

Reference Code**Repository**

LGBTQ Religious Archives Network

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Title

Dr. Rebecca T. Alpert Oral History Interview and Transcript

Date

February 26, 1999

Extant

1 hour 31 minutes interview (three files) and 1 transcript

Abstract

Dr. Rebecca T. Alpert discusses being one of few women in Rabbinical school, the challenges she faced when coming out as a lesbian, and the work she has done as an academic in the Jewish community, including her book *Like Bread on the Seder Plate*.

Biographical

Rebecca Trachtenberg Alpert was born to a non-observant Jewish family in Brooklyn, New York in April, 1950. She grew up in Brooklyn, attended synagogue, and absorbed Jewish culture from Brooklyn's civic life. She lived with her parents while she studied religion at Barnard College. To enlarge her experience, she spent her junior year in Israel and returned interested in the Reconstructionist movement as it was then evolving. With encouragement from Elaine Pagels, Alpert decided to enter the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC) in Philadelphia, its third woman candidate. There she met and married fellow student Joel Alpert. She graduated from RRC in 1976 and completed a doctorate in Religion at Temple in 1978. After graduation she was active in the Philadelphia communities and she began to teach as an adjunct and work as a rabbi with numerous Reconstructionist congregations across the United States. She worked in an administrative capacity at RRC as the Dean of Students until 1987.

Rebecca had two children with Joel, a daughter Lynn in 1982 and son Avi in 1984. In 1986, Rebecca came out as a lesbian; she and Joel divorced on friendly terms, and Rebecca became partners with Christie Balka. At that time, but not specifically because of coming out, her relationship with RRC ruptured. From 1988-1991 she was the Director of Adult Programs at

Temple University, and in 1992, she became the Director of the Women's Studies Program at Temple University. In 1997, she became a member of its Religion and Women's Studies faculty, where she currently teaches courses on American religion, religion and sexuality, lesbian and gay lives, and race and gender. Concurrently, she has been active with the American Academy of Religion, the Women's Law Project, and the Family Planning Council of Southeastern Pennsylvania. She was also the co-chair of the Mayor's Commission on Sexual Minorities in Philadelphia under the Rendell administration.

Dr. Alpert is Professor of Religion and Women's Studies at Temple University. She is the co-author (with Jacob Staub) of *Exploring Judaism: A Reconstructionist Approach* (1985; rev.ed., 2000), author of *Like Bread on the Seder Plate: Jewish Lesbians and the Transformation of Tradition* published by Columbia University Press (1997), editor of *Voices of the Religious Left: A Contemporary Sourcebook* for Temple University Press (2000) and co-editor (with Sue Elwell and Shirley Idelson) of *Lesbian Rabbis: The First Generation* published by Rutgers University Press in 2001. She has written numerous articles on Jewish medical ethics and contemporary Jewish life, published in *Tikkun*, *Judaism*, *Shofar*, and *The Journal of American Ethnic History*. She published *Out of Left Field: Jews and Black Baseball* (Oxford University Press) in 2011. In October 2014, Alpert was appointed as Associate dean for Academic Affairs of the College of Liberal Arts at Temple. Her next book, *Religion and Sports: An Introduction and Case Studies*, is scheduled to be published by Columbia University Press in May 2015.

Scope and Content

Dr. Rebecca T. Alpert was among the first women in America ordained as a rabbi in the newly forming Reconstructionist movement. Her interview describes her Jewish childhood and education in New York. Attracted to the work of Mordecai Kaplan, she entered and graduated from the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in 1976 and later joined its staff. In this interview, she discusses how she was urged to leave the College when she was open about her lesbian partner. She described how she experienced divorce, family life and a writing career. She also briefly describes her work as faculty at Temple University. Although she is culturally Jewish, she currently finds more nurturing spirituality in a variety of religious practices.

This interview was conducted by Sally Benson Alshe for an oral history project of American Jewish life.

Access

Open to all researchers.

<https://lgbtqreligiousarchives.org/oral-histories/rebecca-t-alpert>

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Languages

Collection material is in English

Custodial History

This tape was given to LGBTQ-RAN archives by the interviewee.

Existence and Location of Originals

[Myer and Rosaline Feinstein Center for American Jewish History Oral Histories Temple University Libraries, Special Collections Research Center](#)

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Tags

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