ESTHER AND HADASSAH: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF FEMALE AGENCY

Grace Thevamalar Paulson

Bachelor of Applied Arts (Spicer Memorial College)

Graduate Diploma in Arts (Massey University)

Post Graduate Diploma. Bus. Inf. Systems (Massey University)

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Philosophy

Principal Supervisor: Professor Jane Fernandez

Associate Supervisor: Dr. Lindsay Morton

Avondale College of Higher Education

October 2018

CERTIFICATION

Statement of Original Authorship

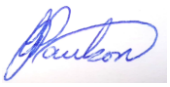
I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted previously for a degree or diploma at this institution, an Australian or overseas university or any other institution of higher education. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signed 

Date: 3 December 2018

Statement of Copyright

I grant to Avondale College of Higher Education the rights to archive in the College library, and to make available my thesis in whole or in part for study now and in the future. I retain all proprietary rights. I also retain the right to use in future works all or part of this thesis.

Signed: 

Date: 3 December 2018

ABSTRACT

The intention of this study is to compare two texts separated by thousands of years, in the context of female agency. The modern male-authored text *Hadassah: One Night with the King* will be compared in the light of 3 models of feminist critique of the biblical Esther regarding female empowerment. This study aims to determine if the discourses within the modern text, *Hadassah: One Night with the King* positions its protagonists as conforming to one or more of three models established by this study's reading of the biblical Esther. The three models are Model 1) Esther as a 'Traditional Female Stereotype', Model 2) Esther as Subversives, or Model 3) Esther as a 'Type for the Jewish people'. It also seeks to establish when the representation of Hadassah/Kesselman and/or Vashti in *Hadassah: One Night with the King* falls outside the three models

This study follows a qualitative methodology and literary analysis that identifies and analyses the literary constructs, imagery, structure, settings and relationships in its exploration of female agency through the frame of limitations and enablers, and three analytical models of the *Book of Esther*. The analysis and conclusions form part of this study. The analysis finds that female agency in *Hadassah: One Night with the King* is complex, complicated, and, because of its contextual nature, not easily or strictly aligned within a particular model. The analysis indicates that although the primary protagonist does exercise agency in parts of the Scroll narrative of *Hadassah One Night with the King*, she appears, by the close of the text, to surrender to the stereotype of femininity depicted in representations of the biblical Esther as set out in Model 1 of this thesis. This finding indicates that the stereotypical representations of Esther's agency have not come very far since biblical times.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is with profound gratitude that I acknowledge my supervisors, Professor Jane Fernandez and Dr. Lindsay Morton for their guidance during my study. Their support and assistance in the selection of this topic, constant encouragement, motivation, reading many versions of my thesis and the time spent with me on this journey have been invaluable. I have learned so much from them. I thank them for their encouragement. This study would not be a possible without them.

My sincere thanks also to Associate Professor Daniel Reynaud for his constructive feedback and input into the shaping of this thesis. His love for biblical literature is an inspiration.

A note of thanks to Mrs. Tracey Cox for her assistance with cross-checking the references.

I would like to acknowledge Avondale College for the opportunity provided to study while working.

A special thanks to my husband who has been a constant support and to my family for giving me the time and space to work on my thesis.

I thank God who has given me the courage to overcome self-perceptions and appreciate who He has created me to be and the value He has placed on me. All glory be to Him.

KEY CHARACTERS

Esther – Queen Esther from the biblical *Book of Esther*

Hadassah – Hadassah bin Abihail, the adopted daughter of Mordecai (referred to as Hadassah)

Kesselman - Hadassah Kesselman, the modern-day bride-to-be (referred to as Kesselman)

ben Yuda – Jacob ben Yuda, the husband of Kesselman

Jacob – The priest

Thesis and Text Chapter Structure

Thesis	*Hadassah: One Night with the King*
Chapter 3 – The Early Years	Chapter 1 – 8
Chapter 4 – Exercising Agency	Chapter 9 – 50
Chapter 5 – Loss of Agency	Chapter 51 – 52

Table of Contents

CERTIFICATION ii

ABSTRACT iii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS iv

KEY CHARACTERS v

INTRODUCTION 1

- Statement of the Problem 3
- Research Outline 3
- Overview of the Texts 4
- Research Context 5
- Methodology and Limitations 7

CHAPTER 1 – WHAT IS AGENCY? 9

- Definitions - Agency as an Endeavour for Freedom 9
- Definitions - Agency as a Construct of the Social Framework 10
- Enablers and Limitations of Agency 20

CHAPTER 2 –DOMINANT READINGS OF THE *BOOK OF ESTHER* 22

- Model 1 - Esther as a Traditional Stereotype 23
- Model 2 - Esther as Subversive of Male Gaze and Authority 29
- Model 3 - Esther as a Type of the Diasporic Jewish People 33

CHAPTER 3 – DISCOVERING AGENCY: THE EARLY YEARS 39

- Setting the Scene: Kesselman and the Museum 39
- Setting the Scene: Hadassah in her Early Years 46
- Vashti - The Queen's Agency 52

CHAPTER 4 – EXERCISING AGENCY: COMING OF AGE 55

- Hadassah the Adventurer 55
- Hadassah the Game Changer 60
- Hadassah the Prisoner 63
- Hadassah the Harlot 65
- Hadassah the Avenger 71

CHAPTER 5 – LOSS OF AGENCY: FINAL YEARS 76

- Hadassah the Mentor/Model 76
- Kesselman the Student 80

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH 85

Findings and Implications 85
REFERENCES 94
Appendix 1 97

INTRODUCTION

As an androcentric text that has contributed to the foundations on which Western patriarchal society is based (Cahill, 1998, p. 6) and to the ideologies that justify the subjugation of women (Ao, 2016, p. 3; Bach, 1999, p. xiv), the Bible serves as an important resource to draw on for women's studies. As part of the biblical canon, the *Book of Esther* has often been read within the confines of the Christian faith that the Bible is God's authoritative text (Mosala, 1986 as cited in Nadar, 2003, p. 7). As such, the interpretations of the *Book of Esther* have had, and continue to have, widespread implications for Christians and women living in patriarchal societies. In recent decades, however, feminist literary theory has opened up opportunities for women to read and interpret biblical texts critically in regards to representations of gender. It is in this context that the study of the *Book of Esther* is significant. In some Christian traditions, twenty-first century women are confronted with issues of inequality, such as, through exclusion from church leadership and ministerial roles, as is evident through ongoing debates (Dowell, 2016; Liveris et al., 2007, p. 29; Nadar, 2009, p. 392). The foundation of such deliberations about the status and role of women within Christian tradition often lies in interpretations of biblical texts that marginalize women (Mhango, 2004, p. iv). However, this does not have to be the case.

Texts serve to shape society as well as be influenced by it, as Cheryl Exum notes (1999, p. 161). This response to social reality happens through the dialogic relationship that texts have with the reader and the larger context of society and culture. Texts influence society by conveying the various facets of lifestyle such as attitudes, values, beliefs, hopes and aspirations of that particular culture in the text (Fedson, 2011, p. 168). Thus, the text in this study has the potential to influence contemporary women readers by affecting self-perception and awareness of their roles in society. This study, therefore, seeks to explore the presentation of female agency within Tommy Tenney & Mark Olsen's *Hadassah: One Night with the King* (2004) as compared to the representation of Esther in the biblical *Book of Esther*. This study is an ideological critique undertaken through literary analysis. It works on the premise that the essence of narrative serves as a platform for observing life changes and for articulating individual choice (Gubrium, Holstein, Marvasti, & McKinney, 2012, p. 3).

In this context, the presentation of female agency within a 21st century re-telling of an ancient text becomes significant.

