THE RABBI-CANTOR TEAM:

Historical Dynamics and Current Models in the Evolving Reform Jewish Landscape

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Introduction

In a 1991 article from *The National Jewish Post & Opinion*, Rabbi Alvin Roth satirized the cantorate in general and his own cantor's fragile ego in particular, complaining that "someone was always hurting his feelings." The uncomfortable issue at hand had to do with paying the cantor a gratuity for his work with the B'nei Mitzvah students. It used to be common for cantors to be paid by the families for B'nei Mitzvah tutoring and preparations, rather than by the synagogue as part of the cantor's salary. Thus, when this particular family started shouting at the cantor, "Not one dime, you leech!" and "Not one cent, you bloodsucker," in response to his asking for a meager $100 tip, he went to the rabbi for help. The rabbi did not understand the cantor's behavior, explaining that "The giving of gratuities is optional," although the cantor had already explained, "I know it's not much, but I depend on it." The rabbi eventually offered to see if the cantor's salary could be raised by $1000, but the cantor objected, saying that "a thousand would never cover it," followed by "Why shouldn't I be paid for my time?" The cantor was referring to the hours spent attending B'nei Mitzvah parties as the clergy representative, while the rabbi never attended such events because he felt that family parties in the sacred space of the Temple were always in "bad taste and ignorance." When the Bar Mitzvah's father later called the rabbi, he said he missed the rabbi and his wife's presence, but was especially "upset that the cantor hadn't come to the children's party" because "they had expected him to sing and lead the dancing." His wife even wrote a letter to the Board of Trustees decrying the cantor's behavior. Nevertheless, the father proudly announced that he was going to make a magnanimous $200 donation after all,

not as a tip to the cantor, but for a Building Fund. The rabbi congratulated him for his generosity, both seeming to completely miss the point of the cantor's complaints.[1]

In a scathing letter of response to the editor, Cantor Norman Summers complains of the depiction of the cantor in an "unfair light," falling into the "stereotype [of] a shnorrer and an idiot." He explains that he learned from his own father "never to humiliate nor speak evil of my fellow humans, nor to make fun at someone else's expense," which is exactly what Rabbi Roth did in his article. Summers then points out that, as a cantor, "I have never heard of any colleague of mine ever humiliating a fellow Jew by asking for money," and that he would never solicit a Bar Mitzvah family for money. Whether the satirical intent came across as light-heartedly comical or insensitive and demeaning, this published dialogue between Rabbi Alvin Roth and Cantor Norman Summers is one example of the tensions and power discrepancies between rabbis and cantors that have led to personal and communal conflicts throughout Jewish history.

I start with this article not in an effort to reignite old conflicts, but to introduce some of the challenges and tensions that have historically been part of rabbi-cantor relationships. As a cantorial student on the New York campus of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR), training to enter the field of synagogue life, I am invested in the ongoing history and development of Reform Jewish clergy. Over the past four and a half years, I have studied liturgy and cantorial music, as well as Jewish history, rabbinic text, and pastoral care alongside rabbinical students. I have led both on-campus and pulpit services with rabbinic partners, and I have offered cantorial "practica,"

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[1] Roth, "The Cantor and the Rabbi," 1991.

musical performances ranging from traditional chazzanut to classical Reform repertoire to contemporary Jewish compositions. My interest in clergy roles piqued as I watched fellow cantorial students deliver practica and recitals on Shabbat and High Holy Day services without any rabbinic support, teaching Jewish text and giving iyyunim as well as leading the musical portions of the services.

The more I learned about cantorial history, the more I uncovered discrepancies between the historical role of cantors as precentors and the contemporary role of cantors as the dynamic, multi-dimensional clergy that I was being trained to become. Moreover, I knew that in synagogue life, cantors almost always work in partnership with rabbis in clergy teams, while many rabbis serve on their own or in clergy teams without any cantors. Yet the cantors around me were perfectly capable of serving as sole spiritual leaders. In fact, some cantors go on to serve congregations in this capacity. So, what was the real difference between these two professions? As I went through my cantorial education, I noticed that despite our overlapping skills and abilities, there were certain differences between rabbis and cantors, and even clearer power disparities between the two roles. I decided to dive deeper into this dynamic for my senior project in order to better understand myself and the historical evolution of Reform clergy that had led to the role I would soon inhabit.

The aim of this thesis is to gain a better understanding of clergy roles in the Reform synagogue today, exploring the historical development of rabbis and cantors, as well as the underlying interpersonal dynamics that inform rabbi-cantor relationships. After a brief review of the scholarly literature available on the topic of rabbis and cantors,

I investigate the historical roots of these two clergy roles and the cultural shifts that led to the current state of Reform synagogue life. In the second section, today's clergy shed light about their firsthand experiences of rabbi-cantor dynamics. I describe some of the highlights from my interviews with clergy, and analyze the underlying power dynamics and various leadership models at play. Using a Family Systems framework, I argue that successful clergy partnerships are founded on self-differentiated clergy teams, in which each person has their own needs met and feels respected and heard in the group dynamic. Finally, the third section focuses on the future of clergy roles, summarizing the core learnings that came out of this project, and offering some recommendations for clergy teams going forward. Through this investigation, I intend to contextualize contemporary Reform clergy roles and relationships, as well as to offer pathways toward a more equitable future in which rabbis and cantors are ideally positioned to support and elevate future Jewish life.

A Review of the Literature on Rabbinic and Cantorial History

Scholarly research on rabbinic and cantorial history falls into three main methodological approaches, which for the purposes of this study will be referred to as the scientific-historical method, the critical method, and insider voices. In each category, the researchers have a particular approach to dealing with the specific topic of rabbi-cantor partnerships within larger works on cantorial history or synagogue relations. Part of the division between the three categories, especially the critical versus scientific-historical methods, hinges on the developing historical trends in Jewish music research itself. In the early 20th century, the approach to this topic trended towards finding an "authentic" timeline, though this approach often left out certain voices in the history. More recently however, research in the field of ethnomusicology has been leaning towards a more holistic, critical approach. This perspective is based on questioning the origins of the historical discourse as well as critiquing any assumptions within that discussion. The third category, insider voices, includes some of the rabbinic and cantorial writings about this topic from experience in the field. These reflections and recommendations are influenced by the authors' own biases and personal values, but give some insight as to what clergy have been saying about rabbi-cantor teams in recent years.

The scientific-historical method

Spanning various Jewish movements and across the twentieth century, the sources in the scientific-historical method all attempt to create a clear timeline of cantorial history starting in ancient times and continuing to today. Despite using legitimate historical

sources, they each create an idealized narrative based on their own perspective. For Abraham Zvi Idelsohn, this is the legitimization of the new field of Jewish music that he helped to create. For Gersion Appel and Leo Landman, this is a specifically Orthodox perspective that would legitimize cantorial models within their communities. Although every history has its own particular perspective, these scholars seemed less explicit about, or aware of, their biases, claiming their own work as the "authentic" timeline.

Known as the father of Jewish musicology, Abraham Zvi Idelsohn (1882–1938) was hugely important in the development of Jewish music as a field of study. However, he was also a product of his time, and used the term "historical proof" very loosely. His work was part of the trend towards claiming that the cantorate was rooted in ancient traditions, or perhaps Idelsohn even started this trend in its earliest rendition. His major contribution to the field was legitimizing the study of Jewish music, of which the cantorate is an important part, and using interviews with various ethnic groups to try to understand what happened over the course of Jewish music history. Idelsohn's groundbreaking work was also undoubtably influenced by the increased anti-Semitism of his era, and the association of ethnomusicology with "primitive" people. He wanted to separate Jewish music from this demeaning category, creating a new field of Jewish music study in the process. As Judah Cohen later explained, "Jewish music study thus remained, after Idelsohn, a matter of origins, ancient survivals, self-preservation, and authenticity," and that these were "politicized lines of argument that were particularly appropriate at a time when 'Jewish' achievement faced an increasing threat at the hands

of Nazi pseudoscience."[2] While Idelsohn was a significant influence for later ethnomusicologists like Cohen and Slobin, he was a product of his time, more interested in discovering a defined historical timeline than creating an impartial, contextualized meta-analysis of the history.

Appel's idealized narrative view of cantorial history described in "The Sheliah Tzibbur in Halakhah and Jewish Tradition" (1979-1980), establishes a timeline back to the Kohanim, through Talmudic times, directly to his day. In his comparison of rabbis and cantors, he proves the cantors' importance by citing the Jewish legal code, the Shulchan Arukh, which rules that a community, assuming it has somewhere to turn for halakhic questions, should prioritize hiring a *shaliach tzibbur* (prayer leader) over a rabbi.[3] Although he was himself an Orthodox rabbi who taught at Yeshiva University, Appel was also the son of a prominent cantor, which may have influenced his perspective in this book. His work contributes an understanding of how traditional Jewish sources refer to cantors in relation to rabbis, and is an example of an attempt to authenticate the cantorate by claiming ancient Jewish sources.

Landman's work, *The Cantor: An Historic Perspective* (1972), adds to the understanding of cantorial-rabbinic relations in the Middle Ages, filling in some of the gaps that other historians have skipped or glossed over. His historical analysis shows that they had many of the same issues that clergy partners have today, with even many of the

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[2] Cohen, "Whither Jewish Music? Jewish Studies, Music Scholarship, and the Tilt Between Seminary and University," 36.

[3] Appel, "The Sheliah Tzibbur in Halakhah and Jewish Tradition." See *Shulchan Arukh*, Orach Chayim, 53:24.

same overlapping responsibilities we see in contemporary rabbinic and cantorial positions.[4] He explains the historical transition from *shaliach tzibbur* to *hazzan* more clearly than Appel, but has a clear Orthodox perspective that seems to bias his contemporary historical analysis of cantorial trends. This bias places him in this scientific-historical category, in which a search for the authentic historical timeline overlooks or undermines trends in non-Orthodox denominations. Overall, these sources offer some important insights and theories about the development of the cantorial role and its relation to the rabbinic role, but should be read with a critical lens in order to uncover these historians' biases.

The critical method

The critical method here refers to an approach to Jewish history that contextualizes historical sources, looking at trends in their sociological and cultural circumstances, not just within the Jewish community but in the broader society. These scholars are explicit about their own biases, placing themselves in the context of their own historical trends. Three of the scholars in particular who have added to the scholarship on rabbinic and cantorial history are Ismar Schorsch, Judah Cohen, and Mark Slobin. Ismar Schorsch is a respected scholar and educator who has published a number of books and articles on Jewish history in general and Conservative Judaism in particular, serving as the Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary for twenty years. Judah Cohen and Mark Slobin are two of the leading voices in the ethnomusicological study of

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[4] Landman, *The Cantor: An Historic Perspective.*

Jewish music, and cantors in particular. Their scholarship covers topics including the professionalization of clergy positions, the development of Jewish music as a field of study, the history of the HUC cantorial program, as well as the history of the American cantorate. Each of their works touches on the topic of rabbinic and cantorial authority and history, and together give a picture of some of the historical and cultural issues that influence the rabbi-cantor partnership.

Slobin's *Chosen Voices: The Story of the American Cantorate* (1989) is a seminal work on the history of the American cantorate, a key resource in the scholarship on cantorial history. In it, Slobin relies on "current from-the-bottom-up historical and anthropological approaches, which build an analysis from a counterpoint of overlapping, sometimes dissonant voices," rather than relying on "a formal series of documents and events."[5] Unlike the bulk of Cohen's scholarship, Slobin puts together a cantorial history based on interviews with cantors and those in cantor-adjacent roles across America. His historical analysis found that early American cantors were often the sole clergy for Jewish communities when resources were fewer, taking on the leadership roles that we now often associate with rabbis.[6] Using statistical evidence, Slobin's chapter on rabbi-cantor relations, "Finding a Role," states that in most synagogues around the country, rabbis are paid more than cantors, which can lead to conflict "in a society that equates salary with prestige."[7] This important book incorporates both personal accounts and culturally-

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[5] Slobin, *Chosen Voices: The Story of the American Cantorate,* xi.

[6] Slobin, 141.

[7] Slobin, 148.

specific trends that add to an understanding of historical and current clergy partnerships in the United States.

In order to better understand current rabbi-cantor dynamics using the critical historical method, it is important to place current trends within their historical context and discover how the roles came to be. *From Text to Context: The Turn to History in Modern Judaism*[8] describes the historical transformation of the rabbinic role in Europe after emancipation, which was the starting point for the modern clergy roles we see today. The fundamental shift that emancipation created in European society had significant repercussions for the organization and leadership of the Jewish community. Rabbis in the pre-modern era were primarily responsible for executing Jewish civil law. They had political jurisdiction over their *kehillot*, their communities. After emancipation, however, rabbinic authority over civil law was given to the state government. The rabbinic job description broadened to include weekly sermons in German, religious education, and pastoral care. Influenced by the German universities, rabbis for the first time were expected to have secular educations, with a doctorate from a German university considered a prized accomplishment. Although knowledge of talmudic texts and personal Jewish piety were still expected, rabbis were also required to have a considerable fluency with secular German studies and culture. Scorch contextualizes these trends within the dominant Protestant culture, in which a secular university education was becoming a valued clergy qualification. To this day, a secular education is still widely accepted as a prerequisite to both rabbinic and cantorial studies, and rabbis are still expected to fulfill

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[8] Schorsch, *From Text to Context: The Turn to History in Modern Judaism*, 1994.

the responsibilities of weekly sermons, religious communal education, and pastoral care. This historical framework helps contextualize current understandings of clergy roles within the synagogue and broader Jewish community.[9]

The start of the modern period in Europe had critical repercussions for the cantorial field as well as the study of Jewish music itself, as Cohen attests to in much of his scholarship. Following the allowance of Jews into mainstream European society in the late nineteenth century, Cohen explains, the professionalization of both the rabbi and cantor roles impacted cantorial-rabbinic relations. “Reflecting back on the (perhaps arbitrary) affirmation of the cantor as a representative of Jewish music suggests musicology’s power to create its own hegemonic narrative, providing a practical way for marginalized groups such as the Jews to forge parallels to the period’s musical origin stories while keeping up with liberalizing movements that they depended on for social enfranchisement.”[10] By placing cantorial development within this historical context, Cohen brings into critical view earlier accounts of Jewish music history that aim to create a direct line back to ancient times, and thus give credence to the newly formed, purely musical, full-time cantorial profession. For instance, Cohen’s examination of two key figures in the field of Jewish music, Abraham Zvi Idelsohn and Eric Werner, balances a respect for their contributions with a criticism of their approach to the history, which focused more on a search for an “authentic” sound or style rather than Cohen and

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[9] Schorsch, *From Text to Context.*

[10] Cohen, “Professionalizing the Cantorate—and Masculinizing It? The Female Prayer Leader and Her Erasure from Jewish Musical Tradition,” 474.

