Deborah's mind and she did not feel she could share any of them. [...]" Outwardly she did her work, observing the social and professional and religious forms, but inwardly she felt that a bottomless darkness had opened up and that she was constantly

tiptoeing around the rim” (218). During Pesach⁴⁷ Deborah becomes overwhelmed with feelings of loss and loneliness: “There was an emptiness at her core that Deborah had not experienced for a long time. She felt it like a physical weight, a tumor inside her, and she wondered fleetingly if perhaps she was sick; perhaps she was dying” (234). Eventually Deborah decides to leave town for a few days to regain her strength and try and find her spiritual path once again. Deborah escapes to her lesbian sister’s home a few hours away, and while there, she is confronted with issues dealing with Kashrut during Pesach and her non-religious family. These issues all come back to her own personal crisis of faith in which Deborah struggles and contemplates where G-d is and what G-d is to her. “Deborah was feeling as though her emotional state really was a physical one, that something was breaking. She was running away from her synagogue and her congregation, she was running away from her own scrubbed apartment during the holiday she cared most about. She was running away from a man she loved” (262). Deborah finds solace, but only after a much-needed break. Her hectic schedule and her duties at hospitals and hospices leave her feeling empty, and after her vacation away from it all, Deborah is rejuvenated.

Rosen creates a love story in which a woman rabbi is questioned on her abilities to perform her duties as rabbi and hospital chaplain and at the same time have a fulfilling spiritual and sexual life of her own. Like Rabbi Sara of Goldman’s novel, Rabbi Deborah is seen questioning herself and whether or not she is fit for the position as rabbi. However, Deborah undergoes an interior struggle for love, acceptance, balance, and spiritual harmony. Deborah does find peace with G-d and happiness with Lev, but not after scenes of self-doubt and rediscovery of her faith.

⁴⁷ Passover, the eight day holiday commemorating the exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt

Rabbi Myra Wahl of Joseph Telushkin's The Unorthodox Murder of Rabbi Wahl (1987) is a strong feminist rabbi who, along with a radical nun and female minister, combats feminist issues on Rabbi Daniel Winter's radio show. Rabbi Wahl is a strong and aggressive feminist rabbi whose position at her synagogue is jeopardized because of her radical views. Rabbi Wahl, the radical nun, and the female minister discuss and argue such issues as abortion, suicide, the death penalty, religion, feminism, and equal rights for races, genders, and religions. As Rabbi Wahl continues to publicly proclaim her ultra liberal feminist views, the all male board at her conservative synagogue becomes enraged and decides not to renew her contract. Rabbi Wahl feels that as a woman rabbi, she is automatically a feminist and it is her right to openly and freely discuss her ideals with an audience. However controversial Rabbi Wahl becomes, she never expects her contract to not be renewed.

Telushkin explores important feminist issues and welcomes the open discussion of whether or not these issues are welcome into the rabbinate. Rabbi Wahl, although an open feminist, does hide her past from the public. The issues that Rabbi Wahl's past brings up are similar to those brought up in Segal's Acts of Faith, such as gender issues and interfaith relations. Telushkin explains that while Rabbi Wahl was a rabbinical student, she began a relationship with another woman who was also not Jewish. "She knew her congregation would not understand why their female rabbi had moved out West with her non-Jewish female roommate. [...] She wanted to love and be loved by a man. She wanted children. And she wanted to be a rabbi. [...] There was still no man in her life. And now they wanted to fire her and stop her from being a rabbi" (24-5). She knows that if this information were to be made public she would lose her position and respect in the rabbinate and congregation. Eventually a few people know this information, but only after Myra Wahl is murdered as she

jogs home after participating in Rabbi Daniel Winter's radio show. Myra Wahl is murdered for her open liberal feminist views and for her verbal attacks after she is told her contract will not be renewed with the synagogue. Rabbi Wahl initially finds her dismissal from the synagogue difficult information to deal with and so blackmails one of the board members, but instead of regaining her position she is murdered. However, after Rabbi Wahl's death, a congregant speaks in positive retrospect of Myra Wahl, "Myra Wahl was a modern Deborah, leading the Jewish people against our enemies, indeed against all enemies of justice." He goes on to describe "this noble soul who challenged the sexism of the Judaism she loved, and by becoming a rabbi proved that Judaism could accommodate itself to a world in which women are equal" (76). Telushkin centers his story on the murder case of Rabbi Wahl who is known as a rabbi and a feminist that did not fit in with her synagogue and particularly the all male board. Myra Wahl struggles with authority and how to both receive and maintain authority amongst those that believe she does not belong.