Written by two male authors, Tenney & Olsen (2004), the presentation of the main protagonists' female agency in the modern text *Hadassah: One Night with the King*, can influence the modern reader's agency. *Hadassah: One Night with the King* begins with the question, "Father, where are you taking me?" (p. 15) signalling the uncertainty of the course of one of the main protagonists, Hadassah Kesselman's (hereinafter referred to as Kesselman) life. Given that the modern protagonist Hadassah Kesselman is portrayed as a descendant of Esther, the novel, through this opening line, reinforces Kesselman's subject-position as a daughter in a 21st century context who must submit to Mordecai's leading, not unlike the biblical Esther. Yet, the nature of Kesselman's question: "Where are you taking me?" suggests that Kesselman is not without a will of her own. While her question could seem, on the surface, to display a degree of compliance, it could also be argued that Kesselman's ability to speak and to frame her voice in the form of a query indicates that she has a will of her own. This study is interested in analysing this tension through the lens of female agency. This study aims to do this through exploring the enablers and the limitations of agency to establish how Kesselman balances the demands of the patriarchal values of her father against her desires as a modern woman.

The study also explores another agentive journey of Hadassah bin Abihail's (hereinafter referred to as Hadassah) childhood through to her aged years as Queen Esther. In this study the enablers and limitations of agency are limited to comparisons with the dominant models established in this study, through a selection of readings of the *Book of Esther*. Also, it considers how the men in *Hadassah: One Night with the King* respond to the women, by either enabling them to exercise agency or by restricting their choices. Finally, the study evaluates Hadassah's positioning in relation to the male characters at various significant moments of her life. The study attempts to understand how she may be perceived at these points regarding female agency: i.e. as one who seems to be either conforming to the stereotypical image of women as defined by patriarchal traditions or as a subversive woman, as one who displays a varied form of agency.

Statement of the Problem

An initial reading of *Hadassah: One Night with the King* appears to indicate that the 21st-century representation of Queen Esther's agency has not shifted significantly since the writing of the biblical *Book of Esther*. It would appear that while attempts have been made to apply modern interventions and tropes such as cross-dressing, falling in love, and teenage rebellion in *Hadassah: One Night with the King*, one of the main protagonists, the modern Hadassah Kesselman appears to have the same fate as that of Esther from the *Book of Esther*. This positioning of Hadassah Kesselman within *Hadassah: One Night with the King* is problematic from a feminist perspective, as it does not seem to indicate progress for women in comparison to the *Book of Esther*. This study will help to evidence the presence of, exercise of, the outcome of, and potential responses to the presentation of agency by the key women characters. The study will do this through first establishing 3 models of representations of Esther drawn from dominant feminist critique of the *Book of Esther*. It will then employ these models in critiquing the modern 'Esther' in *Hadassah: One Night with the King* in the context of female agency. The structure of the thesis is outlined below.

Research Outline

The Introduction provides an overview of the two texts that are used in this study and deals with the research context, the theory, and provides the framework for the study, the methodology and limitations of the study.

Chapter 1 aims to define the concept of female agency. Firstly, the chapter explores female agency as an endeavour for freedom from patriarchal constraints and as a societal construct. The chapter then considers the concepts of enablers and limitations of agency and arrives at a working definition of female agency for this study.

Chapter 2 sets up three dominant models of feminist critique of the *Book of Esther* and discusses the enablers and limitations of agency as they apply to each of the models. It also reviews the definition of agency against the three models and establishes these models as a framework for comparing the biblical *Esther* with

Hadassah: One Night with the King.

Chapter 3 begins the analysis of *Hadassah: One Night with the King* on female agency, focusing on Hadassah bin Abihail and Hadassah Kesselman and their agentive abilities at the beginning of the text as well as their early years. It focuses on female agency as it is presented within the text in relation to their exploration of the boundaries of agency. Vashti's role as it contributes to agency is also explored as a model.

Chapter 4 continues the analysis of the texts on female agency focusing on the middle years of Hadassah bin Abihail. It discusses the experiences of Hadassah as she exercises agency and the enablers and limitations as they impact on the exercise of agency through her as an adventurer, a game changer, a prisoner, a harlot and an avenger.

Chapter 5 analyses the lives of Hadassah bin Abihail, the mentor, and Hadassah bin Kesselman, the student, at the close of the novel, and their reflections on life in the context of the enablers and limitations of agency.

The Conclusion provides a summary of the thesis, findings and implications of the study, and closes with recommendations for further research.

Overview of the Texts

The following provides an overview of the two texts that have been chosen for this study. The biblical *Book of Esther* is a narrative about a young Jewish girl named Esther, an orphan adopted by her uncle Mordecai. She grows up in exile in Persia and lives with her uncle as an obedient Jewish child until she is recruited into the harem of King Ahasuerus. Concealing her Jewish identity at Mordecai's request until the close of the narrative, she goes on to become Queen of Persia and the key player in foiling a plan to annihilate the Jewish people contrived by their enemy Haman. Esther and her uncle are recognized as those responsible for the establishment of the Purim festival that continues to be observed by the Jewish community even in the 21st century. At first reading, the *Book of Esther* is a short story of a poor, orphan girl's ascension to the throne as Queen of Persia. However, the subtexts deal with issues of power, gender, race, agency and empowerment.

Hadassah: One Night with the King is a modern re-telling of the *Book of Esther* authored in the 21st century. The narrative of Hadassah bin Abihail (Queen Esther) is seen through the eyes of the modern young bride-to-be Hadassah Kesselman as she reads the memoir of her ancestor from ancient times. Hadassah bin Abihail's memoir provides an ethnographic account of her life events and her ascension to the throne for future generations. Although separated by centuries, both texts follow the narrative of the same woman. While the biblical *Book of Esther* continues to be part of the research agenda of biblical and literary studies, this modern re-telling has attracted very little literary criticism despite its potential for illuminating contemporary Western Christian values and models of femininity and agency. The research context below provides the reasons for the choice of these two texts for this study.

Research Context

Although the Bible is an ancient text which was written many centuries ago, it is the foundational text of the Christian religion, similar to the Tanakh (Hebrew Scripture) which is the foundational text of Judaism, and is used widely around the world even in the 21st century. Further, the Bible is also known and accepted as a piece of literature. However, its critique was traditionally reserved for privileged voices within religious orders, and the historical-critical method for interpretation (de Wit, Jonker, Kool, & Schipani, 2004, p. 11; Kitzberger, 1999, p. 29). This historical-critical method was ostensibly 'objective' and was perceived to maintain and perpetuate the truth as spoken by God. Because of its sacredness, all other forms of interpretation were considered to be *eisegesis*, i.e., the reader's interpretation (Tolbert, 1983, pp. 118 - 119). However, development of new methods of criticism in the 20th century, such as Marxism, feminism and reader-response criticism among others opened up possibilities for multiple critical, cultural interpretations that extended to the study of the Bible. Also, post-modernism has dispelled the notion of the existence of a 'single' truth paving the way for the exploration of other perspectives.

The reasons for the choice of *Hadassah: One Night with the King* for this study fall within the intention of this research as a feminist study. Because the study is about female agency and both the *Book of Esther* and *Hadassah: One Night with the King* are

androcentric texts (Mhango, 2004, p. iv; Nadar, 2009, pp. 18 - 19) separated by time and culture, they provide for an interesting comparison of women's lives within two distinct time periods and cultures. Also, because both texts are authored by men, they provide for comparison of men's writings about women. *Hadassah: One Night with the King* is written by two men, Tenney & Olsen. While there is no conclusive evidence that the author of the *Book of Esther* was male, Alter (1981, p. 146) observes that an assumption can be made that the biblical texts were authored by men based on the texts' portrayal of women as inferior to men. Also, through their association with religion - specifically Christianity and Judaism – both of these texts have the potential to influence religious followers. For women religious followers, especially those who find their society and culture operating on the patriarchal values of the Bible (Klein, 2003, p. 8), these texts could either empower them or reinforce their subjugated role in society through their influence. This influence of the text on the reader is reiterated by de Wit et al., (2004, p. 13). They observe that the relevance of the biblical text depends "for personal faith or social praxis, to a great extent on the cultural values adhered to" and the response could either lead towards empowerment or despair. Therefore, the choice of *Hadassah: One Night with the King* for its presentation of female agency is appropriate for this study which is feminist in its intent.