Slobin's broader, more contextualized method influenced by ethnomusicology.[11] While his other works focus on the study of Jewish music in general or on HUC in particular, his groundbreaking article, "Professionalizing the Cantorate—and Masculinizing It? The Female Prayer Leader and Her Erasure from Jewish Musical Tradition" (2019) takes a broader view of the historical development of today's professional clergy roles, more closely aligned with Slobin's approach. Yet unlike *Chosen Voices,* Cohen's research is mostly based on scholarly articles and written historical accounts rather than interviews and statistical analysis.

The Making of a Reform Jewish Cantor (2009) continues the conversation of Cohen's other articles and Slobin's *Chosen Voices* by bringing the historical timeline of cantorial development up to the early 2000s. Cohen here focuses on the particular way that HUC-JIR prepares cantors for the field, commenting on the training and identity formation of cantors since their professionalization. While he briefly mentions the relationships between rabbis and cantors through their HUC training, Cohen portrays cantors as completely music focused, with almost no mention of other topics of study included in the updated cantorial curriculum, which bring their role more closely in line with that of rabbis. This could potentially be a function of how recent these changes were to the cantorial curriculum, or because of Cohen's primary focus on music in this study.[12]

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[11] Cohen, "Whither Jewish Music?"

[12] Cohen, *The Making of a Reform Jewish Cantor.*

Insider voices

The category of “insider voices” are sources written by rabbis or cantors in the field, with the purpose of offering their own perspectives of what constitutes effective synagogue leadership. Some sources come from individual rabbis, while others are official documents published by national Reform organizations: The Union for Reform Judaism (URJ), and its clergy branches, the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), and the Central Conference of Cantors (ACC). While the CCAR resolution and URJ guidelines both outline successful rabbi-cantor partnerships in particular, *Sacred Strategies: Transforming Synagogues from Functional to Visionary* (2010) offers important insights to visionary synagogue leadership from a team of rabbis including the renowned scholar, Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman. Although each of these documents has a particular lens from which they approach the topic of clergy leadership, they all use first-hand experiences from congregational clergy, offering a glimpse into the contemporary world of rabbi-cantor teams.

A scholar, rabbi, and long-time teacher at HUC-JIR, Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman is one of the world’s prominent experts on Jewish liturgy, and a dedicated leader in rethinking and renewing synagogue life. Along with the other authors of *Sacred Strategies*, Hoffman provides a guideline for how synagogues can transform from boring relics of Jewish tradition to exciting centers of learning and prayer, based on in-depth studies of a few “successful” or visionary synagogues around the country. Exploring the path that each selected congregation took to reach this pinnacle of higher functioning, the authors are critical of both rabbis and cantors, especially those that were resistant to

change in worship and synagogue functioning. “The desire for greater participation in worship has meant that conflicts have emerged between generations with differing attitudes and cultural backgrounds. This conflict has been played out in recent years through controversy over music and the role of the cantor.”[13] *Sacred Strategies* aims to transform synagogues on every level, minimizing its focus on any specific clergy role in favor of a more holistic approach to leadership. Hoffman has a definite bias towards creativity, newness, and transformation over traditional roles and models, yet offers an intriguing proposal for synagogue leadership that could be applied to clergy teams.

There are two CCAR resolutions on the topic of clergy roles in the congregation that seem to have been the product of decades of communications between the CCAR and the ACC. The 1989 “Guidelines for Cantorial-Congregational Relationships” does speak specifically to the role of cantors in relation to rabbis, but is much more prescriptive, offering guidelines for how URJ congregations should function in relation to cantors. Letters dating back to 1981 between ACC and CCAR executives show an intense and at-times contentious debate about the role and authority of cantors in relation to rabbis. The letters refer to incidents of abuse of power, harassment, and mistreatment of cantors, and in 1982 led to the creation of a Rabbinical Cantorial Relations Commission led by members of the United American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC)[14], ACC, and CCAR. These guidelines were eventually adopted and recommended by the URJ Board of Trustees and the ACC together. The first document of its kind published by the URJ,

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[13] Aron, Isa, et al. *Sacred Strategies: Transforming Synagogues From Functional to Visionary*, 34.

[14] The precursor to the URJ.

and still in circulation today, the guidelines have a somewhat dogmatic tone that belies the contentious history that led to their creation. Moreover, these guidelines have helped to create a baseline for rabbinic-cantorial partnerships from the perspective of the URJ in conjunction with the ACC, two crucial governing bodies for Reform clergy.

The 2005 CCAR resolution, “Rabbis and Cantors: A Sacred Partnership,” outlines what qualifies as an ideal clergy team, and gives personal accounts from a few current rabbis and cantors that have a self-proclaimed “successful” partnership. Unlike every other source in this literature review, this document is the only one I could find that wholly focuses on the question of what constitutes a successful rabbi-cantor team. The bulk of the document features voices from select clergy teams, while the overview summarizes the themes that arose from speaking with various rabbis and cantors. Although limited in its scope and tied to its specific time in history, this is still used today as an important source in exploring how clergy teams in the field understand their roles.

Reflections on the literature

Each of these three groupings offer a different lens into the topic of rabbi-cantor partnerships, whether historical, ethnomusicological, or personal. Some connect cantors to a long lineage of Jewish musical leaders going back thousands of years, while others contextualize the conception of clergy within more recent trends towards professionalization and institutionalization of religious and musical roles. More recently, the institutions that rabbis and cantors created have started to publish guidelines for how clergy should work together to lead synagogue life into the future. While the sources on

this topic are not exhaustive, it does appear to be an important topic for study, especially in the past few decades. Trends towards the critical approaches of Schorsch, Cohen, and Slobin help to give a more contextualized, non-linear history of the development of rabbis and cantors, examining the professionalization of each role that began with European emancipation and the start of the modern era. These scholars also show that while rabbis have long been the sole voice of Jewish authority, cantors have only more recently risen to this role, even if only in a limited capacity. Yet this does not undermine the importance of understanding the cantorial role. In Slobin's words, "nearly all the basic sociological works on American Jewish life…ignore the cantorate's contribution."[15] To what extent has the cantor's role in the rabbi-cantor partnership changed in recent history? How do clergy view their roles today, even compared to just ten or twenty years ago? As synagogue life and leadership continues to evolve, more research needs to be done to account for these developments and try to understand what it means to create a "successful" clergy team today.

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[15] Slobin, xii.

Historical Trends in the Development of Rabbis and Cantors

While little scholarship exists on the development of rabbi-cantor teams, plenty of scholars have explored the historical roots of the modern rabbinic and cantorial roles that inform today's clergy dynamic. The following section will use available literature to construct a brief history of the rabbinate and cantorate with a lens toward the development of contemporary progressive congregations.

Pre-modern roots of the cantorate and rabbinate

Historians disagree about the exact origins of modern cantors, some following in the footsteps of the cantorial narrative and others taking a different approach. In an effort to give themselves greater authority, some cantors endeavored to connect their historical narrative to biblical roots. Judah Cohen explains that "a quest for a unified narrative—one that somehow threads together a varied and far-flung series of populations and cultural practices across space and time…requires a great deal of nuance and imagination."[16] Slobin acknowledges the ambiguity in cantorial origins: "It is perhaps typical of the long-term refashioning of post-Temple Judaism that there is no one date for the emergence of the hazzan, rather a process by which a recognized prayer leader slowly comes into focus."[17] Nothing is more telling of this uncertainty than the conflicting accounts rooting today's cantors both in the biblical *Kohanim* (priests) and in opposition to them. Writing in the early twentieth century while employed at HUC, Idelsohn

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[16] Cohen, *The Making of a Reform Cantor*, 25.

[17] Slobin, 23.

describes the origins of the cantor as the *mitpallel*, intercessor to the people, specifically *not* a priest.[18] Meanwhile, fifty years later and coming from within the Orthodox movement, Appel established his own narrative from the *Kohanim*, through Talmudic times, to today, saying, "It is reasonable to assume that the role of hazzan and *sheliach tzibbur* had its origins with the Kohanim who performed the *avodah*, the divine service in the Temple, and the Levi'im who accompanied it with their *shirah*."[19] This conflicting narrative continues into the Talmudic period, when Appel describes rabbis as the first *sh'lichei tzibbur*, prayer leaders,[20] contrasting with Idelsohn's assertions that this role was the later iteration of the proto-cantorial role of *mitpallel*.[21] Taking Slobin's recommendation, it would seem that rather than a direct historical line to the cantors of today, the role of the cantor has "slowly come into focus" over centuries of evolving Temple and synagogue practices.

There does, however, seem to be some consensus on the medieval role of the *hazzan*, or cantor, which saw the advent of the "professional *shaliah zibbur*."[22] By the 6th century, prayers had become too fixed and complex for the average lay person to remember, and Jewish communities were not familiar enough with Hebrew to lead services. Idelsohn blames this need for a cantor on communal ignorance, both a byproduct of oppression against the Jewish population and the incorporation of highly

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[18] Idelsohn, 102.

[19] Appel, 3.

[20] Appel, 3.

[21] Idelsohn, 102.

[22] Landman, 5.

intricate, sophisticated *piyutim*, liturgical poems, into the prayer canon. In the words of Appel, “The hazzan is thus heir to a great tradition, which began in the earliest periods of Israel’s glorious past, and was later carried forward by the illustrious scholars and liturgical poets who served as hazzanim in the Middle Ages.”[23] Flowery language aside, there are more historical records from the Middle Ages that suggest the historicity of the *hazzan*’s role in the Jewish community. The *hazzan* in the more formalized role of official prayer leader eventually became a respected position of communal authority.

Sources have also attempted to retrace the origins of the modern rabbi, creating a direct link with late biblical and post-exilic developments. The pre-modern role of the rabbi in Ashkenaz “still functioned primarily in a juridical capacity as an expositor of Jewish civil and religious law.”[24] However, this role underwent a significant shift with the modern era that began in the late eighteenth century, leading to the professionalization of both the rabbinate and the cantorate, and shaping clergy roles in the modern day.

Early modern developments in the historical roles of rabbis and cantors

In understanding the impact of modernity on Jewish history, scholars like Ismar Schorsch and Judah Cohen have pointed to trends in broader European society that influenced the Jewish community. Emancipation, a harbinger of the modern era, had a direct impact on the Jewish populations in Europe, where they were for the first time accepted in varying degrees into the Christian-dominated society. Enlightenment

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[23] Appel, 3.

[24] Schorsch, 10.

philosophy, translated into the concept of *Bildung*, began to spread and permeate German social values, leading to the rise of the secular university. Protestant clergy began training at universities rather than seminaries at this time, and, as noted above, "the doctorate became the emblem of the modern rabbi."[25] Whereas the pre-modern Jewish community was an all-encompassing, self-governing body, modern Judaism became relegated to the realm of religion alone, stripped of its power to self-govern. This in turn placed greater emphasis on the role of the rabbi to maintain Jewish tradition in the synagogue. "As the last major public forum of Jewish religious life, the synagogue gained a centrality it had never enjoyed in medieval times…Emancipation transmuted Judaism into a religion and its place of worship inevitably became its dominant institutional expression."[26] This shift had important ramifications for both the rabbinate and the cantorate. Additionally, Schorsch points out that this change was not just within the Reform movement, but across the Jewish spectrum.

In 1828, Rabbi Nathan Marcus Adler, the first German rabbi with a doctorate, described the development and broadening of the rabbinic role that took place in the early 19th century, "For beside the duties of preaching, running the school, [and] answering questions related to the synagogue and to ritual and ceremonial laws, the functions of the rabbi consist of weddings, divorces, translation of Hebrew documents [and] certification of ritual slaughterers."[27] This represents an expansion of the rabbinic role from a purely

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[25] Schorsch, 38.

[26] Schorsch, 15.

[27] Schorsch, 11.

halachic judge to a pastoral caregiver, educator, life cycle officiant, and even ritual butcher. Adler's first position was at the Oldenburg community, where he was followed by Samson Raphael Hirsch, the father of modern orthodoxy. Across the Jewish world, emancipation led to a greater emphasis on secular university education, as the early Reformer Abraham Geiger described in his description of the modern rabbinate: "He must acquire a broad and solid scholarly education, practical theological training especially in preaching, and an understanding of Judaism in its historical development."[28] This change began in Germany over the course of the 1820s and spread throughout Europe, despite the vocal protests of some rabbis.

While many rabbinic hopefuls began seeking out university educations, there were some who did not agree with the changing values of the modern rabbinate. For example, Rabbi Salomon Tiktin in the Jewish community of Breslau, who was ousted in favor of the more modern Rabbi Abraham Geiger, submitted a rabbinic job description to the local government restricting rabbinic authority to halachic law. He felt that a secular education and fluency in German were anathema to the rabbinate, and should not be allowed, and certainly not required. Divisions between modernizing and anti-modernizing forces led to splits within the Jewish community. In Russia, "the conflict soon led to the extraordinary phenomenon of a dual rabbinate: a minority of official but unpopular rabbis literate in Russian but incompetent in Talmud intent on dislodging the dominant and still respected leadership trained in the insulated world of the *yeshivot.*"[29]

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[28] Schorsch, 13.

[29] Schorsch, 19.

