

Community makes a serious scholarly contribution to the history of American- and Canadian-Jewish life and leaves the reader eager for more information and research into the underservedly neglected world of North-American Orthodoxy.

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Schwartz, Shuly Rubin. *The Rabbi's Wife: The Rebbetzin in American Jewish Life*. New York and London: New York University Press, 2006. xiii, 312 pp.

In the opening pages of her book on the American Jewish rebbetzin, Shuly Rubin Schwartz notes that “the contributions of rabbis’ wives to the American rabbinate [have] largely been ignored.” (p.1) With these words, she defines the void in American Jewish history that she plans to fill. She presents “discernible patterns” and highlights individual rebbetzins whose activities “illustrate the impact of their evolving role.” (p.23) In highlighting the role of the rebbetzin, Schwartz provides an excellent view of the life of (North) American Jewish women, in general.

The introduction offers an overview of the “wife of” role in general terms within American society, a brief historical perspective of the rebbetzin in both history and fiction, and a glimpse into the role of Protestant ministers’ wives. Rubin Schwartz’s discussion of sources is especially fascinating. While she rightly notes that “rebbetzins have rarely left diaries or memoirs,” (p.2) she was able to access speeches, newspaper clippings, and letters; she could often verify oral evidence and recollections by speaking with more than one interviewee and by using extant records. (p.7) The book celebrates the ways these women forged creative and productive lives in response to their milieux. Describing the activities of rabbis’ wives through the stories of particular women is one of the strengths of Rubin Schwartz’s approach.

The American rebbetzins Rubin Schwartz has chosen as examples were active women who did not shy away from publicity.

This contrasts with the level of visibility of Canadian rebbetzins, who were often not fully named even in their obituary notices. Very few Canadian rebbetzins wrote speeches or articles.

Chapters 1 and 2 overlap to some degree; both address the period from 1890 to 1920 with the second chapter extending to 1930. These decades cover the years of mass immigration from eastern Europe, when women's groups—including Jewish women's groups—were organized to assist in the inculcation of “American” ideals in the newcomers. This is also the period in which each of the denominations carved out its place as an interpreter of Judaism in America and established a framework for women's participation through the synagogue “sisterhood.” Chapter 3 covers the interwar period and the immediate post-World-War II years. Chapter 4 also deals with the post-war period with emphasis on the shift in the overall status of Judaism, as well as the move to the suburbs. Chapter 5 explores the fall-out from the women's liberation movement of the 1960s on the “wife of” role, while Chapter 6 provides a glimpse of the current thinking of American rabbis' wives along with some speculation concerning the future.

The first chapter, “The Pioneers,” details the public lives of the three women responsible for first promoting the role of women within their respective denominations and creating the groups' national women's organizations. (p.28) These women had all been gifted organizers, activists, and educators prior to their marriage to rabbis. In marrying their equals, they acquired a platform from which they could pursue their interests. Henrietta Szold also merits a section in this chapter despite the fact that she was “never anyone's wife, let alone a rabbi's.” Rubin Schwartz includes her as both an “exemplar of female leadership” (p.46) and one whose unmarried state gave pause to ambitious Jewish women of her day. (p.50) Unfortunately, her placement in the book seems to reinforce indirectly the notion that strong female leadership and marriage cannot be combined.

In the second chapter, neatly titled, “The Power Behind the Throne,” Rubin Schwartz notes that “the role of the rabbi's

wife emerged after 1910 at the same time that the American rabbinate came into its own. (p.52) She observes that American rabbis' wives were conscious of their specialized role. They became public advocates not only of their own congregational communities, but also of the synagogue as a communal institution. (p.63)

Chapter 3, "Mr. and Mrs. God," and Chapter 4, "Two for the Price of One," discuss the lives of women who took on public leadership positions within their Jewish community during some of the most difficult years in American and Jewish history. Yet there seems to have been only a tenuous connection between their preoccupations and what was taking place in the larger world around them. For example, Rubin Schwartz notes that the wives of Christian clergy were "pressed into service during the Depression" and saw "themselves as staff member more than wife." For them, "childbearing became an interruption of their true calling." (p.91) Did the same hold true in the Jewish community or some sectors of it? Rubin Schwartz does not say. Yet Jewish congregants, like their Christian counterparts, were also financially and socially challenged in these years.

Chapter 4, in particular, reinforces the premise of Rubin Schwartz's first published article, "We Married What We Wanted to Be" (*American Jewish History* 83 [June 1995]: 221-46). It emphasizes the "visibility of the rebbetzin" in the postwar period, noting that between 1944 and 1968 "rabbis' wives opted to share with laypeople, the exceptional nature of their position." (p.131) By the 1960s, the attractiveness of having "the opportunity to touch people's lives in such a unique way" was losing ground. (p.173)

In the concluding two chapters, Rubin Schwartz deftly outlines the issues facing the rebbetzin in the last 40 years, especially the question of the *raison d'être* of the rebbetzin role once women themselves could be ordained. (p.170) She notes that the debate about what to name the rabbi's wife became a "hot issue" in the 1970s and continues to be so today. Increased education on the part of congregants, greater professional opportunities for

women, and economic stability have converged, so that congregants no longer defer to rabbis because of their intellectual attainments or position. And that affects the derivative rebbetzin's role. One major change Rubin Schwartz highlights by citing articles from the 1950s which "reflected the sense of camaraderie...among American rebbetzins" (p.173) and others from the 1980s which show the fault lines between Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform to have irreparably widened. Congregational expectations of rebbetzins changed drastically in these decades, depending on whether the community was Orthodox, Conservative, or Reform. Rubin Schwartz notes that interviews and other research indicate that only the Orthodox continue to have expectations of their rebbetzins.

This book brings the rebbetzin role to the center of thinking about American religious leadership, though she suggests that the importance of the role peaked in the mid-twentieth century, and that today, at least within Conservative and Reform congregations, its influence has eroded. The author has provided scholars of Jewish women's religious history with a solid starting point from which to explore further this role among North American Jews. Her research also invites thought about the role of the rebbetzin outside the American milieu, in communities where rabbis' wives continue to labour alongside their husbands nurturing congregants and their families

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A recurrent theme in Jewish history has been the question of maintaining Jewish cultural identity while Jews integrate into the societies in which they live. Today, this theme is at the forefront of Jewish interest as a result of the successful integration of young Jewish adults into North American societies. Their high