And finally, there appears to be no research comparing female agency within the modern text and the *Book of Esther.* Kelly-Zukowski (2005) discusses a number of Old Testament women's agency in the context of "creativity", "manipulation" and "deceit" arguing that they manipulated their way towards the fulfilment of God's plan through their lives (p. 34). However, she excludes the *Book of Esther* from her discussion. A number of other scholars have explored agency in the *Book of Esther* from various perspectives but comparisons between *Hadassah: One Night with the King* and the *Book of Esther* could not be found at the time of this study. Using the biblical Esther only as a point of reference, a comparison of female agency within *Hadassah: One Night with the King* will highlight the changes in the presentation of agency in texts that are separated by thousands of years. This study will fill the gap in research through its comparison of the presentation of female agency within these two texts.

Methodology and Limitations

The methodology used for this research falls under the qualitative paradigm, which seeks to understand human experience through its representation in the texts and is "inductivist, constructionist and interpretivist" (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 386). Within the qualitative paradigm, following the interpretivist method, literary analysis is used to detect the presence of, intention for and/or the absence of agency through the relationships, structure, settings, imagery, voice in order to detect the impact of the limitations and enablers of agency. This analysis focuses on the details that are understood in consideration of the contexts within which the characters are studied (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 404). Literary analysis helps bring out the tensions in power and positioning in the presentation of female agency.

The scope of this study is limited to the textual contents of the text and the reader's interpretation of it. The first stems from the fact that literary criticism, from a hermeneutical perspective, is the analysis of texts in order to understand what the discourse is about (Culler, 1997, p. 64). Further, as a feminist study, literary criticism is based on feminist epistemology which is described by Fuchs as "characterized by its rejection of the omniscient, dis-interested gaze of the omniscient historian" (2008, p. 50). In the analysis of the text for its presentation of female agency through its enablers and limitations, this study rejects the omniscient, dis-interested gaze of the omniscient historian. Instead using Tompkins (1980, p. 205) idea of the text as the "single unit of interpretation", female agency is explored.

A subsequent limitation of this research that must be acknowledged is researcher's context. Individual criticism based on textual analysis is one of the strengths of literary criticism. Based on the premise that meaning is generated in the process of interaction between the text and the reader, literary analysis is undertaken within the researcher's context. The inability to extricate the researcher from their context causes a dilemma. Neill (2013, p. 336) summarizes this dilemma aptly by saying:

> Words don't have meanings which somehow exist independently of our encounter with those words and thus not only is it not possible, even with the best will in the world, to cleanse one's reception of any discourse of

> preconceptions but, moreover, it is not possible to receive it as discourse without these preconceptions.

Richardson (2002, p. 2) reiterates this point in saying:

> We are always present in our texts, no matter how we try to suppress ourselves. We are always writing in particular contexts—contexts that affect what and how we write and who we become. Power relationships are always present.

Considering the two statements above, the researcher acknowledges that this work is based on the researcher's current context as an Asian educated Christian female grappling with the positioning of women within biblical texts and their modern re-tellings. Also, because the interpretation is based on what the researcher observes in the text, broader claims about the society cannot be made. Instead, what the text says can be validated as the ideologies found only within that particular text.

Finally, the focus of this study is on female agency. Therefore, the agency of men is the focus of critical analysis here only when their actions serve as enabling or limiting the protagonist's agency.

CHAPTER 1 – WHAT IS AGENCY?

Definitions - Agency as an Endeavour for Freedom

Agency, viewed from the perspective of an individual who feels constrained by either internal or external influencers - such as circumstances, society, culture, race, their own psyche and other factors - is an attempt for freedom in decision-making. In this sense, as Charrad (2010) observes, the concept of agency is about "power" and the "capacity to act", towards gaining independence and freedom (p. 517). The synonyms of agency are "motivation", "will", "purposiveness", "intentionality", "choice", "initiative", "freedom", "self-hood", and "creativity" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 962). Inherent in these synonyms is the concept of self-expression in some form or another. The extent of self-expression is dependent on the perception of the contextual factors that influence the individual. Hence, the enablers of agency serve either as catalysts or triggers for responses that evidence the use of agency while the limitations suggest a restraint from the exercise of agency. However, even the enablers could elicit no response for agency from women under specific conditions and the limitations could elicit responses towards exercising agency (Charrad, 2010, p. 519). Agency is, hence a complex phenomenon with the outcomes of the exercise of agency evident in temporary routine activities as well as through the changes in perspectives that impact on life in general. The motive or intention is to have the power to be an autonomous individual.

As an endeavour for freedom, female agency is characterized by intent and subversive acts of resistance against oppression. The tools that aid in the enactment of this resistance are both tangible and intangible assets. The positive outcome of the use of these assets when evident can lead toward empowerment. When these outcomes are not positive and seem to reinforce or are perceived to reinforce the subjugated position of women, it signals a loss of agency as it does not motivate the individual to respond to the context so as to bring them positive change. The lack of responses or the responses that seem to be accepting of the situation could stem out of fear, intimidation, coercion or many other such factors and therefore serve as limitations to the exercise of agency (Abrams, 1999, p. 827). Intentionality, on the other hand, in the exercise of agency can result from the use of psychological assets such as self-definition and self-direction and self-discovery and/or the use of tangible assets. The outcomes of the exercise of this

intentionality when evident, are interpreted as agency that leads to empowerment. The intent and the response to the situation are both critical to understanding agency as an endeavour for freedom.

The notion of agency as an endeavour for freedom is highly contextual and embedded in social practices or is in other words, "intersubjective" (Showden, 2011, p. 7); the degree to which it is sought can vary depending on the intent of the individual. With an intention to make a simple change in perception to an attempt to overturn inbuilt societal values and systems, agency can be subtle and quiet, or loud and violent. It is a desire to derive a result or outcome that is intended to be beneficial to the individual as it contributes to empowerment and includes the process by which the attempt is made to achieve this outcome.

In summary, agency is an attempt at gaining autonomy and power in decision-making about matters that concern the individual and leads them towards empowerment. The discussion of the influencers of agency - both intangible and tangible - indicate an attempt at freedom through the liberation of the mind, the impoverished physical circumstances and the ideologies that constrain the exercise of agency. Female agency then is about power and freedom to choose for oneself what seems fit and that which genuinely reflects the individual's desires and thoughts for empowerment rather than reinforcing subjugated positions (Abrams, 1999, p. 829). Agency, therefore, is complex and complicated because it is deeply embedded within societal cultures and ideologies (Showden, 2011, p. 7). The intent then is that the individual can choose and act according to what the individual wants despite the influencers. The section below deals with agency as a construct.