Some of this anti-modernizing sentiment was also combined with opposition to efforts of the Russian government to regulate the education of rabbis. Yet even among rabbis in Western Europe who supported a secular education, critical differences emerged between the importance of this education in relation to Jewish learning. The nascent Orthodox movement argued that "piety and talmudic learning were the qualities a community should look for when searching for a rabbi, and these were precisely the attributes conspicuously absent among Reform rabbis."[30] In the end, across all Jewish movements that emerged in the nineteenth century, the force of modernity continued to shape and divide the European, and eventually the American, rabbinate.

Emancipation and the start of modernity also brought significant changes in cantorial roles and responsibilities. In the transformational period of the 1820s in Germany, the role of the cantor became intertwined with the Lutheran church roles of musical *Kantor* and *Oberkantor.* In other words, the fact that Jewish communities use the term "cantor," rather than *hazzan* or *shaliach tzibbur*, is evidence of Christian society's influence on Jewish history. According to Cohen, the terms *hazzan* and *shaliach tzibbur*, rooted in Jewish history and rabbinic texts, were combined with the Christian term "cantor" in order to "imbue the figure with a sense of tradition."[31]

As 19th century German society was embracing *Wissenschaft,* the value of learning and scholarship, cantors were determined to prove that music was also an important part of the Jewish past via narrative cantorial histories, cantorial journals, and

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[30] Schorsch, 22.

[31] Cohen, 457.

cantorial guilds. In an effort to parallel the historical timelines that Christian scholars were creating, Jewish historians attempted to create narrative links from ancient times to contemporary cantors and Jewish synagogue music. Cantors banded together for better job security and social standing by creating their own cantorial journals, which shaped and defined the role of the modern cantor. These journals published articles that helped "recast Jewish music history as a function of cantorial development…carefully shifting away from the cantor's local responsibilities of slaughterer and/or teacher to a purely musical role…"[32] Cantors themselves, through guilds and journals, shifted their focus solely to their role as professional Jewish musicians, ushering in a cantorial Golden Age in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Part of the cantorial and rabbinic transformation brought on by modernization led to the pairing of these clergy roles that we see today: "While the rabbi can debate legal matters, settle internal disputes, and serve as the intellectual center of a congregation, the cantor actively leads the ritual, counterbalancing the rabbi's intellectualism with creative and skilled religious expression."[33] The professionalization of each of these clergy positions intensified their specializations and shaped them as opposing leaders of the synagogue. The modern rabbi was taken from the role of communal judge and brought into the synagogue as a pillar of Jewish history and thought, trained to teach Judaism and deliver weekly sermons in the vernacular. The cantor, who in pre-modern times served as lay prayer leader, *shaliach tzibbur*, or multi-functioning synagogue leader, now became

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[32] Cohen, 465.

[33] Cohen, 458.

specially trained as a Jewish musician influenced by the theory, history, and practice of Western art music. As emancipation gave Jews the opportunity to pursue careers in secular society, the cantorial role "became a fixture of Jewish ritual, and consequently a barometer of sonic authenticity."[34] Jews looked to cantors as carriers of their musical and liturgical Jewish heritage, while rabbis served as their historical-theological teachers and leaders. Both of these roles were relegated to the synagogue, which became the epicenter of modernizing Jewish life in an increasingly secular post-emancipation world.

Historical sources of religious authority

In this section, I explore the various sources of religious authority for rabbis and cantors in the premodern and modern worlds, focusing on the Ashkenazic Jewish world. This will serve as a foundation for the rabbi-cantor dynamics of today's clergy teams. It is important to note here that there is an element of authority that came from the fact that all rabbis and cantors were men for most of Jewish history. Later in this section, I will further discuss the role of gender.

Rabbinic authority in the premodern world was based on learning, and passed down from rabbi to rabbi through the chain of transmission known as s'michah, or rabbinic ordination. "From a formal, institutional point of view, rabbinical ordination was therefore a proclamation of the fact that, in the opinion of the ordaining individual or individuals, the person receiving ordination was a Rabbinic scholar *(talmid hakham)* at the top of the hierarchical scale of Jewish learning, and therefore capable of issuing

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[34] Cohen, 458.

halakhic decisions."[35] This rabbinic authority "derived from a tangible, sacred, and comprehensive legal tradition," and entailed in-depth and lifelong learning of rabbinic and biblical literature.[36] "Jewish law had evolved the notion of a kind of 'apostolic' succession beginning with Moses, who was invested by God himself and who subsequently laid his hands on Joshua. Every ordained 'judge' could pass on ordination to others, and only ordained judges could constitute a 'Synhedrion' or any other kind of valid court."[37] While this line of transmission was broken at some point in the early Middle Ages, it was reinstated due to the efforts of rabbis such as Maimonides in the 12th century, though it was still several hundred years before ordination was commonly accepted by the Jewish world again.[38] Nevertheless, rabbinic ordination was the symbol of scholarly learning and authority in the premodern world, conferring upon rabbis the power to arbitrate and make legal decisions within their community.

As the post-emancipation world became more secularized and influenced by outside culture, some rabbis began obtaining university educations and doctorate degrees. Yet secularization represented a threat to the religious authority of rabbis. To confront this threat, rabbis like Zacharias Frankel, the intellectual progenitor of Conservative Judaism, "believed that religion in its Jewish guise should serve as the ultimate source of authority for the modern rabbinate," but that Judaism and the rabbinate had to adjust to the modern

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[35] Bonfil, *Rabbis and Jewish Communities in Renaissance Italy,* 37.

[36] Schorsch, 15.

[37] Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo: Lawyer and Mystic,* 122.

[38] Werblowsky, 123.

world by invoking “the universal category of religion. The rabbi had to be a man imbued with the spirit of God.”[39] Rabbis began to draw on the notion of religion influenced by Christianity, in which “prayer flowed from the heart and not the mind, and it was feeling which constituted the core of religion.”[40] Approaching this notion from a distinctly Jewish perspective, rabbinic authority transformed itself to represent both tradition and the modern world, drawing inspiration from rabbinic literature as well as a secular education. Specifically, this view represents Reform and Conservative leadership, while much of Orthodoxy still considers the biggest Talmudic scholars to be the ones with the most authority.

Landman writes, in *The Cantor: An Historic Perspective*, that “in the hierarchy of religious officials, the *hazzan* rated second to the rabbi and his powers were restricted by the rabbi and the elders of the community.”[41] Nevertheless, he qualifies this statement by explaining the discrepancies of comparing the historical roles of rabbis and cantors. “The *hazzan* was the leading official in his field,” he clarifies, citing the intellectual and preaching abilities of many individual cantors.[42] The overlap in rabbinic and cantorial roles goes in both directions, as some pre-modern communities had a rabbi fulfill the role of cantor when they could not afford both. In terms of authority, “rabbis were given full jurisdiction over ‘communal employees,’ which included the cantor.”[43] While fraught

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[39] Schorsch, 15.

[40] Schorsch, 15.

[41] Landman, 15.

[42] Landman, 15.

[43] Landman, 46.

rabbi-cantor relationships certainly were part of this history, there were also many exemplary rabbi-cantor relationships in which rabbis helped cantors get higher salaries, encouraged the community to respect them, and established strong friendships. For instance, Cohen describes the partnership of Rabbi Benjamin Szold and Cantor Alois Kaiser who served congregation Oheb Shalom in Baltimore, Maryland in the late 19th century. Under the leadership of Szold, Kaiser was able to substantially expand the music program of the congregation, leading to the purchase of a melodeon, hiring a choir director, and expanding the size and budget of the choir.[44]

The historical development of clergy roles in America

The history of Jewish clergy in America tells a somewhat different story, though Europe was certainly an important influence on American religious life. When resources were fewer in early American history, cantors were often the sole clergy for Jewish communities, serving as their representative to the outside world.[45] Slobin describes the role of the early American *hazzan* as "multiple functionary," a sort of catch-all for any extra communal responsibilities that were needed,[46] including working as a teacher, *mohel*, *shochet*, supervising the *mikveh*, and others. This had been general practice with cantors in Europe since the Middle Ages, and was passed down to the early cantorate in America. With the professionalization of the cantorate, however, the norm of multiple

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[44] Cohen, *Jewish Religious Music*, 191.

[45] Slobin, 141.

[46] Slobin, 152.

functionary was frowned upon and the role eventually became more streamlined. The main exception to this trend is that cantors are still regularly called upon to work as educators.

Once European ordained rabbis arrived in America in the 1840s, rabbis generally became more respected and better paid than cantors. A particularly telling article from the *Occident* in 1866 describes the tension between rabbis and cantors, "While the more learned members of the profession [rabbis] are deservedly honored and, in proportion, better rewarded for their services, it seems only reasonable the others [*hazzanim*], who are more constantly in demand, should not have cause to regret that they have devoted themselves to become public servants and teachers."[47] This article points to a power difference between these early, university-educated rabbis and those who had been serving as cantors in America with no formal education.

This difference in rabbinic and cantorial education first began to be addressed in 1924, when HUC in Cincinnati hired Abraham Zvi Idelsohn to teach its rabbinic students. Although there had been cantorial training programs in Central and Western Europe since the late 1800s, there was not yet an American seminary to teach cantors.[48] For HUC, hiring Idelsohn added to their academic stature, as he was "the only tenured professor of his kind in the United States."[49] Idelsohn can be seen as part of the trend that began in 19th century Europe to give greater credibility and historical weight to Jewish music,

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[47] Slobin, 146.

[48] Cohen, *Making of a Reform Cantor*, 30.

[49] Cohen, "Whither Jewish Music?" 33.

tying him to the German cantors writing their own histories in the cantorial journals of the 1800s. “Reviews of Idelsohn's 1929 *Jewish Music in Its Historical Perspective*, the first book on Jewish music to be published through a major American press, lauded the author for his ability to weave a substantial Jewish thread into the mainstream discourses of Western musical history, as well as his adeptness at bringing together deeply scattered musical aspects of the Jews into a coherent, linear, and logical narrative.”[50]

Following in Idelsohn’s footsteps, Eric Werner was officially installed as his successor at HUC in 1938. However, Werner decided to move to New York “in order to facilitate a more sustainable form of higher Jewish music instruction.”[51] Although the Jewish Theological Seminary had attempted but failed to set up a cantorial school in the 1920s, it was Werner who, in October 1948, established the School of Sacred Music (SSM), the first formal cantorial training institution in America. “By training a new generation of cantors, Werner hoped, he would create a platform for researching Judaism's ancient musical heritage while putting that research to practical use in the American synagogue.” Although the SSM was non-denominational, with the hope that cantors could act as a unifying force across Jewish divides, other organizations soon created their own cantorial schools, including the Conservative movement’s Jewish Theological Seminary and the Orthodox movement’s Yeshiva University. Nevertheless,

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[50] Cohen, 35.

[51] Cohen, 39.

the creation of the School of Sacred Music helped bring greater acceptance and respect to the cantor as an essential clergy person along with rabbis.[52]

The School of Sacred Music, which became the Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music (DFSSM) in 2011, still trains cantors inspired by Werner's vision today, while also adapting to the shifting clergy roles and changing needs of synagogues over time. In Cohen's 2009 study of the HUC-JIR DFSSM, he summarized the core of the cantorial musical education this way: "In becoming Reform Jewish cantors, students inherited the power to embody their specialized knowledge publicly; to negotiate as cantors in their daily activities; to maintain relationships with a cantorial past through a collected musical repository; and to carry the cantorial figure—sometimes cautiously and defensively—into an ever-changing future."[53] The concept of "sonic authenticity" that began with the professionalization of the cantorate is still a core role of the modern cantor. However, the requirements and expectations of the cantor have changed significantly in recent years.

Development of synagogue life in the late 20th century

In an exploration of the late 20th century historical developments in synagogue worship in particular, there are numerous competing narratives that try to explain the cultural changes and rising tensions in congregations. Written by a team of sociologists, educators, and liturgists, including Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman, *Sacred Strategies:*

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[52] Cohen, 43.

[53] Cohen, *Making of a Reform Cantor*, 228.

Transforming Synagogues from Functional to Visionary attempts to explain these changes through an in-depth study of a few select congregations across the country. The tone of this work is distinct from scholarship written by those who come from a musical background, such as musicologists Mark Kligman and Rabbi Jeffrey Summit. While *Sacred Strategies* tends to focus on rabbinic drivers of change and portrays most cantors as traditionalists, resistant to change, Kligman and Summit both depict a more nuanced look at musical change, describing cantors who were part of the change as well as those who were against it.

In the 1950s and early 1960s, Jews were largely focused on group survival as well as successful integration into American society. Therefore, synagogue membership was important to American Jews in the mid-century because "they allow for the pursuit of two goals: to remain a Jew and to become an American."[54] However, this cultural system collapsed over the following three decades, when Jews no longer felt the drive for survival and their goal of integration had largely been achieved. Synagogue membership was no longer a given for American Jews, and congregations had to figure out ways to adapt and reorient themselves. "American Jews today are not only freer to choose whether to be Jewish, they are also freer to choose how, when, where, and why to be Jewish."[55] This cultural change within the Jewish community was tied to broader American cultural trends of the 1960s-1980s. People became less trusting of received doctrine, there was a "pluralization of meaning systems" both in religion and other

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[54] Aron et al, *Sacred Strategies*, 22.

[55] Aron, 23.

cultural touch-points, people enjoyed greater “freedom of individual choice,” and institutions in general were seen as less trustworthy.[56] If they were to survive, synagogues could no longer assume that American Jews would trust them, but would have to adapt in order to earn their patronage.

One way that Jewish communities adapted to these changes was to create more participatory, meaningful, and engaging Jewish worship. One example of this trend was the Havurah movement, which began in the late 1960s. This movement comprised of small, tight-knit groups, “in which groups of friends came together in living rooms, communal houses, Hillel foundations, and rented church basements for study, prayer, and often political and social action.”[57] The Havurah movement, with its “do it yourself” ethos, shifted the focus away from trained professionals and empowered Jews to lead their own ritual and spiritual experiences. Within established synagogues, there was a similar trend towards a greater focus on congregational participation, especially in relation to worship and music. In this environment, new tensions emerged between rabbis and cantors. Participation in worship meant simpler music, and a sharp differentiation from the classical Reform music in which cantors had been trained.

