“What kind of job is that for a nice Jewish boy?”: Jewish Anxieties over Masculinity in an Age of Affluence (1945-1965)

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In the prosperous years after World War II, the growing businesses and increasing professionalization of American Jewish men propelled them into the middle class. Accompanying the new economic profile, however, was an undercurrent of anxiety over middle-class norms of masculinity, and how they threatened to limit the opportunities, the idealism, and even the morality of Jewish men. This presentation will follow the conversations of the American Jewish writers, rabbis, activists, scholars and social critics who argued that American Jewish men experienced a crisis of masculinity in the postwar period. These debates reveal a more complicated and ambivalent embrace of the “American Dream” than has been previously acknowledged in the historiography of American Jews in the postwar period.

Rachel Kranson’s current project traces the ways that American Jews responded to unprecedented affluence in the decades after World War II. She teaches courses on Judaism and American religion, and is also on the steering committee of the Women’s Studies program.