Definitions - Agency as a Construct of the Social Framework

Agency as a construct is the result of the influence of external factors such as society, culture, religious affiliation, finances, and education on the perceptions and the actual power that women have. Mackenzie and Stoljar (2000) allude to agency as a construct when they observe that according to some Foucauldian theories, agency must be conjured not from an individual's perspective but more from the impact of the shifting power structures (p. 10). Davies (1991) positions the individual amidst these

shifting powers when he says, “Individuals are conceived as being in relation to something external to themselves called "society" which acts forcefully upon them and against which they can pit themselves (p. 42). Davies’ observation suggest that society sets up expectations or a frame of reference that individuals are expected to adhere to. There is hence a relationship between the society and individuals with each impacting on the other. Klugman et al., (2014) say, “Norms affect people’s daily actions and act as an underlying and sometimes subconscious factor that affects processing information, making decisions, and taking actions” (p. 26-27). Further, Wardlow (2006) notes of the influence of society that, “Persons are thus only fleetingly and provisionally unitary actors, for they are always oriented toward and moved by the relationships in which they are embedded and of which they are made” (p. 13). Wardlow’s statement implies that the individual at any given moment cannot have autonomy for agentive action independent totally of the contexts or society in which they live. The influence of society on individuals and women in particular is perhaps what causes Showden to observe that agency is a construct of the social framework (2011, p. 11 - 12) and that, “one can only understand the individual’s sense of purpose, desire, and opportunities by considering her in her environment” (2011, p. 38). Charrad calls this environment the “social structure” within which one lives (2010, p. 518); Bowden and Mummery: “the bounds of socially authorized actions” (2014, p. 125); and Druxes says of agency as a construct that “we are inscribed in social practices and institutions” (1996, p. 12). Agency as a construct is the social framework that is meant to guide the thoughts and actions and behaviours of individuals.

Stereotypes are an example of a construct of society. The stereotypical definition could be created based on relationships, “race”, “class”, “sexual orientation”, and “variations of time”, “place” and “political context” among others observes Abrams (1999, p. 820). Her list highlights the ideological underpinnings that constitute societies and the expectations of those living under it. Davies (1991) suggests that the framework is set up through discourses that the individual is constituted by within a particular context. She says, “choices are understood as more akin to ‘forced choices’, since the subject's positioning within particular discourses makes the ‘chosen’ line of action the only possible action, not because there are no other lines of action but because one has

been subjectively constituted through one's placement within that discourse to want that line of action" (p. 46). Hence, women who find themselves part of or originate from these cultures have psychological factors that affect the use – and perception - of their capacity for agency. Gammage, Kabeer, and van der Meulen Rodgers (2016, p. 23) and Klugman et al, (2014, p. 15) recognize the impact of the societal discourses on women and hence observe that in order to bring about changes in society with regards to female agency, they must begin through discussions with the key players that influence and shape society. Ideologies can thus have both positive and negative impacts on agency. As Klugman et al. (2014) observe, "Adverse social norms underpin and reinforce the multiple deprivations that many women and girls experience" (p. 4). As a construct, agency is dictated through the ideologies constructed by society that elicit a particular response creating the stereotype.

Agency as an endeavour for freedom and a construct of the social framework go hand in hand. In agency as an endeavour for freedom, there is the intention and desire for autonomy within a society and culture and a desire to be liberated from the factors that serve as limitations to agency. On the other hand, agency as a construct consists of the perceptions that are derived from ideologies or social circumstances that seem to limit agency (Kabeer, as cited in Alsop et al., 2006, p. 11). There is, hence a complex interconnectedness of agency as a construct and agency as an endeavour for freedom.

Agency as a construct and an endeavour for freedom are not without criticism. The difficulty to clearly distinguish between the terms empowerment and agency is one of them. Klugman et al., (2014, p. 1) note that these two terms are often used interchangeably in literature, and can be synonymous. Although synonymous, without agency there can be no empowerment as agency is about power. When the outcomes of the exercise of agency are perceived to be beneficial to the individual, it leads to empowerment. However, on the other hand, without at least a certain sense of empowerment, agency cannot be exercised. Therefore, some of the differences between the terms can be attributed to the perception of the concepts of empowerment and agency. For Drydyk (2013) agency does not capture the notion of empowerment (p. 249) because empowerment is a "process of change with a specific kind of outcome" (p. 251). This view limits agency to its temporal effect. Also, the outcomes do not always

evidence the use of agency as the outcomes depend on how much power is appropriated through the exercise of agency. For example, Vashti was banished for exercising agency. The outcome was meant to be beneficial for her – protect her from being shamed; but because the men held the power, her actions resulted in her shaming – the loss of power from being Queen. Since agency is a developing concept and is, according to Abrams (1999, p. 249, being "fitted" and "adapted in a more nuanced way to the real world of development", there is scope for creating a definition of agency that suits this study.

Agency as a concept then deals with power either perceived or real (Bowden & Mummery, 2014, p. 123). The perception and possession of power often influences responses and decisions in relation to situations. For example, if a woman finds herself in a situation in which she believes she does not have the power to speak, her response in that situation will be influenced by this perception, whether it be for compliance or resistance. Resistance, whether applied, with the intention of seeking to be liberated or where it is perceived to bring about a beneficial outcome, is a mark of agency (Bowden & Mummery, 2014, p. 124). Whereas submitting and conforming due to fear, intimidation, coercion or simply because the individual does not perceive they have the right to make a decision for themselves indicates a lack of agency. In other words, the exercise of agency is an indicator of the presence of agency and inaction the lack of agency. However, agency involves both internal factors, such as perceptions and fear, as well as external influencers, such as society and culture. All of these factors – internal and external - can serve as enablers or limitations for agency based on the context of the individual and in turn the real or perceived power held by the individual.

Psychological or intangible assets that have a positive influence on the perception of or real power held serve as enablers of agency. Assets here mean 'resources' (Alsop, Bertelsen, & Holland, 2006, p. 11). Because the psychological assets are non-exhaustive and highly contextual, limiting the scope of these assets for this study is essential. For the purposes and scope of this study, therefore, these psychological assets are limited to those that Meyers (2014) proposes as critical to empowerment: self-discovery, self-definition and self-direction (para 5). Of these three concepts, self-definition is synonymous with self-perception according to Alsop et al., (2006, p. 82) who confirm that self-perception is a psychological asset fundamental to

agency. The significance of self-definition is highlighted by Pollack who says that it is "an internal or psychological quality from which a woman derives a sense or feeling that she can function as an autonomous, self-determining individual" (2000, p. 82). Since self-perception is a psychological asset, an outcome is required to evidence the impact of this asset. If the outcomes seem to have impacted the individual positively, they signal a move toward empowerment. However, if the outcomes seem to contribute towards a decline in self-perception, this can lead toward disempowerment. Therefore, the manner in which self-perception is applied as well as the extent of the utilization of self-perception becomes critical to understanding its impact on agency.

An example of Esther, the main protagonist in the *Book of Esther,* illustrates the effect of the psychological asset, self-perception. When pleading for her life and the life of the Jewish people Esther says: "If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king" (Esther 7:4). Esther's humility suggests the uncertainty of her position with the King as one that is favoured or not. This uncertainty is reflected in her self-perception as a not-so-worthy individual and therefore not worthy of 'disturbing the king'. Her self-perception in this instance is dependent on the value the king placed on her life. Hence, when he requests her to reveal the identity of the villain who threatened to annihilate the Jews including the Queen, Esther's self-perception is boosted and she seems to gain confidence from his response. This confidence is evident in the change of the tone of her narrative from 'pleading' to a bold and direct response, "an adversary and enemy! This vile Haman!" (Esther 7:6). Self-perception in this example has served a paradoxical role of being an enabler as well as a limitation in the exercise of agency. When Esther's pleads for her life, self-perception serves as a limitation, however when pointing out the villain it serves as an enabler. Self-perception, hence is dependent on the contextual factors which could be both internal and external. This example illustrates that there is a relationship between self-perception and agency on two levels – the temporal and the longer term. This relationship acts out in the exercise of agency such that women who have "low levels of psychological assets" are "less likely to make choices that can build or strengthen the other assets that form the basis of their agency" (Alsop et al., 2006, p.