Cantors became intertwined with the entire ethos of the classical Reform synagogue, based on the heady, organ-based Episcopalian worship style. The role of the cantor in Reform synagogues in particular had arguably been in decline since cantorial music began to be notated in the late 19th century, decreasing the need for a trained

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[56] Aron, 36.

[57] Summit, 43.

cantor and relying more heavily on choir and organ music. Reform worship was largely based on English hymns, which did not need a cantor. However, across other denominations, the early 20th century saw the Golden Age of the cantor, with star cantors like “Yosele Rosenblatt, Samuel Vigoda, and Moshe and David Koussevitzky” recording TV and radio shows, and performing in some of the most renowned music halls and concert venues in the country.[58] However, “the 1950s accelerated the decline of the cantor as musical virtuoso,” transitioning from the cantorial Golden Age to the rise of Jewish folk music stars like Debbie Friedman and Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach.[59] Kligman explains that just as the era of star cantors was waning, the professional role of cantor was expanding beyond music to include pastoral, educational, and administrative duties.[60] Thus the shift from classical cantorial to folk-inspired music paralleled a shift in the cantorial role from singer and performer to synagogue professional.

This shift in synagogue music did not take place overnight, and was met with resistance from both rabbis and cantors. As Jewish summer camps gained popularity in the 1960s with participatory, folk-style Jewish music, congregants and some clergy wanted to see more of their camp music enter the synagogue. Cantor Jeff Klepper explains that the music of the Jewish summer camps of his youth embodied the revolutionary, communal ethos of the 1960s, “everybody sings and that makes it democratic, and it’s anti-commercial because you could sit in your living room with a

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[58] Kligman, “Contemporary Jewish Music in America,” 97.

[59] Kligman, 97.

[60] Kligman, 97.

guitar and enjoy the evening in front of the fire singing folk songs."[61] Rabbi Danny Zemel remembers encountering cantors who were resistant to this musical change, responding, '[Cantors will] use the word camp music as if I'm supposed to be embarrassed by the sound of camp. So my standard response…is to say that 'my favorite sound in the sanctuary is the sound of everybody singing together.'"[62] Though many rabbis also felt threatened by the cultural changes that weakened their authority in the community, *Sacred Strategies* describes rabbis as on the forefront of many of these synagogue worship changes, more willing than cantors to respond to the will of the congregants. Rabbis of this era were more likely to have a camp music background, while cantors often had operatic and classical music training. Nevertheless, "by the 1980s the folk-rock style had become commonplace in Reform worship, except in the oldest, most Classical Reform congregations."[63]

By the 1990s, it was clear that large-scale developments were taking place not just musically, but also culturally. The broader American culture in the 1990s saw a rise in what some call a new Romanticism, which prized "greater traditionalism, individualism, and emotionality."[64] As synagogue memberships were declining, worship practices in particular became a prime area of exploration and experimentation in the 1990s for many communities trying to draw in bigger crowds and higher membership numbers. One 1993

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[61] Klepper interview, quoted in Kligman, 117.

[62] Rabbi Danny Zemel, quoted in Aron et al, *Sacred Strategies,* 34.

[63] Kligman, 119.

[64] Aron et al, 48.

survey estimated that only about 10% of American Jews attend weekly services, about half the amount of estimated Christian church-goers at the time.[65] The swaying, lively folk music that was rising in popularity contrasted sharply with "the old and dying style that had relegated worshipers to passive listeners who never moved their bodies, except as directed by the service leader."[66] Experimentations and new types of worship all had one thing in common: greater congregational participation.

The new romanticism of the 90s was an outgrowth of the folk music revival of the 60s, prizing meaningful engagement in a musical, singing community. The baby boomers who had grown up steeped in the folk music revival of the 1950s and 60s were now advocates of regularly using the folk-rock camp music to bring people together in synagogue worship, explaining that the familiar tunes helped connect them to the synagogue community as well as a sense of spirituality. At the same time, critics of musical change like Samuel Adler, a world-renowned composer and Julliard professor, who wrote some of the most well-loved Jewish camp melodies, decried these musical changes, claiming that "supporters of communal singing are eager to blame low synagogue attendance on the traditional music rather than seeing that the fault lies in the decline in familiarity with, and affinity to, synagogue ritual life."[67] In the face of challenges to religious life, some claimed that communal music was the key to reigniting synagogue participation, while others felt that giving in to popular music in the

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[65] Aron et al, 47.

[66] Aron et al, 48.

[67] Kligman, 119.

synagogue would only lessen familiarity with and participation in Jewish observance. There were clergy on both sides of this debate, though it is often described as rabbis on the side of musical change versus cantors on the side of musical tradition.[68]

The 90s Romanticism and its greater emphasis on authenticity in the individual's worship experience seemed to augment the divisions between rabbis and cantors, leading to what the authors of *Sacred Strategies* called the "worship wars." Some believed that authentic prayer reflected the musical aesthetic of its time, and that prayers set to popular musical styles were closer to congregants and prayer leaders' personal prayers, while any older musical styles hindered authentic prayer. Authors described tension between cantors, trained in Western art and classical Reform music, and congregants "demanding congregational singing." Rabbis, siding with the will of their congregants, "demanded folk music" that the cantors felt was demeaning to their musical skills.[69] There were, of course exceptions, to this trend, as there were cantors who had a background in, or love of, camp music, and who were proficient in guitar.

As the authors of *Sacred Strategies* put it, "Reform rabbis had reached the conclusion that synagogue worship was truly terrible. But cantors, overall, did not agree."[70] Was worship "truly terrible" in Reform congregations of the time? Rabbis, siding with their congregants on this issue against cantors, may also have shifted the balance of power back into the hands of the rabbis. In rebellion to the cultural shift away

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[68] Kligman, 120.

[69] Aron et al, *Sacred Strategies,* 53.

[70] Aron et al, 73.

from institutional authority, *Sacred Strategies* depicts rabbis as visionary leaders driving "worship change by a theological and aesthetic vision of what worship should be."[71] From this rabbinic viewpoint, it was not synagogues as a whole that were behind the times, but only worship, exemplified by the outdated cantor fighting against the change. On the other end of the spectrum, working *for* institutional change, were the visionary rabbis, prioritizing the needs of the congregations with creative, adaptive solutions.

One congregation that *Sacred Strategies* studied in-depth was Temple Micah in Washington D.C., where the music director described the hierarchical power structure when it came to worship: "Danny [the rabbi] took my control over the music. He is pretty much the general and Meryl [the cantorial soloist] and I are the lieutenants. He makes no bones about that."[72] Not only did the rabbi in this example make visionary, creative changes to worship, but he did it as the "lieutenant" leader of the congregation, without the partnership of a cantor. The authors equate a completely sung-through service, in which "the congregation sang its way virtually from beginning to end," with "the Reform version of good davening," highlighting complete congregational participation as the definitive example of ideal worship.[73] Meanwhile, worship that was closer to classical Reform in any way is considered "truly terrible." Rabbis are painted as reflecting the needs of their communities, while cantors largely prioritize their own selfish preferences.

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[71] Aron et al, 73.

[72] Aron et al, 73.

[73] Aron et al, 73.

Yet there were cantors who disprove this theory, such as Cantor Jeff Klepper, a close friend of Debbie Friedman and a composer who wrote some of the most well-known music of the Jewish folk movement, including the ubiquitous “Shalom Rav,” alongside his musical partner, Rabbi Daniel Freelander. Cantor Benjie Ellen Schiller, who has been teaching at the HUC-JIR DFSSM since the 80s, composes music that “synthesize[s] the folk and artistic styles and combine[s] them with traditional chants,” exemplifying musical change that aims to innovate synagogue worship.[74] A contemporary of Cantor Schiller, Merri Arian, has also been teaching cantorial students how to lead music “in order for congregants to join in,” reflecting the push towards participation in synagogue worship.[75] Although these are just a few select examples, the efforts of these cantors and educators in addition to rabbinic narratives help create a more well-rounded perspective on the “worship wars” of the 1990s.

In interviews, cantors who were invested in the 60s, 70s, and 80s shared their own experiences in the field during this time. Those who had lived through the changes of the last three or four decades often did not view themselves as “old school” or part of the old guard, but rather as part of the change in some way. A cantor invested in 1980 named the changes they have seen in the cantorate, “Initially rabbis and cantors just came from different places, different cultural places, different world-views. But the cantors of the 60s and 70s are not like the cantors of today.” This cantor continued to describe the development in the cantorial education of the 80s versus today, adding that “cantors and

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[74] Kligman, 120.

[75] Interview with Merri Arian, July 22, 1998, quoted in Kligman, 121.

rabbis certainly did not think the same. They didn't have the same experiences," namely the Jewish summer camp experience, which drove much of the musical change in Jewish life. The cantor pointed to a difference between musical styles between cantors and rabbis: most cantors were trained in opera singing, while most rabbis grew up with camp music.

There is no doubt that Jewish summer camps had a significant influence on the way synagogues developed throughout recent history. However, even among cantors versed in opera, many saw themselves on the forefront of cantorial change. For example, one cantor ordained in the 70s explained, "I am a musician in a sense, and I love to sing, and I did opera as just part of my hobbies. But I felt I had an obligation to represent what a cantor should be: a full clergy partner who was educated, who had opinions, who could express those opinions in writing and verbally, plus all the musical things that we take for granted." This dedication to becoming a "full clergy partner" would indicate that there were cantors who were not just fighting against synagogue change, but saw themselves as part of this change. According to the ACC, the official cantorial organization of the Reform movement, "The cantorate remains not only responsive to, but leads the reinterpretation of Jewish music that continues to unfold through prayer and learning in our communities."[76] The ACC website describes the modern Reform cantor as a "spiritual leader and clergy partner," working with rabbis to build the future of the Reform Jewish world.

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[76] "Our History," American Conference of Cantors.

Gender, clergy roles, and synagogue leadership

In 1972, Sally Priesand became the first woman rabbi ordained by the Reform movement, followed by the first female cantor, Barbara Ostfeld, in 1975. Feminism and the writings of influential Jewish feminist thinkers like Judith Plaskow and Marcia Falk also helped shape the way that female clergy understand their roles and changed the ingrained models of leadership and hierarchy. Yet there is still a long way to go in the effort for inclusion and equality in synagogue leadership. Although the first female rabbi was ordained at HUC in 1972, "it is Rabbi Laura Geller who shattered the stained-glass ceiling in 1995" by becoming the first female senior rabbi of a large synagogue over 1000 families.[77] The impact of women in this previously male-dominated field is still being analyzed today, but there is no doubt that female clergy have inalterably changed the clergy role and synagogue leadership in the Jewish world.

One of the most significant developments over the past fifty years in the clergy field is the admission of women into the rabbinate and the cantorate, a change that would have irreversible implications for the future of synagogue life. Rabbi Judith Schindler and Cantor Mary Thomas explored some of the broad-reaching effects of female clergy on synagogue leadership in their 2016 article, "rather than seeing ourselves as the inheritors of an evolving and formerly masculine hierarchical leadership tradition and maintaining that status quo, we turned our organizational structures on their sides and began to understand them as the rich tapestries of relationships, roles, and responsibilities that they

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[77] Schindler and Thomas, "Weaving Webs of Sacred Connection: Women Rabbis and Congregational Culture," 553-4.

really are."[78] They explain that it is women who have led the cultural shifts that we have seen in synagogue life in recent decades, promoting clergy not as the top of the chain of command or captains of a ship, but as the center of a sacred web of relationships.

How do women leaders differ from their male predecessors? Rabbi Schindler and Cantor Thomas base their claims on the tenets of Jewish feminist philosophy. According to renowned feminist liturgist Marcia Falk, "The conception of God as transcendent Other is based on a hierarchical construct of God and world that can be highly problematic for modeling relationships, especially from a feminist perspective, since it provides theological underpinning for the hierarchical dualisms—including the foundational dualistic construct of female and male—that characterize and plague Western culture."[79] Hierarchical dualisms, which construct male as superior to female, point to the fact that, at its core, hierarchy is a masculine concept.[80] This influences how we view God and the world, creating inequality and distance between divine and human, self and other, men and women, rabbis and cantors. Women in positions of power tend to be less hierarchical in their leadership styles, "valuing partnership over dominance."[81]

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[78] Schindler and Thomas, "Weaving Webs of Sacred Connection: Women Rabbis and Congregational Culture," *A Sacred Calling: Four Decades of Women in the Rabbinate*, 560.

[79] Falk, *The Book of Blessings*, 420.

[80] According to one definition, "Hierarchical dualism was developed by members of the dominant political, economic, and cultural group – middle- and upper-class European and European American men – and it both motivated and justified this group's domination of others." For more information, see Matthaei and Brandt, "From hierarchical dualism to integrative liberation: thoughts on a possible non-racist non classist feminist future," 2001.

[81] Schindler and Thomas, 555.

They tend to prefer inclusive, collaborative working styles based on “collective decision-making” and listening to a variety of perspectives.[82]

Two major recurring problems come up for female clergy, which parallel larger cultural issues for women in the workplace. Firstly, many women find themselves trapped between being perceived as “too masculine” if they try to assert their authority on one hand, or “too feminine” if they try to be friendly and connect with congregants on a personal level. This can be seen in the contrasting feedback and responses that women get in relation to men in similar positions. Women are criticized for their appearance and clothing, the timbre of their voice, or their approachability, which are perceived as either “too masculine” or “too feminine”. Cantor Barbara Ostfeld touched on these challenges when she was asked to return to HUC-JIR to teach female students how to conduct themselves in the field: “Women rabbis can’t wear high heels or fashionable dresses. These are forbidden in the unwritten manual that instructs them to hide their attractiveness, their originality, their vitality in extra fabric and subdued colors. Women cantors can’t pitch their melodies too high or wear bright lipstick. Our manual directs us to shake hands with femaleness, not to embrace it. And I am here teaching these high-achieving women precisely what? How to avoid being handled.”[83] This was a recurring theme in interviews with female clergy as well, an issue that most male clergy do not often encounter.