Glenn and Jeanne Gillette and David J. Zucker's short story "Here and Now" is a story about the use of a time machine in order to recover a Holocaust Torah and reunite it with its ark. Rabbi Sarah Pollock is called upon in order to inspect the ark and help to attain the Torah from before the moment in which it was burned. As Sarah introduces herself to Hersh, the donator of the ark, it is written that, "Sarah noticed the little things—eyes that skittered away and jumped back to stare a little, a head twitch that was a denial cut short—reactions she expected whenever she identified herself as a rabbi to older people" (10). Although this is all that is mentioned about the fact that the Rabbi is a woman, the authors are easily able to point to the fact that society is not yet comfortable with or expecting to encounter a woman Rabbi.

In Eileen Pollack's short story "The Rabbi in the Attic" (1991), Rabbi Marion Bloomgarten is brought to an Orthodox synagogue to serve as their Rabbi after no other Orthodox school or Conservative school will allow one of their students to be placed with the synagogue. Rabbi Marion Bloomgarten is faced with gaining acceptance from those who believe that because she is a woman she cannot be a rabbi. Coming from the tolerance and modernity of the reform movement, Rabbi Marion must meld old world ideals with her new ideas and reforming enthusiasm. Rabbi Marion thought to herself after leading services, "The whole room was chuckling. What was the joke? A rabbi—why not? Hadn't her voice been inspired tonight? Yes, she thought, yes, but the voice of a woman, no matter how inspired, was good for one thing: lulling babies to sleep. And the woman herself—a woman rabbi, at least—was good for a laugh" (103).

Rabbi Marion struggles to find her place and acceptance within the Jewish community, but she also must find acceptance within a movement that does not accept her as a rabbi. She encounters this problem of acceptance by the Orthodox in her own home as the rabbi that once served the Orthodox synagogue refuses to leave his home and accept that a woman has come to replace him. Rabbi Marion must share her home with the old opinionated rabbi who is confronting his own past traditions in the presence of the reformed Marion Bloomgarten. Pollack is able to bring a strong woman rabbi into an Orthodox synagogue and allow her to be successful. Although Rabbi Marion is confronted with a tradition that does not accept her she does her best to change their minds and even the mind of her new and unwelcome housemate. "Rabbi Bloomgarten soon was accepted by our congregation as thoroughly as had been her predecessors, which meant she was ignored almost completely. To help pass the hours when no one called on her, the rabbi took singing

lessons [...] and sent for the books that she once had studied at seminary” (118). Marion had found a place within a synagogue although they did not need her in the same way as traditional synagogues and so she encountered feelings of loneliness and questions of observance in her place at an Orthodox synagogue.

All of the women rabbis presented in the novels and short stories battle with issues of acceptance, empowerment, sexuality, and gender. The women that are head rabbis of synagogues struggle with time issues as the congregation and board members question their abilities to act as a full time rabbi and be wives and mothers all at the same time. The women of the novels are seen as struggling within their roles as their personal and professional lives become more complicated. Issues of sexuality play a big role in these novels as the authors struggle to bring attractive and sexual women together with the rabbinate. According to these novels, sexuality and the rabbinate should be separate and distinct from one another, and women bring these sexual issues into the rabbinate. The way that women rabbis dress, speak, and act on a daily basis all affect their pulpit careers as they make choices for lovers and husbands both with congregants and non Jews. According to these authors, a woman automatically brings a different agenda and different issues to a pulpit and the rabbinate, and furthermore, women rabbis’ careers deal with matters of gender, sexuality, acceptance, and performance ability. Women rabbis as main characters appear only a few times within American literature and their appearances are immediately clouded by issues of their gender and create a different and new rabbinate for a new generation and a new congregation.