12). Self-perception which is synonymous with self-definition is therefore critical to agency,

Very closely associated with self-perception, Stone (2013) notes self-worth as a psychological asset that is also critical to agency. According to Stone, self-definition includes a sense of self-worth as well as self-perception. Stone (2013) uses Vashti's banishment from the *Book of Esther* as an example of how women are punished for expressing their self-worth. She observes that the chamberlains assumed that Vashti is perceived to have self-worth and feared that other women may "act out of the same self-worth" (p. 124). As the biblical account narrates:

> Queen Vashti has wronged not only the king but also every official and citizen of your empire. For women everywhere will begin to disobey their husbands when they learn what Queen Vashti has done. And before this day is out, the wife of every one of us officials throughout your empire will hear what the queen did and will start talking to us husbands the same way, and there will be contempt and anger throughout your realm. (Esther 1: 16-18)

The men's fear in this instance is of Vashti herself as a person and their perception of the impact of Vashti's agentive capabilities to defy the King's orders. This example, indicates the relationship between self-worth and self-perception with the former impacting on the latter. As Stone (2013) observes, Vashti lost her position and power as queen and her life in the palace (p. 125). Although her banishment brought her humiliation, shame and disgrace she succeeded in instilling such grave fear in the hearts of men that they issued a decree in an attempt to contain and subjugate all women in the kingdom (Stone, 2013, p. 125). Vashti's actions reveal a woman with high levels of self-worth and self-perception. A lack of one of these attributes would generally reflect on a lack of the other. In other words, a healthy self-worth can be assumed to result in a healthy self-perception and vice versa.

Although self-perception is a critical psychological asset, it may be categorised differently. Abrams (1999) locates 'self-definition', and 'self-direction' under self-perception (p. 824) whereas Meyers (2004) finds self-definition to be synonymous with

self-perception. Also, for Alsop et al., (2006) self-definition centres around self-perception and self-worth, whereas for Abrams (1999) self-definition takes into account self-worth and self-perception but seems to focus on positioning. Positioning here refers to the point in time at which decisions are made. This static moment is loaded with the context and the multitude of influences upon the individual at that particular moment. Ao (2016) refers to positioning as location. She says, "At each moment, the individual stands in a particular location. This can be either powerful or powerless depending upon one's location at a particular time where identity gives an individual power and positions in society" (p. 80). Some contexts can cause individuals to have low self-perception, less power and therefore less agency or vice versa. Low self-perception can contribute to the loss of agentive ability (Bowden & Mummery, 2014, p. 124; Showden, 2011, p. 3) and impact on other areas of life, not just the moment of decision-making. Hence, self-perception and self-worth both contribute to self-definition or the identity of the individual. In its impact on momentary actions, agency is associated with temporality. The perception and exercise of agency could change from one instance to another depending on the influencing factors. Nevertheless, agency is also associated with longer term impact on individuals extending outside of that single moment. Abrams (1999) observes that patriarchal social values instilled in women's subservient roles as "home-makers" and "child bearers" can extend into other areas of life as well (p. 818). This implies that the effects of oppression go beyond the confines from within which they are imposed. Abrams (1999, p. 830) accounts for these factors on the influence of agency in saying:

> … a feminist account of agency supplies the insight that people may be hindered by obstacles that bear on them as members of a disempowered group, whether these obstacles are imposed from without, instilled within, or both. Such obstacles may consist of norms that constrain choices or deprecate abilities; or they may consist of practices that intimidate, belittle, or degrade.

Self-definition then may be summarized as self-perception or identity at a moment and position of decision-making that includes ambitions, desires and the inherent attributes of the individual (Abrams, 1999, p. 824). Self-perception although may be categorized

differently, works in combination with self-worth to influence an individual's identity. Self-perception is also significant to agency.

Self-direction is another significant psychological asset that Abrams (1999, p. 809) notes as an intentional course that an individual maps out for themselves despite their circumstances. It includes self-definition but differs from it as it takes into account not only the moment of decision-making but considers the lessons learned from past experiences and the impact of these decisions on their future. It requires positive self-worth or high self-esteem or as Abrams (1999) notes, "self-reflection and the development of awareness and critical judgment" (p. 821) to think through the pros and cons and make strategic decisions after considering these factors. Klein observes that self-direction is "purposeful" (2014, p. 2). Vashti's example holds value here as she is a woman who exercised agency regardless of the consequences. She had a clear idea of what she wanted to do – refuse the King's invitation, and that she did boldly. Self-direction includes motivation that the individual has in order to take the path that they have decided on. Self-direction and self-perception have a directly proportionate impact on each other.

Self-discovery, the last of the psychological assets that is relevant to this study is to do with the process of recognizing one's value and the enablers and limitations that hinder the realization of that value. Self-discovery also deals with the emotional development of women (Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000, p. 18). It is therefore very closely associated with self-perception and self-direction and extends itself into and is constituted by these two factors. Self-discovery is impacted by internal and external factors i.e., socialization as well as self-reflection (Abrams, 1999, p. 823). Therefore, self-discovery cannot be developed in isolation. It is a process in which autonomy is gained or agency is developed through the discovery of 'self'. The measure of self-discovery does not correlate to the measure of exercised agency although it could. Self-discovery can also enable or limit the exercise of agency leading either to empowerment or to reinforce women's subjugated role depending on the response to the influencers on agency which are complex and highly contextual (Abrams, 1999, p. 823). In summary, self-discovery is a process of understanding one's position and using that understanding to work towards gaining autonomy. All the three – self-definition, self-direction and

self-discovery - are psychological assets or intangible assets that work from within an individual. Psychological or intangible assets are significant to this study as they provide the motivation for the actions of the main protagonists in *Hadassah: One Night with the King*. Also, the outcomes of their exercise of agency plays out in their relationships, their discourses and their behaviour. As the reader engages with the text, the protagonists' agency becomes evident as they are presented by the authors.

In addition to these intangible assets, tangible assets are also equally critical to agency as they too serve as enablers or limitations. Further, intangible assets do not work independently of tangible assets. The next section deals with tangible assets as they impact on agency.

Tangible assets are physical assets and/or external factors that determine the economic and social positioning of individuals (Alsop et al., 2006, p. 12). These tangible assets could be financial means as well as the privileges that can be associated with it such as education, housing, medical care as well as social factors such as the right to vote, and the freedom of speech (Klugman et al, 2014, p.21). Tangible assets through improving the conditions of life increase self-perception and the position of individuals in a society and in turn agency (Alsop et al., 2006, p. 22). Tangible assets, therefore, are just as significant to agency as intangible assets. Education, for example, can enable agency by creating awareness of women's positioning, rights and opportunities (Alsop et al., 2006, p. 51; Klugman et al., 2014, p. 14). Also, these authors recognize that tangible assets can contribute towards empowering women by creating self-worth, through positioning them within circumstances that enable and promote judgment, deliberation and purposiveness. In other words, tangible assets provide individuals with what Alsop et al., (2006) term as 'opportunity structures' (p. 189). Similarly, the lack of tangible assets can contribute towards a loss of agency by reducing the social positioning. Also, a lack of tangible assets could affect the understanding and perception of the ability to use the intangible assets (Klugman et al, 2014, p. 16). For example, if a woman lives within a cultural context within which the man is the breadwinner, her status is that of a dependent. Also, if she lives in poverty, tangible assets will be limited. If it is a patriarchal society in which she is abused, she may believe her husband's abuse to be acceptable (Alsop et al., 2006, p. 11; Klugman et al., 2014, p. 28). If a woman lives

under all of these conditions, she could believe that she has limited capacity to exercise agency. In situations like this, the subservient role is "ingrained in her psyche" according to Alsop et al., (2006 p. 12), which results in the women becoming "embodied subjects" of the subservient ideology as Showden calls it (2011, p. 3). For agency to be exercised in such circumstances, there must be a change in the mindset or psychological assets must change. Showden (2011) observes that agency needs to be a deliberate, intentional effort that ethically considers situations and circumstances rather than passively accepting the "morality or social norms" (p. 6). Tangible assets are critical to an individual's positioning and positioning is critical to agency. Therefore, tangible assets are important to this study. Also because of their correlation, both tangible and intangible assets are significant to agency (Alsop et al., 2006, p. 120). Having discussed tangible and intangible assets, the section below discusses briefly the factors that evidence the presence of agency.