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[82] Schindler and Thomas, 555.

[83] Ostfeld, *Catbird,* 155.

Another important issue for female clergy is "the 'myth' of work/life balance prescribed to high-achieving women," in which it is assumed that women should be able to manage a high-level career as well as bear the burden of childcare in their family life. In other words, "if women are only 'committed enough,' 'marry the right person,' or 'sequence it right,' they can surely rise to the highest levels of their field and raise a happy and healthy family."[84] Rabbi Sally Priesand describes this pressure as starting when she was at HUC: "I did feel that I had to be better than everyone else. There were some classes—in Talmud, for example, my classmates never prepared because they knew the professor would always call on me."[85] There is an added pressure on women to excel if they want a career, and yet to still fit into the cultural norms of marriage and children.

Yet the way women have addressed these particular challenges in positions of leadership has actually led to some of the most important changes in the field. "The drive as clergy, both male and female, to model both excellence and strong family life (in whatever form the twenty-first-century family takes) is precisely the reason that more women are needed to take on the roles of senior clergy, for women clergy have led the way in transforming congregational cultures into both empowering and collaborative environments."[86] For example, in the quest to find fulfillment both in their work and family lives, women have paved the way for more balanced work-life schedules. This does not mean that women put less work or thought into their jobs, but rather that they

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[84] Schindler and Thomas, 557.

[85] Priesand, *Sacred Calling*, 84.

[86] Schindler and Thomas, 557.

"allocate those hours differently, to meet the needs of both work and home."[87] Instead of fitting themselves into the hierarchical, male-dominated structure of leadership, some women developed a new leadership model based on an interconnected web of partnership and collaboration, with clergy at the center rather than the top. "Over the past four decades, women senior leaders have bequeathed to the rabbinate a vision for weaving sacred communities of connection where the leader is at the center but all share in the strength of building the organization."[88] This model facilitates the community engagement and participation that synagogues have been wanting for years, empowering congregants to step up because they know that they matter and that their voices will be heard. An interconnected web with clergy at the center also has significant potential for the rabbi-cantor dynamic, suggesting a non-hierarchical, collaborative model for clergy teams.

Recent developments in cantorial education and ordination

Changes to the rabbinate and cantorate are often connected to developments on the educational level, and parallel some of the developments to the programs at HUC, the Reform movement's official training ground. After the opening of the cantorial program in 1948, the first investiture of cantors took place in a small ceremony in 1951, as part of the movement's efforts to formalize and professionalize the cantorate.[89] In the 1960s, the

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[87] Schindler and Thomas, 558.

[88] Schindler and Thomas, 562.

[89] Cohen, *Making of a Reform Cantor*, 229.

cantorial students joined the full HUC commencement ceremonies along with the rabbinic students. Since then, the program changed significantly, becoming a graduate instead of undergraduate program in 1984, adding the year in Israel requirement for the cantors in 1986, and adding courses in Jewish history, rabbinic text, and pastoral care. But it was not until 2012 that cantors were first ordained, a significant if nominal change that would help make their role more official on a state and national level.

All of these changes were instigated by students, who organized the Student Cantorial Organization to petition the school for changes to the program that would "[elevate] the School of Sacred Music and the Cantorate to a level of the utmost respect and dignity so we can continue to flourish and to serve Judaism in the fullest measure."[90] When a panel of students approached the HUC administration to petition for cantorial ordination in 2011, some faculty were concerned that "use of the term 'ordination' for cantors could diminish the significance of the title 'rabbi.'"[91] Nevertheless, Rabbi David Ellenson, president of HUC-JIR, coordinating with the CCAR and the ACC, made the decision to officially ordain DFSSM cantors in 2012. Part of the change from investiture to ordination at the DFSSM was in order to give cantors greater legal authority to perform life cycle ceremonies and function as synagogue leaders. For instance, in certain states, ordination is required in order to perform marriages and act as military or prison

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[90] Stahl, Howard. Unpublished report of the President of the Student Cantorial Organization. Given at the ACC Plenary Session, 1971.

[91] Caro, "ACC E-Note #105: Update on Discussion of Cantorial Ordination at HUC-JIR," 2011.

chaplains. Cantors were barred from being able to officially perform these functions until HUC-JIR began ordaining cantors along with the rabbis in 2012.

Cantorial ordination is a topic that requires more investigation, as it is still part of ongoing discussions at HUC-JIR and the Reform movement as a whole. Ordination is generally understood in the Jewish context as the English translation of the Hebrew "*s'michah,*" the ancient practice of conferring the title of rabbi. This ritual is believed to be part of a chain of transmission that dates back to the biblical Moses himself, and involves a rabbi placing their hands on the person's head. While the process of conferring the title of cantor elevated from investiture to ordination in 2012, the Hebrew text of the cantorial certificate does not parallel the rabbinic "*s'michah*" language. One rabbi justified this difference by quoting the first verse of Pirkei Avot, "Moses received the Torah at Sinai and passed it down to…the prophets," explaining that the "transformative experience" of *s'michah* should be reserved for rabbis. He believed that cantors are not and should not be part of that long chain of transmission. However, others are still in conversation with HUC-JIR in order to create more parallel language between the rabbinic and cantorial ordination certificates.

What has been the purpose of the changes and additions to the cantorial program at the DFSSM? What are the school's goals for the cantorate? According to Cantor Richard Cohn, the current director of the DFSSM, "The direction of the program over [the past] twenty or so years has clearly been to educate the multi-dimensional cantor." He laid out a list of the varied skills and responsibilities that comprise today's cantorial roles:

- Expert in the interpretation and communication of Jewish text, spirituality, and culture through music
- Collaborative leader of communal prayer, celebration, and observance, uniting and empowering the community through song
- Educator for early childhood, elementary-age children, families, B'nei Mitzvah, teenagers, adults, and older adults
- Well-informed scholar of Jewish thought and literature
- Fully trained counselor and pastoral presence
- Lifecycle officiant, including supervision of conversion
- Program developer and facilitator
- Collaborative clergy with rabbis in the leadership and governance of communities, and in the building out of their overall vision and program
- Leader in the broader Jewish community
- Departmental administrator

In response to these developments, the rabbinic perspective on cantorial authority has shifted significantly over the past five decades. In a 1955 CCAR responsa answering the question of whether a cantor may officiate Jewish weddings, the answer is no, “the performing of marriages is professionally, technically, and spiritually the exclusive function of the rabbi.” The justification given for this decision includes historical texts on “professional privilege” and level of “technical and legal competence” that are only

granted to rabbis. In a 1969 document "Answers To Social Security Office" on the CCAR website, this question was asked: "Does a cantor as such preach and teach the tenets of Judaism? Are the duties of a cantor akin to those of a rabbi as a preacher and teacher of Judaism?" In answer, the document reads: "The cantor is not a teacher, as a rabbi is."[92] The CCAR is here drawing a distinction between the rabbinic and cantorial roles, and thus claiming certain arenas as the exclusive role of the rabbi with important legal ramifications. However, this view eventually shifted across the Reform movement. The ACC claims that at least since 1983, when the SSM program expanded and began awarding cantorial students with a master's degree, they "promoted the concept of the cantor as a co-clergy professional, asserting that investiture was comparable to ordination both in terms of training and array of responsibilities."[93] While there are still questions of how much and what kind of authority cantors hold, all major Reform organizations now acknowledge that both rabbis and cantors are clergy.

In conclusion, congregational worship today is as accessible as ever, with many Reform communities embracing the camp music of the folk revival movement, and clergy relating to their congregants in a more personable, informal way than they did in the mid-20th century. On the other hand, some Jews mourn the loss of the majestic and beloved high art music and formal preaching styles of the 19th and 20th century synagogue. If modernity brought on a specialization of clergy roles—cantor as classically-trained musician and rabbi as university-educated orator—recent changes to

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[92] Freehof, "Answers To Social Security Office."

[93] "Our History," American Conference of Cantors.

clergy roles suggest the de-specialization of these roles, or at least a greater fluidity between cantor and rabbi responsibilities. Cantorial training in particular reflects these profound changes in synagogue worship and clergy roles, with the ordination of cantors and a curriculum comprised of Classical Reform music, nusach and chazzanut, and contemporary synagogue melodies, paired with pastoral care, education, history, and text. Nevertheless, there are still significant differences between rabbinic and cantorial education: rabbis do not have the intensive musical training that cantors do, and cantors do not get the same training in homiletics and rabbinic text. How do these differences play out in the Reform synagogue? How do rabbis and cantors work together to lead congregations in the 21st century world? As synagogue life and clergy roles continue to evolve, how will cantorial and rabbinic partners work to bring these ideals forward?

Recent Trends in Rabbi-Cantor Partnerships

Within the context of rabbinic and cantorial history, and especially regarding the cultural, political, religious, and musical changes that began in the 1950s, what does the Reform synagogue look like now? As often occurs with cultural change, there is not a singular model for synagogue music or clergy roles, but a plethora of styles and aesthetics. We are in a period in congregational life in which there are clergy trained in the older Reform model of the 1960s, as well as those trained in the much more recent HUC-JIR curriculum of the early 2000s, and everything in between. Most of the cantors in the field were still invested, though a growing number were ordained post-2012. Clergy teams now encompass rabbis and cantors from the past six or even seven decades, and represent a huge range of leadership, personality, and educational styles. These unique circumstances make for a fascinating study into the interpersonal dynamics among today's rabbis and cantors.

In this section, I will explore in-depth the stories and experiences that came out of my interviews with clergy. These are just a few examples of the experiences of clergy that I heard, and more research still needs to be done to gain a fuller picture of today's Reform cantorate and rabbinate. What challenging moments have rabbis and cantors experienced in their pulpits, and how did they come about? What positive relationships have rabbis and cantors had with their clergy teams, and how did they foster a sense of trust and amity? What are the sources of clergy authority and structures of synagogue hierarchy in place today? In analyzing the interviews, I have attempted to assess some of the underlying assumptions, power dynamics, and leadership models that underpin Reform

synagogue leadership in our times. My hope is that this analysis helps clergy better understand their roles and work together in leadership teams.

Introduction to interview findings

The cantors who contributed to this study consistently spoke about the structures of authority in contemporary synagogue operations, and explained that while there has been much discourse of partnership among rabbi-cantor teams, there continues to be a clear hierarchy in which rabbis remain power-holders.[94] Some of the metaphors that the clergy I spoke with used described the cantor as "the second fiddle," "riding shotgun," or "the vice president, you might say, as opposed to the president." The rabbi's role was imagined "kind of like the CEO of the organization." Others explained that "rabbis hold all the power. That's something that cantors have a hard time accepting." One cantor gave the advice that "as a cantor, [you] need to just be okay that the rabbi is the boss." Despite the unanimous declaration of the rabbi as the person ultimately in charge of the synagogue, there seems to be some ambiguity around the hierarchy and levels of authority within a clergy team. What does it mean, both on a daily and meta level, that the rabbi is in charge of the clergy team? What misunderstandings lead to conflicts among clergy roles? I have tried to understand this power discrepancy through interviews with rabbis and cantors, exploring both the conflicts that arise from rabbinic-cantorial partnerships and the best practices for avoiding or resolving such issues.

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[94] All of these interviews have been kept anonymous so that clergy could speak openly about their experiences while maintaining the privacy and posterity of their workplaces.

In any leadership team, there are multiple factors influencing group dynamics and individual behavior. Although all clergy I spoke to largely agreed that the rabbi was ultimately “in charge,” each person seemed to have their own understanding of how the rabbi and the cantor work together and share responsibilities in the synagogue. This is even more complicated in larger clergy teams when there may be multiple rabbis, cantors, and other Jewish professionals. Just because clergy acknowledge the power dynamic does not mean they necessarily have the tools or means to navigate it smoothly. Through my interviews, I have identified several of the underlying processes that can lead to interpersonal problems, as well as some of the tools that lead to collegial and effective partnerships.

A full report and analysis of the conversations, firsthand experiences, and clergy perspectives found in the almost thirty interviews I conducted would be beyond the scope of this project. However, the following analysis focuses on certain key topics that I believe are most relevant to the pursuit of ideal clergy relationships. These include an exploration of the sources of power and authority of today’s Reform clergy, responses to and coping mechanisms for the rabbi-cantor power dynamic, and the leadership models in use within clergy teams. I investigate the role of hierarchy in synagogue leadership, and attempt to assess the pitfalls and best practices among clergy teams. I conclude with my own definition of successful rabbi-cantor partnerships, based on the Family Systems concept of differentiation of self.

Emotional tensions underlying the rabbi-cantor dynamic

In his groundbreaking 1985 book, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, Edwin Friedman applies the framework of Family Systems Theory to the congregational community. “Family systems theory offers new perspectives and approaches for clergy-congregational problems and the stress experienced by clergy at such times.”[95] By looking at the synagogue community as a family with familial processes, clergy can better understand and address underlying tensions and crises that come up in their professions. One cantor stated this clearly, saying, “Congregations are families, and clergy people are parents. And nobody wants to see parents fight, no matter how much they triangulate, no matter how much they try and trick you into it, no matter how much they are on your side.” Another clergy person reflected on entering a large clergy team that functioned much like a family, “So for my first year or two, it really felt like the senior rabbi and the senior cantor were like mom and dad, and the two associates and I were like siblings, we were like the kids.” There are now numerous clergy in the field who have studied Family Systems Theory, and report success in using this knowledge to work through conflicts in their pulpits. For the purpose of this project, I have attempted to apply some of the principles of Family Systems Theory to rabbi-cantor partnerships in particular, with their unique interpersonal dynamics.

At HUC-JIR, rabbinic and cantorial students study together starting from their first year in Jerusalem with very few barriers differentiating the programs. This creates an equal playing field that promotes the idea that both clergy roles are equally vital to

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[95] Friedman, *Generation to Generation,* 196.

congregational life. According to one rabbi ordained by HUC-JIR, “the year in Jerusalem together taught me from the beginning of my experience to look at my colleagues that I know as equals and to have absolute respect for everything they did.” However, this rabbi also expressed an underlying tension in this model. If rabbis and cantors study together and are promoted as equals, “I wonder what [cantors] think of me. Because they don’t need me anymore. So where’s my place? What can I do?” She was referring to a perceived threat that cantors may pose to rabbis: cantors who have almost identical training to rabbis, but who are *also* trained in music. According to one cantor, “What I think cantors have historically underestimated is how threatening our presence and skillset can be.” In reality, the programs are differentiated: rabbis receive substantially more training in rabbinic texts, homiletics, and pastoral counseling. However, these clergy were touching on the underlying fear of redundancy, which can exacerbate feelings of competition and inadequacy. These perceived threats may draw out such feelings in rabbis, an inner voice that tells them that they are not good enough, or that they do not belong.

Perhaps there is a broader theme among Reform clergy. “I can tell you from my experience as a rabbi—being one, growing up surrounded by them also— so many of us have such feelings of inadequacy in the first place, and fear of being found out and proven to be fake. And many of us, psychologically, only went into the rabbinate in the first place as a way of boosting our feelings of self-worth because we're going to be useful and important…and it's not just in Judaism, I've found this talking to liberal clergy friends as well. The feelings of inadequacy are so powerful and strong.” Certainly, there

are cantors who feel the same way. The recent expansion of the cantorial training and responsibilities within congregations only intensify the tensions. Because of how recent these changes are, many more established rabbis "are not ready to just hand it over to a brand new face, a brand new cantor, and say, 'Welcome! Take 50% of my castle!'" Cantors are "telling the world that we can be sole spiritual directors, and what does that do to the rabbinate?"[96] The feelings of shame and impostor syndrome that the expanded role of the cantor can bring out in rabbis certainly contribute on a larger scale to conflicts between rabbis and cantors.

When it comes to clergy confidence and sense of self, one recurrent topic was the tension between the effect of the cantor's music versus the power of the rabbi's words. When clergy offer sermons, give a lecture in a class, or write a bulletin article, they certainly have the potential to call people to action or affect change in their communities. However, a powerful musical moment in worship or a piece of music taught in a religious school class can have a strong and lasting emotional impact on a congregant. According to one rabbi, "If music evokes your emotions in a way that words don't, the *hazzan* has emotional power in the context of the synagogue that the rabbi does not." There can be overlap between these two modes of communication of the rabbi and the cantor, and many clergy teams weave between leading spoken and musical moments. Yet the interplay between the power of music and the power of speech can be a source of conflict and competition in certain communities.

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[96] Interview with a cantor.

On the topic of music, rabbis may feel inadequate or upstaged by the cantor. Even in a jovial clergy partnership, one cantor recalled, “The first rabbi that I worked with would always say, ‘I could give the sermon of my life, and then I [the cantor] would get up there and [sing] something, and no one would remember a word that [I] said because that song [was] so pretty.’” Music has a power to touch people emotionally that is distinct from words, and can sometimes be even more memorable. The sermon, on the other hand, is often associated with a call to action, admonishment for communal behavior, or intellectual insight. One rabbi explained that “The rabbi functions as the *mochiach* [castigator], the person who takes the community to task when the community is doing bad things.” In their public-facing roles on the bimah, the rabbi is often responsible for challenging people to change, while the cantor makes them feel good on an emotional level. Off the bimah, in their personal interactions with congregants, this might not hold true. However, while music does give cantors a certain level of influence, rabbis enjoy greater recognition in title, history, and public-facing role.

Miscommunication and unclear role definition

One of the fundamental challenges to clergy partnerships is miscommunication. When teams are communicating clearly, they tend to function smoothly and are able to overcome any difficulties that arise. However, miscommunication between rabbis and cantors can often lead to the bimah mishaps, role confusion, and interpersonal tensions that several interviewees reported. One newly-ordained cantor described the miscommunication that happened when she was navigating her partnership with a

seasoned senior rabbi. Although there was no bad intent or ill will, it was as if they were speaking different languages. “I really thought I was saying one thing, [but] he heard something completely different. He really thought he was being clear in saying something to me, and I heard something entirely different.” Whether working together as *sh’lichei tzibbur*, planning holiday events, or leading congregational trips, this cantor noted a difference in leadership style that took years to overcome. “It was that conflict of two people thinking they know best, and me really needing to back down because I didn’t know best,” she said. There are often a myriad of factors involved in interpersonal communications, and in this particular case, there were not only differences between rabbi and cantor, but also between a female associate and a male senior clergy. When clergy do not speak the same language or communicate effectively, this can hinder productivity and create tense working environments.

Another point of contention that came up in interviews was related to role definition, specifically in the area of music. Music and liturgy are the specialty of cantors, often overlapping with service leading. In interviews, cantors reported challenging relationships with rabbis who were “very opinionated about the music,” particularly rabbis who were not very musical. Role confusion also came up in bigger clergy teams, where the chain of command could be more complex. An assistant cantor in a large congregation with three rabbis and two cantors reported feeling “frustrated on a regular basis” because she did not understand how her role related to the other clergy roles. “It felt like my leadership was coming from different people. I had my senior cantor, but I also had my senior rabbi.”

The problem of clearly defined roles has been complicated by the widespread trend of cantors fulfilling more traditionally rabbinic duties. In recent decades, cantors have vied for greater respect as co-clergy, doing administrative work, giving sermons, and teaching classes that might have been assigned exclusively to the rabbi in the 20th century Reform synagogue. This change is also mirrored in HUC-JIR's cantorial requirements for ordination, where courses in rabbinic text, life cycles, and chaplaincy have been added in recent years.[97] Interestingly, this flexibility in clergy roles led some cantors to describe feeling that they had something to prove, wanting to show their congregation that they are equal to and can do everything the rabbi can do. As with women entering previously male-dominated fields, there is what some call the "careful-what-you-wish-for paradox," a pressure on women and, in this case, cantors, to "have it all."[98] A cantor who believes they can fulfill rabbinic duties just as well as the rabbi might feel resentment when they are either not given those opportunities, or end up overextending themselves, working the equivalent of two jobs for one salary. The rabbi, on the other hand, may feel threatened by the expansion of the cantor's role and try to exert their power or dominance over the cantor. While such changes are generally positive and have led to greater respect for cantors, it can be challenging for both rabbis and cantors to navigate their emerging roles and find a healthy balance.

Whether or not there is miscommunication or unclear roles within the clergy team, interpersonal problems between the rabbi and the cantor often come to a head on

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[97] See the section on "The historical development of clergy roles in America" for more information.

[98] Schindler and Thomas, 557.

the bimah, where the clergy are regularly on public display to their congregants. One cantor retold a story he had heard of a clergy team, who, in the middle of services, got their cues mixed up and started the next prayer at the same time, the cantor singing and the rabbi speaking. They looked at each other, then both started, again interrupting each other. Eventually, after repeating this a few times, the rabbi walks over to the cantor's lectern, and throws his music aggressively on the floor. This is one of the more extreme versions of such a story that I heard in my interviews, but echoes a fear of public humiliation that clergy feel when they are in front of their congregations. Incidents of this nature on the *bimah* are usually a symptom of a deeper relationship divide, not the underlying source. The *bimah* is just a place when congregants observe their leaders most clearly working together, and can often sense when something is amiss.

Lessons from the field

Given the myriad of miscommunications and interpersonal problems that can arise between rabbis and cantors, what does it take to have positive, productive clergy partnerships? When I asked interviewees about their positive experiences with clergy partners, I heard themes of open communication, vulnerability, having common experiences (especially in the realm of music), and working in collaborative, as opposed to siloed, systems. Some clergy likened their clergy partner to a romantic spouse, "The clergy person you partner with, I am convinced it's the equivalent of a marriage. It really is. You are so close, you spend so much time together." They described having each other's backs, and maintaining open communication even when they disagreed. It is

important to note that having a negative experience when a new clergy partner starts their contract, for instance, does not mean that there is no room to change and grow. The experiences that clergy reported from years in the field show that relationships often take time to nurture and develop into effective sacred partnerships.

When communication is clear and both parties are able to speak and listen to one another, clergy teams can model and facilitate positive congregational environments. Open communication depends on the clergy's willingness to be vulnerable. The same cantor that felt that her senior rabbi was speaking a different language than her in her first year at the congregation explained that both she and the rabbi wanted to make the relationship work, and were even open to having an outside mediator step in to facilitate this process. She was willing to change, and so was the rabbi. "We had a couple sit-downs where it was like, 'Let's just clear the air because I feel like it's really tense.' We shared, [and] he was really vulnerable with me," this cantor explained. Because they were both willing to be vulnerable with each other and had a genuine desire to develop their relationship, three years into her contract, the cantor reports having a much more amiable, productive partnership. As she said, "Let's fix it. If I'm the problem, let me know. And if I'm not, then help me learn to work with this system."

One of the hallmarks of clear communication is knowing how and when to address any issues that arise. In order to minimize triangulation and maintain a united front to the congregation, "one of the things that I stand very firmly by is that all of the chaos has got to be kept backstage, that it is behind the curtain." Another cantor has learned to establish this clear communication from the very beginning of the relationship.

"One of the reasons that we had a wonderful working relationship was that…within the first week that I started [working], [we had] a conversation about how we communicate with each other. Do we prefer telephone? Do we prefer text? Or email? How are we going to set the rules for disagreeing? And that set us up for three wonderful years of working together." This lesson was echoed in another cantor, who described, "One of the first things I said to [the rabbi] is that I want you to know that I will not talk behind your back. I will not say anything behind your back that I would not want you to know, ever." The key to building amicable, effective clergy teams seems to lie in their openness to work on any issues that arise, and their ability to establish a process for addressing those issues, preferably from the very start of the relationship.

Another critical theme in effective partnerships is having some common ground or shared values, particularly around music. One cantor explained that one of the first things that drew him to his beloved rabbi partner, with whom he worked for eighteen years, was a shared background in the Reform camp movement and its music. The style of folk music that circulated in Jewish summer camps starting in the 1960s and 1970s created a strong common ground for some rabbis and cantors, a shared musical ethos and style of Judaism that was slowly transported into regular synagogue worship.

While certainly not a requirement, an appreciation for music in the rabbi and a similar taste in musical style seems to facilitate amicable partnerships. As one interviewee explained, "It's not necessary, you don't have to have that, but it does make it richer and makes you feel like there is common ground." Once again, the theme of common ground emerged as a factor in positive clergy partnerships. Although it could be

seen as an infringement on the cantor's specialty, and a few cantors expressed this concern, in the best-case scenario, a musically knowledgeable rabbi can support and enrich the cantorial role. In interviews, cantors reported feeling closer to their rabbis when they could talk about musical choices together, rather than the rabbi assuming that the cantor would make all the musical decisions alone. One cantor described the experience of working together with a particularly musical rabbi: "It was so touching to be able to change roles a little bit, you know, to let my rabbinic partner have this musical moment and to be able to collaborate with him and not just other singers or song leaders." In contrast to dysfunctional relationships where cantors reported feeling disrespected or undermined by the rabbi's musical input, this cantor describes a relationship of mutual trust and respect when it comes to music. What differentiates these divergent experiences? An amicable, positive working relationship among the clergy team seems to correlate with successful collaboration on music between rabbis and cantors. While music is the specialty of cantors, it is a part of a larger clergy role, which works best in partnership with the rest of the team.

Having a shared understanding of music can take many forms, including rabbis experiencing previous positive relationships with cantors, and cantors being willing to make musical space for their rabbi. For example, one cantor, whose sibling is a rabbi, explained that she did not have any issues with her rabbi partner, whose sibling is a cantor, because their experience with other clergy people helped them foster an appreciation and respect for one another that enabled them to work together in collaborative partnership. Another cantor learned that finding "humility in musical space"

was a key to building positive clergy partnerships. When entering into partnership with a new rabbi, she makes sure to ask them about their connection with music, and give them opportunities to lead music with her if they have a musical interest. One High Holy Day season, she arranged a duet for her musical rabbi, “In doing that duet, not only did I show humility and make space for him, I taught him that I'm not to be feared, and that I'm not threatening.” In her experience, “if you give space [to the rabbi] in a non-threatening, safe way, I think there's more of a chance of you getting space in that way.”

Current sources of rabbinic and cantorial authority

In order to better understand the underlying processes involved in rabbi-cantor teams, a deeper investigation of the power dynamics involved is needed. Both rabbis and cantors have positions of leadership in the community, and have a role to play in the organization of the synagogue. Rabbis and cantors must navigate their various forms of power and authority, both formal and informal, in order to work together as an effective team. Power can be understood as the ability to control and influence the behavior of others, while authority is defined as a formal position of power through a specific role.[99] The roles of rabbi and cantor, conferred through the ordination ceremony, carry a certain authority within the Jewish community, though the level of power they have over individual behavior has changed over time. A more in-depth exploration of the sources of power and authority can help clarify the particular roles of both rabbis and cantors, and explain some of the power dynamics at play within the clergy team.

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[99] Geringer, private communication.

Just a few decades ago, the idea that a cantor was a member of clergy was not widely accepted. Yet today, that conversation has shifted dramatically, and cantors are generally seen as clergy. But just because rabbis and cantors are both clergy does not necessarily make them equal partners. Clergy disagree about whether rabbis and cantors should be equal or not, but the reality in the field indicates a more complex power dynamic between the two roles. Historically and still today, outside of the Reform movement, the rabbi has the power to make halachic decisions that directly impact individual behavior in their community and in the greater Jewish community. However, within the Reform movement, the rabbinic role has largely lost this power to influence individual behavior because of the non-binding role that halachah plays in the Reform community. Reform rabbis still enjoy the recognition of title that confers a sense of historical continuity upon them. The role of the cantor, on the other hand, has shifted throughout history to encompass a variety of responsibilities, and has only become recognized as a full member of clergy in recent years.