Agency is alluded to through discourses of empowerment, power (Mishra & Tripathi, 2011, p. 58) politics, and gender (Meyers, 2014, pp. para 6 - 8) to either indicate the presence of, the possibility of, the capacity for, or even the absence and the impossibility of exercising agency. However, the presentation of agency in texts poses a dilemma. Fraser says: "Either we limit the structural constraints of gender so well that we deny women any agency or we portray women's agency so glowingly that the power of subordination evaporates" (Fraser, as cited in Charrad, 2010, p. 517 - 518). As a way out of this dilemma Fraser proposes the need for "a coherent, integrated, balanced conception of agency, a conception that can accommodate both the power of social constraints and the capacity to act situatedly against them" (Fraser, as cited in Charrad, 2010, p. 517 - 518). Arriving at this conception of agency that can fulfil both the factors above is a lengthy process and beyond the scope of this study. However, the analysis of the enablers and limitations of female agency in this study will expose both the structural constraints of gender and the masking of subordination if any through the discourses in the text.

Enablers and Limitations of Agency

The contextual and complex nature of agency creates difficulty in classifying the limitations or enablers of agency into two specific categories (Klugman et al, 2014, p. 14). Not only do the interpretations of the term agency vary, but also the capabilities, as well as the exercise of agency, can be drastically different between individuals and in different contexts (Alsop et al., 2006, p. 13). Also, what may serve as an enabler to a certain individual could serve as a limitation to another. In some instances, a particular factor which may be a limitation in one context may be an enabler at another. The enablers and limitations of agency, therefore cannot be clearly classified as such although they may be distinguished by their function at each occurrence and the context within which they occur.

The function of an influencing factor as an enabler or limitation is decidedly based on an innumerable amount of factors that are at play at that particular moment when the decision is made to exercise or not exercise agency. This decision depends on the capacity for agency as well as the influence of the factors "outside the individual" (Balasundaram, 2009, p. 4). Agency is evidenced through some sort of action, outcome or even changes in perceptions that are intended to cause a positive outcome. Further, inaction followed by some explanation could provide clues about agency but inaction with no explanation requires reading between the lines and analysing further in order to unpack the capacity for and possible reasons for inaction. Similarly, intentions are also vital as they reveal the purpose for the responses. The consideration of all of these factors aid in deciding whether the influencing factor is an enabler or a limitation to agency.

The fluidity of the notion of gender can be problematic and needs to be qualified here. For the purposes of this study, male and female categories are marked by the assignment of gender. Female in this study refers to women, who through their physiology are identified as women. It is also acknowledged that to gain a holistic view of agency would involve taking into account the entire life of an individual. However, for this study, the possibilities of agency explored are restricted only to the extent to which they are evident through the text.

Summing up the discussion above, female agency is involved in the discourse of power as it concerns women. It is not one that asks: who holds power in relationships between men and women in patriarchal societies? But rather, how much power does a woman have to make decisions about herself and the aspects that are significant to her? As Klugman et al, (2014) say, "Agency is about the ability to make effective choices and to transform those choices into desired outcomes" (p. 2). Thus, the concept of agency has at its core the notion of freedom of choice and decision-making. As Davies (1991) says, "Agency is never freedom from discursive constitution of self but the capacity to recognise that constitution and to resist, subvert and change the discourses themselves through which one is being constituted" (p. 51). Further, two possible notions of agency as it applies to women are possible – freedom and construct, with both interconnected to the other. Whether a construct or an endeavour for freedom, agency is influenced by tangible and intangible assets working together. With the focus on the aspects of agency discussed above and for the purposes of this study, female agency either as an endeavour for freedom or as a construct refers to *an awareness of (both tangible and intangible assets) and/or use of agentive abilities for positive or beneficial temporary outcomes and/or outcomes that lead toward empowerment*. In this study, the presentation of agency within *Hadassah: One Night with the King* is compared with the presentation of agency established through the three dominant readings of the biblical Esther, set up as a framework for this study.

The comparison of the presentation of agency enables the reader to gauge the changes in the presentation within an ancient text versus the modern one. The study highlights the differences in positioning through the relationships, discourses, imagery and settings. Through the reader's engagement with the text, the presentation of agency can influence the reader toward empowerment or despair as the intangible and tangible assets work together. The comparison could provide hope or the loss of agency and therefore this study is significant.

CHAPTER 2 –DOMINANT READINGS OF THE *BOOK OF ESTHER*

As a patriarchal text the biblical *Book of Esther* has generated considerable debate among scholars for its portrayal of its protagonist, Esther. Even in a comparatively narrow field of scholarship, a range of divergent readings is evident. Across feminist readings of the *Book of Esther*, the protagonist seems to variously exemplify roles that conform to and contradict stereotypical appropriations of women. Nevertheless, none of these readings exclusively promotes a singular viewpoint. All readings seem to expose some elements of the subservient position of women in the patriarchal culture within which the *Book of Esther* was written. However, feminist critics also bring a range of interpretations that are useful in exploring varying attitudes to Esther. In these readings, the portrait of Esther is based on the enablers and limitations of agency whether they be internal or external. For the purpose of this analysis, these readings have been structured around three dominant portraits of Esther:

Model 1: Esther as stereotype

Model 2: Esther as subversive

Model 3: Esther as a type of the Jewish people.

While the first two models deal with the exercise of agency, the third deals with the outcomes as a result of the submission of oneself to a higher power. In this comparative study, the Models 1, 2 and 3 representations of the biblical Esther will provide the lenses through which *Hadassah: One Night with the King* will be analysed.

All three models approach the *Book of Esther* from a slightly different perspective. The first set of analyses in Model 1 aid in establishing the main protagonist Esther as a stereotypical, submissive woman with limited—if any—agency. Where agency is exercised in this model it seems to be with the intent to comply to the stereotypical definition of women within a patriarchal culture. The readings of Model 1 are from Esther Fuchs (2013) and Lillian Klein (2003). Model 2 contains readings of Esther as a subversive, manipulative woman. Critics that hold this view are Susan Niditch (1995), Leila Bronner (1998) and Johnny Miles (2015). Although these critics approach the text with different purposes, they largely agree that Esther can exercise agency to her advantage despite the cultural limitations imposed on women in biblical

times. The readings of Esther as a subversive heroine provide an alternative perspective on the *Book of Esther*, which is utilized for the study of *Hadassah: One Night with the King*. The third model subscribes to the reading of Esther as a type of the Jewish diasporic people. These readings largely focus on Esther as a Jewish heroine. In using Esther as a type of the diasporic Jewish people, characteristics and a model for the diasporic Jewish people are provided for emulating in the lands in which they are scattered. Among scholars who consider Esther as a hero are Orlando Costas (1988), Kevin McGeough (2008) and Sylvia B. Fishman (2002). Hence, these three readings provide the framework that is used as a point of reference for the comparison of the modern text, *Hadassah: One Night with the King.*

Model 1 - Esther as a Traditional Stereotype

Readings in Model 1 - Esther as a stereotype - align with the historical-critical interpretations of biblical narratives in which men are dominant, and women are subservient. This stereotypical depiction of women has been perpetuated through the centuries to the extent that the influence is still evident within the 21st-century society and culture, observes Ao (2016, p. 77). In these analyses, Esther's agentive ability either seems to be restricted, limited, or hidden. Women who conform to this model have internalized their subjugated role in society and serve as an example of the impact of psychological assets. The exercise of agency in this model is often limited or restricted and even when agency is exercised, it is often to fulfil the expectations of perceived roles or to maintain a defined status within the society and culture. Both critics chosen for this model seem to expose the subjugated role of women within patriarchal societies.