Recent changes in the cantorate have led to a crucial change in the fundamental understanding of the role of the cantor in relation to the rabbi. Because these changes are so recent, both cantors and rabbis in the field have a range of options when it comes to the cantorial role and responsibilities. For one rabbi, even though “the cantorate has seen itself as more of a clergy partner [in recent years],” they must prove to the congregation that they are truly invested in these greater expectations. One cantor explains that cantors should worry less about being equal or being “invited to all the meetings,” but rather think about whether they have something to contribute. If not, they do not need to be

involved at that level. The idea that authority like that of the rabbi comes from showing up for the community and putting in more hours illuminates one justification for the power dynamic that exists.

Some clergy felt that because rabbis put more hours into the position, they have greater authority in the community than cantors. This was posed as a barrier to cantors overcoming the power difference between rabbis and cantors. Cantors would have greater leadership and power in the community if they were willing to put in the greater hours and effort into the job that rabbis already do. Some explained that greater authority comes with greater responsibility, such as being the clergy “on call” at all hours of the day or night. According to one rabbi, “If you don't want to be out at night, you're not where the buck stops. I'm not trying to hoard power, but if you're taking responsibility for something, that's going to involve certain kinds of actions or involvement.” Rabbis may be expected to be part of evening and late-night meetings that cantors are not necessarily expected to attend. There are also emergency lines that rabbis may be expected to be on-call for at any hour. On the other hand, there are some congregations where this emergency response is divided equally between all the clergy, not just the rabbis. The concept that rabbis work harder or are more involved than cantors was a recurring theme among both rabbis and cantors in interviews. In order to be an equal or full clergy member, they explained, one must invest more time and commitment to the community.

Certain descriptive statistics also have an impact on power and authority between clergy roles, including population, gender, and age. According to the CCAR website, there are around 2,200 rabbis serving the global Reform Jewish community. In July 2020,

the ACC reported 566 total members, including its student members in the DFSSM.[100] This substantial difference between the CCAR and ACC factors into the greater power and authority that rabbis hold in the Reform movement as a whole. According to one cantor, "The reality is, the Reform movement is an exceedingly rabbi-dominated movement, and that is never going to change. When you are graduating [for example] sixty or seventy rabbis and ten cantors, the numbers are never going to equate." The fact that there are more rabbis than cantors also influences the ability that each group's organization has to advocate for itself, specifically through its institutions. It also means that more people recognize the title of rabbi than that of cantor. People outside the Jewish community, unaffiliated Jews, or those who are part of a congregation that only has rabbi clergy may never have even heard of a cantor, whereas more people are likely to know what a rabbi is and associate the title with a certain level of authority.

Another method of understanding the value that communities place on their clergy is to look at their respective salaries. Statistical evidence shows that in most synagogues in the United States, rabbis are paid more than cantors, which can lead to conflict "in a society that equates salary with prestige."[101] While not necessarily indicators of authority, these figures play into the power dynamics and hierarchical relationships between rabbis and cantors. According to the CCAR's 2016-2017 Salary Study, the mean salary for senior or solo rabbi positions ranged from $111,003 to $307,789, depending on the size of the congregation. For a full-time cantor, mean salary ranged from $97,930 to

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[100] American Conference of Cantors, "Placement Report to the Plenary," 2020.

[101] Slobin, 148.

the one who buried their parents, I'm the one who called them when they were sad or sick and said the right thing, and so that has to be enough for us at some point. And I think to be a cantor, you have to be okay with enough and not everything." This cantor was describing the influential role that they had with certain members of their community. Despite not having the title of rabbi, their personality and ability to connect with congregants led this cantor to serve as the person that congregants turned to in times of distress or joy.

Another cantor explained their reality in the field, "As a cantor, you need to just be okay with the rabbi as the boss." Rather than react to this reality adversely or aggressively, this cantor decided to promote a positive relationship within this power dynamic, asking themselves, "What can I do to help the rabbi? What can I do to make the rabbi look good?" Both of these examples come from cantors who have worked within the established power differences, focusing on strengthening their relationships with their rabbis by supporting and helping them, or developing pastoral, close-knit relationships with their congregants. For many cantors, this fits with their expectations and goals in their careers. One cantor specified, "I think that 'equality' is a bit of a misnomer…I don't know that everybody has to be equal. I can do my job, if I am given space to do my job." For her, doing her job as a cantor requires that her rabbinic partner respect and trust her enough to give her the space to do her work without exerting his own power over her areas of focus. Some cantors explained that they prioritize a positive working relationship with their rabbis above other aspects of the job, like salary or prestige. "I think working with a fantastic clergy partner, is the equivalent of like, $20,000 in a contract. I would

make less money to work with someone I really work well with." In addition, numerous cantors explained that they did not become rabbis precisely because they did not want to be ultimately responsible for the running of the synagogue, and were content to play a supporting role to the rabbi.

Several interviewees described their ideal partnerships as comprised of clergy with complementary skillsets that help to balance out some of the power inequities. One cantor in particular broke down the responsibilities of the rabbinate into three main roles: scholar, CEO, and pastor. She broke the cantorate into the roles of pastor, musician, and teacher. She explained that, according to this model, "You could be good at all three but you're not going to be a master of all three." Her rabbi, she claimed, was a master scholar and CEO, but not as strong a pastoral leader. She, however, felt strong as a pastor and a musician, but not as confident as a teacher. Although perhaps complementary, the description of her rabbi with the hierarchical, highly respected roles of "scholar" and "CEO," while the cantor occupies the roles perceived as softer, more emotion-based ("pastor" and "teacher"), conveys the unequal power dynamics between these two roles. Nevertheless, this cantor has found a clergy partnership that works for her. "So we balance each other in that way. I am not the politician that he is…[but] my organizational skills are much better than his. And he'll admit it…but it takes both of those parties coming to the table." This frank and confident discussion of each clergy partner's strengths and weaknesses has created an environment in which each person feels empowered to use their skills as well as confident enough to acknowledge their limitations and growth areas. In conclusion, "It's okay to not have all the tools in the tool

kit. You just have to find the people who do. And trust them to bring their tools to the table."

One cantor has encountered frustration from many of her cantorial colleagues, who complained that they were trusted to bring their tools to the table. They were not invited or asked to participate in some of the board and committee meetings that took place in the evenings or off-hours at the synagogue. In these cases, she gives two responses, "Either A) Did you actually have something to contribute, and is there a way to contribute it? Or B) Maybe you did not create the relationships or a system where [synagogue leaders] would turn to you and want your voice at the table." Rather than blame the cantors' exclusion on power dynamics or the hierarchical structure of the synagogue, she shifts the responsibility to the cantor to make their intentions known. If they feel it is important to be part of certain meetings outside of their primary field of responsibility, they must forge those relationships and make their voices heard. This will not necessarily come automatically from the other synagogue leadership. Nevertheless, from this cantor's perspective, there is potential for equality in clergy responsibility in the congregation, if the cantor would like such responsibility.

Non-hierarchical leadership and the co-clergy model

For clergy who are dissatisfied with the traditional synagogue hierarchy, in which the rabbi is the ultimately authority and the cantor works for and reports to the senior rabbi, there are other leadership models out there. An example of clergy teams approaching the rabbi-cantor dynamic differently are those who opt for a non-hierarchical

model. One rabbi explained her ideal clergy dynamic as a team effort: “I shouldn't feel anxious because I can't and you can. I should feel, ‘Thank God we have you and you know how to do that.’ And we'll use that and you do that bit. And [if] you can't or don't want to do this, I can do this bit, and [we can] find a way to do work together without any kind of hierarchy.” The idea that each clergy person brings their own unique strengths was echoed in a cantor who explained, “I think that the relationship between the cantor and the rabbi is such that it has to be based on respect for what each partner brings, both professionally and personally. If both of you are strong in the same areas, it’s not going to be a very balanced partnership. So the goal for me in finding the right cantor-rabbi pairing is: do they balance me?”

Cantor Cohn, director of the DFSSM, expressed a similar idea, “In really strong clergy teams, an awareness of [each member’s] innate areas of expertise and inclination are consciously and mindfully balanced.” He continued to explain that one must have “good self-awareness, good self-appraisal, and [be] able to distribute the incredibly large amount of responsibility that the clergy take on in ways that make sense for the team and the institution.” Balance among the clergy team was an important theme that emerged in several interviews both in terms of skillsets and personality, creating a well-rounded, balanced clergy team.

Nevertheless, the dream or ideal of a well-balanced, non-hierarchical clergy team is separate from the practical application of such a concept. How are today’s clergy working to make this ideal a reality? One clergy person has learned that, “When you start at a congregation, you are walking into a conversation that has been going on for decades

without you. You need to listen. Sit down, and listen." She explained that, in trying to change clergy roles in the synagogue, we must "acknowledge that traditionally, there was a hierarchy." Within that historical context, any change comes from developing strong relationships based on mutual respect and trust, and then working together to develop new leadership models.

In speaking with numerous clergy in the field, there were some who chose not to follow a prescribed path in their rabbi-cantor dynamic, but to create new, unique clergy teams that reflected their own values. In particular, there were a few teams that explored the title co-clergy, all to reflect their desire to level the playing field in some way. The term co-clergy has been part of the discourse at HUC-JIR for some time, with rabbinic and cantorial students assigned projects in which they are "working as co-clergy," for example, "on a merger of two synagogues." One cantor defined the new title in this way: "Co-clergy is not something that exists in the real world. It is something that is forged when two people trust each other enough to make that relationship happen."

Changing a cantor's official title to co-clergy usually means a contractual change in direct supervisor from the senior rabbi to the synagogue board, and may include an increase in salary. With the senior rabbi and the cantor both reporting to the lay leaders of the congregation, they are on more equal footing in the hierarchy of the synagogue. The term co-clergy is not yet widely recognized in the field, but rabbis and cantors who are exposed to it during their training have started to bring it to their communities.

Although the co-clergy model offers many exciting possibilities in expanding the notion of clergy teams, it raises challenges about the very nature of rabbinic and cantorial

authority and power. Both rabbis and cantors seem to agree that the senior rabbi is “where the buck stops,” but is that still true with co-clergy? How might the co-clergy model be reflected in compensation, if both rabbi and cantor are equally contributing to synagogue leadership? Given the already delicate nature of rabbi-cantor dynamics, how might clergy go about leading their congregations toward this model without inciting conflict? One cantor cautioned that despite the openness to co-clergy language at HUC-JIR, “going in and expecting to be treated as co-clergy is just not the way the world works.” In the “real” world, beyond the walls of academia, you cannot “walk in demanding equal footing. Or perhaps I don't think it will result in equal footing if you walk in expecting it.” Rather than an expectation of “equal footing,” it is often the cantor who must gently lead their congregations and rabbinic partners towards being treated as co-clergy. For instance, the cantor may make more of an effort to be seen working in partnership with the rabbi, co-leading life cycle events or attending board meetings, even when it is not necessarily required. The burden of teaching congregations about alternative leadership models is often on the cantor, though many rabbis today are also open to and excited about this idea.

In at least one rabbi-cantor team, a cantor went from a limited service role to a full-time partner with co-clergy status within the first few years. They explained that “it very quickly became a partnership” even before the cantor became full-time. The rabbi suggested they change the cantor’s title to co-clergy in order to better portray their equal roles within the clergy team. According to the rabbi, “After a year, we made it official with the board to have [the cantor] be co-clergy, as a full partnership. Because that’s what

made sense for us." While the rabbi focused on the idyllic nature of their partnership, the cantor was a bit more critical of the situation. Despite a natural evolution of this partnership towards greater parity in responsibilities, this was not mirrored with parity in their salaries. The cantor eventually moved on to another pulpit, citing the fact that they were "harboring a little resentment towards the board because we were equal, but we were certainly not being compensated equally."

Another cantor described the process of attaining the co-clergy title as a matter of redefining the synagogue's hierarchical structure. After a negative experience with an authoritarian, abusive rabbi who was finally retiring after many years, this cantor "sat down with the president, and ultimately with the board, and asked them to change my title to co-senior clergy, and to give me parity with the senior rabbi in that I do not report to the senior rabbi. I report to the lay leadership, ultimately to the president of the congregation. There was a board meeting where they discussed it, and the vote was unanimous, with one exception: the senior rabbi who was retiring." The title co-clergy or senior co-clergy can give the cantor parity with the rabbi in title, and earn them a level of respect that fits their role and position in the congregation.

Defining successful clergy partnerships

Based on the above analysis of clergy interviews, historical research, and the framework of Family Systems Theory, I propose defining successful rabbi-cantor partnerships as self-differentiated clergy teams. Friedman defines "leadership through self-differentiation" in this way: "If a leader will take primary responsibility for his or her

own position as 'head' and work to define his or her own goals and self, while *staying in touch* with the rest of the organism, there is a more than reasonable chance that the body will follow."[103] If the head of the organization can embody their role confidently and know their own needs, their community will likely follow their lead. What is unclear about this definition, however, is how it applies to the context of rabbi-cantor teams. Is the rabbi always the "head," are the rabbi and cantor each heads of their own roles in the synagogue, or do they work as one head of the congregation?

Self-differentiation also can be described as "the capacity to define and remain true to one's own values, wishes, and needs while still remaining connected to the system."[104] Rabbis and cantors work best together when each one is able to stay true to themselves while staying connected to each other and to the greater congregational system. Clergy partnerships break down or become dysfunctional when one or more members of the team cannot stay true to their own values, wishes, or needs, while also staying connected to the synagogue community. Interview findings suggest that there is not one model for success that works for every rabbi and cantor, but rather, ideal partnerships are ones where clergy each feel respected, where their voices are heard, and where they have their own needs met, while maintaining a connection to their clergy team and synagogue community based on trust and collaboration. Rabbis and cantors both felt frustrated in positions where their needs were not met, where they felt unheard and disrespected, or where they felt so alienated by their clergy partners that they had to

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[103] Friedman, 229.

[104] Geringer. Private communication.

separate themselves physically or emotionally from their communities. In these examples, the dysfunctional clergy relationship doubtless effected the culture and functioning of the synagogue community as a whole. Alternatively, when clergy are able to maintain self-differentiation within their teams, they are happier, more fulfilled, and are better able to focus on building meaningful, vibrant Jewish communities.