Model 1 begins with Esther Fuchs (2013) who suggests that the presentation of Esther's agency within the *Book of Esther* is limited by literary construct. In *Status and Role of Female Heroines in the Biblical Narrative*, Fuchs (2013) aims to explore the reasons why the books *Ruth* and *Esther* have been included into the canon. In the process, she explores Esther's journey towards becoming a heroine and attributes her achievement of this status to her beauty. Fuchs (2013) argues that the text portrays her as an object of the "male gaze" and as a commodity that is owned by men. Also, she observes that Esther is portrayed in her relationship to the king and her uncle as an

obedient and subservient woman who is "owned" and that this portrayal serves a "functional" (p. 83) purpose within the narrative to advance the plot. The biblical Esther is not proactive in matters that concern her life and seems content to obey. This depiction of Esther as an "owned" woman who is willing and ready to comply is a limitation on her agency imposed through the literary construct of her personality. Esther is portrayed as one whose self-perception, which is a psychological asset, seems to be based on the belief that women are inferior to men. Also, external factors such as her obligation to her uncle and her desire to please and serve him also limit agency. In this example, Esther's agency is presented as limited through the literary constructs in the form of both internal and external factors that influence it.

Fuchs (2013) compares the presentation of Mordecai and Esther's voices. She observes that the power afforded to Esther's voice in comparison to Mordecai's is another factor that contributes towards viewing her agency as a literary construct. Fuchs (2013) suggests that Esther's speech is controlled by Mordecai and not spoken of her own volition. By allowing herself to be controlled, and in surrendering the power of her voice to Mordecai, she is indicating a lack of agency. This surrender of her voice to Mordecai could be a result of her becoming an "embodied subject" (Showden, 2011, p. 3) of the ideology of women being inferior to men, out of respect or even obligation to her uncle, the man in her life. Whatever the reason may be, the surrender presents Esther with a lack of agency. Also, Fuchs (2013) observes that Mordecai's thoughts and plans are materialized through Esther's actions rather than her own, further reiterating her lack of agency. Fuchs (2013) demonstrates how literary construction serves as a limitation for agency with the male voice given authority through direct speech while the female voice is petitionary. Mordecai's speech "is peremptory, authoritative and concise. The economy of his speech is compensated by energetic activity: he 'orders,' 'takes,' 'informs,' 'writes,' 'sends,' 'signs,' 'comes in,' and 'goes forth'" she observes (p. 81). It must be noted that Esther's agency is limited because of the manner in which she is constructed within the narrative. Through the construction of her voice, Esther's power is given over to Mordecai.

The portrayal of Esther and Mordecai in such contrast is yet another construct that limits agency according to Fuchs (2013). Mordecai, she argues, is given an active

role and Esther a passive one. Esther's hesitation to enter the King's presence unsummoned is sharply contrasted with Mordecai's defiance in refusing to bow before Haman (p. 80). Fuchs (2013) observes that "Mordecai inspires respect and awe while Esther pleases Hegai, keeper of women" (2:9) and "finds favour in the sight of the king" (2:7). Hence, "aesthetic grace paves the way for the woman's success, whereas man's power rests on his ethical fiber" (2013, p. 81). This presentation of the dualistic contrast of opposites serves to strengthen Fuchs' (2013) argument that Esther is a passive woman who does not exercise agency in her own right. The only action that Esther seems to take is to submit and obey and allow her beauty to work for her as she believes it should; this demonstrates the impact of the psychological assets of low self-perception on her lack of agency.

In addition to the above, although Fuchs (2013) suggests that the presentation of Esther in contrast to Vashti is a literary construct that serves as a limitation to agency, she destabilizes the notion that Esther is a hero. Fuchs (2013) notes that Esther is a passive, compliant housewife (p. 82) whereas Vashti is openly defiant. Further, in the biblical characterization, Esther is locked into a position of submission. The biblical characterisation suggests that Esther's agency is limited through literary construction and is unable to exercise more agency than is allowed to her by the implied author. Fuchs (2013) further suggests that patriarchal constructions of biblical women such as Esther seem to constrain women so that they assume that "only by re-enacting the roles assigned to them by the patriarchal system as wives or mothers can women become national heroines" (p. 83).

Through her reading of Esther, Fuchs (2013) unsettles attempts to idealize Esther as 'heroine' and instead raises a number of provocative questions for modern readers. Her reading brings to the fore questions about agency, empowerment, and freedom that concern the modern reader. How should women respond in situations of abuse? What kind of a role model is Esther to women? Can women be heroines only because they can obey men without questioning? Fuchs (2013) suggests that the biblical Esther, "despite her literary and biblical prominence … serves as agent rather than a free actant" (p. 82) and is therefore not an ideal model of a liberated woman acting in her own right. According to Everett-Haynes, Fuchs' study exposes patriarchal constructions of women

and, "male stream scholarship," which is explained as the "tendency to objectify and commodify the woman's body and the female subject, and to define femininity regarding male interests and priorities" (2008). Fuchs (2013, p. 84) also observes:

> The stories of Ruth and Esther are not only stories told by a man's world, but also for a man's world. These are not stories of women, but stories of female role models determined and fostered by the strongly developed patriarchal ideology so characteristic of the society in which they lived.

Therefore, the construction of Esther preserves the status quo of the women as that created for male pleasure and desire. In Fuchs' (2013) reading, self-direction is based on Esther's appeal to men as an object. It is a notion of agency based on a construct which is the behavioural expectation for women. In this example, society, culture and the stereotyping of women serve as limitations to agency.

The second scholar from Model 1, Klein (2003) suggests that the presentation of Esther's agency is a construct but appropriates subtle power to her position that allows her limitation to be used as enablers. In the book, *From Deborah to Esther: Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible*, Klein (2003) discusses the *Book of Esther* through a frame of honour and shame. Klein (2003) suggests that Esther displays elements of subversiveness although her actions stem out of the desire to be seen to conform to the culture rather than for gaining power for herself. Klein (2003) argues that "the appearance of shame masks Esther's actions in the masculine world" (p. 116) and enables her to gain honour through her "opportune practice of shame" (p. 111). She observes that the *Book of Esther* "ridicules the dominant culture…through the agency of a woman" (p. 95) who uses shame as a strategy to receive honour. Klein (2003) says, "Shame allows women to partake vicariously of honour" (p. 97) as she explores the actions of both men and women in the *Book of Esther* to evidence this paradox. The notion of "shame" as we know it is destabilized in her reading. Feminine shame is glorified in that it carries the positive connotation of "modesty". She writes, "Feminine shame as a positive value, is characterized by deference and submission to male authority, by docile and timorous behaviour, by hiding nakedness, by sexual exclusiveness, and by modesty in attire and deportment" (p. 96). However, "honour"

maintains a positive connotation. In the patriarchal culture within which Esther lived, honour is associated with sexual autonomy which only men could have (p. 96). Hence, for women to gain honour, they had to "achieve it through shame" (p. 96). In other words, by acknowledging their subservient role in society regarding status and power, women enable men to maintain honour and their status of power and superiority. Klein (2003) therefore presents Esther as a woman who successfully navigates patriarchy through the application of this "shame" theory.