According to one interviewee, the key to successful partnership is "to not be threatened by the things that aren't yours. Right? So you have to have enough ego to say, 'I bring something to this table,' but enough humility to say 'I don't bring everything to the table.' And both partners have to have that respect for the other's gifts. Otherwise, it gets pretty rocky." From this perspective, it is not about equality, but rather self-differentiation that is the goal, a balance of strengths and gifts that can best serve the community in a partnership built on respect and trust. In fact, in self-differentiated rabbi-cantor relationships, the rabbi was described as "egoless" and having "very little insecurity around someone else taking up space." Another cantor described a beloved rabbi who "appreciated what cantors bring to worship and other parts of synagogue life." It seems that working in collaboration—rabbis and cantors asking each other questions and respecting each other's expertise—takes a particular level of self-confidence and security in oneself.

One test of whether a team is self-differentiated is reflected in the way they work through conflicts as they arise. According to one interviewee, "It's not about the best moments," but rather, "How do you handle the worst moments?" The following example comes from a rabbi-cantor team that I would define as a successful, self-differentiated

clergy partnership: they were nearing the end of the virtual High Holy Day services of 2020, approaching the very last piece of Ne'ilah and moving into Havdalah, when they were to show a special video from a visiting musician. The cantor was ramping up for their last big musical moment, the ubiquitous Janowsky "Avinu Malkeinu." Just as it was about to be the last moment for the cantor to shine, the rabbi mistakenly began introducing the Havdalah video, completely cutting the cantor off. When the cantor realized what was happening, they thought, "In that moment, at any other time, in any other kind of rehearsal or performance space or whatever, there would have been smoke coming out of your ears, you know what I mean? How did you forget *Avinu Malkeinu*?" In the heat of the moment, when anger and blame would have been the cantor's instinctual response, they made a crucial and self-aware assessment. "I think in those moments, you have a choice. Are you going to decide that that was done to you? Or are you going to decide that someone made a mistake, and you deal with it gracefully, and as a team, you're going to work through it?"

Instead of falling prey to the emotional response or a mindset of victimization, the cantor was able to have the level of trust in and respect for their rabbinic partner to believe that this was an unintended error. "I think it becomes problematic when we talk in terms of 'what the rabbi did to me.' Nothing was done *to* me. There was a mistake! And, God knows, I made a million mistakes in the *chagim*." The cantor relied on their own sense of self as well as the strength of their partnership to realize that this was not some underhanded attempt to assert power or undermine the cantor, but was simply an honest omission. Finally, the cantor made their needs known to the rabbi, and they were able to

move forward in the service together. “Rather than kind of go at each other, it was, ‘How are the two of us going to fix this?’ And me saying what I needed.” Because the rabbi was receptive to the cantor’s needs, the two decided what to do next, and were able to continue smoothly. The cantor’s ability to state their needs, the rabbi’s responsiveness, and both of their ability to truly trust their partner, makes this interaction a model of self-differentiated clergy teams.

In terms of synagogue leadership, self-differentiated clergy teams have the confidence in themselves and respect for one another to build a vision for the congregation together. One cantor explained that “Every time I went to an interview, I would say to the rabbi, ‘So tell me…what is your vision for the synagogue?’ And in my opinion, there's a right way to answer that and a wrong way.” She claimed that the wrong way to envision the future of the synagogue would be for the rabbi to say, “Well, here's where we're going. And this is my vision. And this is my…” According to this cantor, the vision should not be decided in a vacuum by the rabbi alone, but rather in collaboration with the rest of the leadership team. She explained that her current rabbinic partner answered the question by saying, “It's not about my vision. It has nothing to do with my vision. It has everything to do with getting the right people on the bus, and then saying to a bus full of people: let's create a vision.” Having the balance of ego and humility to make space for your other teammates and to create a shared vision together is the kind of thinking that leads to successful, self-differentiated clergy teams.

The Future of Clergy Teams

How can rabbis and cantors carry forward and promote the values and skills that lead to successful, self-differentiated clergy partnerships? History has taught us that the roles of Reform rabbi and cantor are continually evolving, adapting to the changing cultural and social norms in the synagogue, as well as the changes in the Reform rabbinic and cantorial seminaries, the CCAR and the ACC. In addition to communal pressures influencing synagogue leadership, the institutions that support clergy have a substantial amount of power to shape and develop clergy roles, from the educational institutions that train rabbis and cantors to the organizations that represent them in the field.

Future goals for HUC-JIR

The curriculum and shared goals of the cantorial and rabbinic programs at HUC-JIR offer one lens into the future of cantorial-rabbinic partnership. Starting with the year in Israel, rabbinic and cantorial students have the opportunity to study together and form lasting relationships in the first year of the program. HUC-JIR's New York campus in particular is a meeting place where budding clergy form personal and professional connections, which can have a significant impact on future clergy partnerships. As one cantor pointed out, "I think if [the rabbi-cantor power dynamic] changes, it's going to [start with] change in the school [before we see these changes in the synagogue]. I think it has to be taught." He explained that "if [equal partnership] is not taught, and it's not really pointed out [to students that] you're both clergy, there is equality," students would not necessarily view rabbis and cantors as equals in their pulpits. An HUC-JIR ordained

rabbi highlighted the importance of personal relationships: “HUC tried to push a sense of partnership, but I also had those natural relationships [with cantors].” By working side by side with cantorial students at HUC, this rabbi said, “I very much felt that sense of partnership and creative collaboration from the beginning.” HUC-JIR is a training ground for the kinds of clergy partnerships that happen in Reform congregations, whether through formal education or the informal relationships that occur in the academic environment. Going forward, I believe HUC-JIR will continue to play a critical role in the formation of clergy identity on both a personal and collaborative level.

I had the opportunity to interview the current DFSSM director, Cantor Richard Cohn, as well as the director of the rabbinical program in New York, Rabbi Lisa Grant, about some of their dreams and visions for the future of HUC-JIR. Cantor Cohn explained that “The cantorial program is seeking the resources to do the kinds of integrative learning that transforms what it means to become a cantor.” In envisioning the future of the rabbinical and cantorial programs at HUC-JIR, Cantor Cohn imagines “applied laboratory experiences” in which students in both programs are “not just learning together, but developing a shared practice.” For instance, “imagine that there was a laboratory environment in which cantorial and rabbinical students were working with faculty teams that represented liturgy, music interpretation, public leadership skills, design and implementation of worship forms, the relationship between word and sound, and communal dynamics. Let's say that was happening with the guidance of faculty teams on a persistent basis, so that, while still students at HUC-JIR, those cantorial and rabbinical students were developing the same capabilities and capacities that we seek to

implement in the field." In this model, students would work in small groups with faculty to develop both a shared language and collaborative vision for the future of synagogue life.

Cantor Cohn also imagines greater synergy between the rabbinic, cantorial, and education programs at HUC-JIR to envision "how the experiences of congregants as learners transform their lives as Jews and integrate with everything else they experience in Jewish life, from the perspective of all three professional disciplines." His vision reflects, in many ways, the ideal of fostering self-differentiated clergy teams, using collaborative learning environments in which each student could bring their own strengths and needs, developing the skills to work in partnership. Cantor Cohn believes that "over a period of a decade or two, that would have a transformative impact on the culture at large," highlighting the influence of education in shaping synagogue life.

Rabbi Lisa Grant, director of the rabbinical program at HUC-JIR New York, focused on similar values as her cantorial counterpart, believing that it is "important to foster relationships in school that will lead to the relationships we want to see." She would want to see more joint opportunities for rabbis and cantors, and more support and guidance in shaping rabbi-cantor partnerships. "People should come out of school knowing what it means to be in partnerships and in sacred leadership," she explained. Rabbi Grant supports a non-hierarchical, feminist-inspired model of synagogue leadership, in which rabbis and cantors work in collaboration, generating ideas together with shared goals. She echoed other clergy in the field who prefer the metaphor of marriage for rabbi-cantor partnerships. You must have "deep respect for one another,"

sharing responsibilities equally, with “clear communication, trust, and resilience when things don’t work.” Beyond this foundation of shared values, there is no one model for clergy (or for marriages) that works for everyone. For instance, she said, it is okay for rabbis and cantors to “sometimes fall into traditional roles, and sometimes not,” as long as they maintain the communication and resilience that leads to strong partnerships.

Partnership between the ACC and the CCAR

Once students are ordained as rabbis and cantors and enter congregational life, they become members of their representative organizations: the ACC for cantors and the CCAR for rabbis. These organizations aim to support and strengthen their members through professional development, community building, and “amplifying the voice” of their clergy to the broader Reform movement.[105] Both the ACC and the CCAR work in partnership with the URJ, the overarching organization of the Reform movement. The development in communication between these three organizations reflects the continually changing dynamics between rabbis and cantors. According to a former ACC president, “Our entire relationship with the CCAR changed dramatically from what I would say was a relationship of tolerance from them to us, to a profoundly great relationship, which I think has a lot to do with personal dynamics.” While these two organizations have historically acted separately, in the past several years, there has been an increase in communications between the two, with joint commissions and resolutions that suggest

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[105] Central Conference of American Rabbis, “Mission Statement,” 2008.

closer ties between rabbis and cantors.[106] Through ongoing education for clergy in the field and other initiatives, these institutions have the power to respond to the ever-evolving needs of rabbis and cantors, and enact change on multiple levels throughout the Reform movement.

Ideal leadership models

Based on my research, there is no one ideal leadership model that works for every clergy team. Rather, each rabbi-cantor team navigates their power differences, communication styles, and responsibilities in their own way. It is important to note that sometimes the disparities in personality or leadership styles between certain rabbis and cantors lead them to unhappy partnerships that end in each going their separate way. Those in positions of power sometimes abuse that authority to the detriment of anyone working in their team. Yet if both partners are willing to work toward the goal of self-differentiated clergy teams, there are some core values that correlate with amiable, effective clergy partners. This includes open communication, a willingness to be vulnerable, and having an established method for working through any issues that arise. Successful clergy partners build their relationship on mutual trust and respect for the skills that each brings to the team, giving each other enough space to meet their own

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[106] Central Conference of American Rabbis, et al, "CCAR/URJ Guidelines on Values-Based Decision-Making: Returning to In-Person Gatherings During the COVID-19 Pandemic," 2020; Central Conference of American Rabbis, et al, "Reform Jewish Movement's Recommendations on COVID-19," 2020; "Cantorate," 1976; "Congregation Professionals," 1977; "Guidelines for Cantorial-Congregational Relationships," 1989; "In Appreciation and Support of the Reform Cantorate," 2003; "Rabbis and Cantors: A Sacred Partnership," 2005.

needs and make their voices heard. Moreover, these clergy report being able to work through challenges that arise without going their separate ways.

Conclusion

Clergy relationships are far from static, and have developed through a combination of partnership and friction, a tension that persists today. When each person is able to bring their whole self to this sacred work and work together in partnership to lead congregations, Jewish life flourishes in new and exciting ways. I believe this team-oriented, dynamic leadership is what we need to move forward as a movement. The fundamental learning from my research is that effective, successful clergy leadership is based on respect, trust, and collaboration: what I call self-differentiated clergy teams. Based on the Family System model, self-differentiated leaders balance their own needs with the needs of the team, making their voices heard while staying connected with their community. Clergy that demonstrated self-differentiated leadership worked through mistakes and challenges gracefully, balanced ego with humility, and envisioned the future of their congregation in partnership rather than in silos. Some self-differentiated clergy maintained more traditional rabbi and cantor roles, while others explored “co-clergy” titles. There is not one ideal model for successful clergy, but they all share the values of collaboration, mutual respect, and a relationship of trust.

Cantor Cohn, director of the HUC-JIR DFSSM, envisions the future of rabbinic and cantorial training in small, group-based, collaborative learning modules, which echo the values of self-differentiated leadership. If clergy learn to work together towards a shared goal during their training, they will be set up for success in the field. Rabbi Lisa Grant, head of the HUC-JIR rabbinical program on the New York campus, presents a collaborative model for rabbi-cantor partnerships as non-hierarchical, equal members of

the clergy team. She focuses on the importance of communication and resilience, echoing the clergy partners who were able to work through challenges or tensions through effective communication. Both Cantor Cohn and Rabbi Grant demonstrate the forward-thinking, progressive values of HUC-JIR, a training ground for the rabbis and cantors of the future.

On the institutional level, I hope to see even more communication and greater collaboration between the CCAR and the ACC. Historically, these two organizations clashed when cantors started vying for greater respect and authority in the synagogue. However, over the past several decades, through the hard work and efforts of both cantors and rabbis, the ACC and the CCAR have begun to work together on joint projects and resolutions, somewhat paralleling the closer partnership between rabbis and cantors in the field. There is agreement across the board on the fact that today's cantors are clergy, fulfilling a myriad of responsibilities in synagogue leadership, and deserve to be treated as such.[107] The joint ACC and CCAR 2005 document "Rabbis and Cantors: A Sacred Partnership" builds on the 1989 guidelines with personal stories of effective clergy teams. Nevertheless, I believe even the 2005 resolution is outdated, and a new document could better reflect the values of partnership espoused by today's clergy.

While historical sources of authority still have practical applications for the power dynamics between rabbis and cantors today, clergy are not bound by traditional roles. Cantors give sermons and offer pastoral care, rabbis lead music, and the specific responsibilities of each clergy person vary from community to community. If the

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[107] "Guidelines for Cantorial-Congregational Relationships," 1989.

cantorial and rabbinic past until this point has taught us anything, it is that clergy are writing their own history. The clergy roles that cantors and rabbis inhabit comprise of more than just a collection of sermons and liturgical music. They have the ability to shape and influence their congregational culture, and use their platform to engender Jewish values in their congregational communities. My hope is that this study of rabbinic-cantorial relationships helps clergy work in collaborative partnership so that they can better serve their communities. The core role of clergy is to foster and build vibrant Jewish communities. When unhindered by fear or anger, rabbis and cantors can work towards this end, bringing together their diverse, unique talents and skills to create exciting, inspiring Jewish life.

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