Although Klein's (2003) reading assigns agency to Esther, her agency is motivated by her need to obey and please Mordecai. She notes, "Female obedience to male authority is shown to be preferable to insistence on established communal values" (p. 102) and argues that "despite her marriage to the king, Esther's primary loyalties remain with her patrikin" (p. 103). Hence, agency is not exercised freely but through a sense of fear and obligation to conform. Also, Esther's agentive abilities are restricted by her relationship with Mordecai, an external influencer. One example is her invitation to the king to a banquet prepared by a woman. Klein (2003) observes that because the banquet was "private, in the queen's quarters, and prepared by Esther herself," this scene underpins the notion of 'shame' because Esther is acting as "servant to men" (p. 108) which signals a subservient role and aids in men holding their honour. The King's message requesting Haman "to hurry to do the queen's bidding," "indicates a subtle shift of authority from the king to the queen" (Klein, 2003, p. 108). In these examples, by allowing herself to be "shamed", Esther is gaining honour from men through her positioning as a woman who is obedient. From a feminist perspective, this poses a problem because agency is utilized in order to reinforce the subjugated role of women.

Mordecai's refusal to put on the clothes that Esther sends him is another example Klein (2003) uses to reiterate the use of agency as a way of conforming to male authority. Klein (2003) observes that Mordecai has lost honour by renting his clothes and that Esther seeks to "restore honour" to Mordecai and herself as she is "inwardly shamed" (p. 106) by his act. In this instance, Esther is exercising agency in order to protect Mordecai's honour. A final example is Esther dressing up for her visit to the King. According to Klein, this dressing up is intentional as she wants to "call attention" to her physical beauty and her "sexual appeal not denying them in the manner of

feminine modesty and shame" (2003, p. 107). Klein's (2003) observation suggests that using beauty through her attire to allure the king is an immodest act. However, Esther is aware that her attire will appeal to the King and proceeds to dress to please him. By displaying "sexual appeal" and "beauty" she is giving honour to the king, although she is 'shaming' herself by intending to be sexually appealing to the king. Both these examples suggest that although Esther conforms to male authority, she does so, subversively.

Similarly, Klein (2003) suggests that through the application of the shame and honour theory played out through the banquet scene, agency is limited. Klein (2003) observes that the King and Haman unintentionally undermine their honour by giving Esther power over their time and autonomy in decision-making. In inviting the King and Haman to her banquet, Esther is presented as one who is overtly exhibiting 'shame' while covertly bringing down Haman. Her covertness is highlighted through Haman's ignorance. Haman's boasts of having received an invitation to a woman's feast occurs when his honour is being "diminished" (p. 108). By specifying a time for the banquet, Esther subtly subverts the power that Haman and the King have with the control of their time. The loss of autonomy over Haman's time is also evident in his need to comply with the eunuch's timing to take him to the banquet (p. 110). In this scene, it is evident that Esther has 'shamed' herself in front of the king by humbling herself in order to request his presence at a banquet she has prepared.

Klein (2003) concludes by noting, "The text allows that, in threatening situations, social paradigms may be creatively interpreted as long as the prescribed gender role is publicly observed. Powerless women – and Jews – can invoke power as long as they maintain required appearance" (pp. 116-117). Klein (2003) seems to suggest that women manipulate the system to exercise agency even as they defer to their 'publicly-observed' roles. It would appear that Klein (2003) is focusing on the power issues in the text and Esther's ability to subtly and passively exercise agency. She suffers through the concept of 'shame' in order to appease societal expectations on the surface while subtly appropriating some power to herself. The overt expression of compliance while subtly subverting allows women to act while remaining 'safe' within their positions.

Model 2 - Esther as Subversive of Male Gaze and Authority

Readings of Esther as subverting the "male gaze" and male authority are primarily found within feminist studies of the *Book of Esther*. These readings attempt to portray Esther as a woman who recognizes her agentive abilities and utilizes them with the intention of deriving beneficial outcomes for herself and those around her. Although the critics' approaches towards Esther differ, these readings by Susan Niditch (1995), Leila Bronner (1998) and Johnny Miles (2015) largely suggest that Esther is aware of and utilizes agency. Niditch's (1995) reading maintains Esther within the patriarchal tradition but argues that she develops adequate agency to subvert the stereotypical expectations of women within that society as time progresses. Although Niditch's reading of Esther seems similar to Klein's (2003) reading of Esther there is a contrast in their intent. While the intent of the former reading is to conform to stereotypical definitions, the intent of the latter is to subvert although from within in order to achieve one's goals. In this the two readings differ largely. Bronner's (1998) reading, on the other hand, attempts to extricate Esther from the stereotypical imagery of women within the patriarchal tradition in order to show that she can exercise agency. Miles' (2015) reading portrays a wise woman who feigns submission in order to subvert the expectations of women within the society in which she lived. While Miles' (2015) reading somewhat parallels Klein's (2003) reading, the aspects of self-direction seem to be much more developed in Miles' reading in comparison to Klein's (2003) and therefore falls under Model 2. Readings from Model 2 are contradictory to the readings in Model 1 and serve to bring opposing views to this study.

In Susan Niditch's (1995) reading, Esther is an active agent in decision-making about matters that concern her life. In *Esther: Folklore, Wisdom, Feminism and Authority* (1995), Niditch makes a literary comparison between the *Book of Esther* and the biblical narrative of Joseph. She explores the hero motifs and themes in both narratives by breaking the *Book of Esther* into four parts namely, "The story of Vashti's banishment," "The story of Esther's becoming Queen," "The brief story of Mordecai's saving the king," and Esther "Saving Mordecai and her people." Niditch observes that Esther begins as a naïve girl but becomes a wise woman who develops her agentive skills and utilizes them subtly to subvert the cultural constraints imposed on her. Her

progress is remarkable—from a passive woman who obeys her uncle to a woman who actively engages with Ahasuerus and Haman, using "womanly wiles" to subvert their intentions (1995, p. 39). Having learned from Vashti's experience, Esther chooses to work "from within the system" (p. 41) through passive resistance rather than open rebellion. Niditch contrasts Esther's actions with those of tricksters and asserts that Esther is a not a trickster because she does not attempt to escape the system when her trickery is exposed as tricksters do. Instead, Esther stays within it and manipulates it to her advantage (Niditch 1995, p. 41). Esther's ability to manipulate the environment signals her maturity and agency. Esther's behaviour evidences the use of her intangible assets such as self-direction and self-discovery as well as tangible assets, such as her position and observations of life in the Palace in order to derive a beneficial outcome. Esther is taking the initiative to become autonomous and determine the course of her life through her actions. Esther utilizes the limitations imposed on her through external factors to her advantage and benefit, indicating thought and planning and intentional effort towards achieving her goals.

Leila Bronner's (1998) reading of Esther is similar to Niditch's (1995) reading in that Esther is an active agent in her life, although the manner in which she is active differs from Niditch's reading. In her article, "Reclaiming Esther" (1998), Bronner uses literary criticism to unpack the first four chapters of the *Book of Esther* as found in the "Scroll." Her intention is to gain new insights into Esther: "Works on Esther are riddled by traditional gender politics: male as thinker and doer, woman as handmaiden and follower," observes Bronner (1998, p. 4). Hence, Bronner seeks to reclaim Esther from the androcentric readings that dominate the more substantial part of the commentaries and assign Esther the role of a subversive woman (p. 3). She approaches the Ancient Scroll from a modern cultural perspective. To Bronner, Esther is not only an active agent with beauty and brains; she is also a politician and a sage (1999, p. 4), and a woman who manages her life with tact and initiative. Esther is aware of the influence beauty has on men and uses it to her advantage. Esther is on a process of self-discovery and is conscious of herself as well as the direction she would like her life to take. She is using tangible and intangible assets with the intention of deriving benefits that lead to

empowerment. Esther uses limitations as enablers to seek beneficial outcomes for herself, indication of active participation in the affairs of her life.

Bronner (1999) demonstrates the active role that Esther plays in her life through the example of her conscious effort in the development of agency while at the palace. According to Bronner, although Esther seems to be quiet and obedient at the beginning of the narrative, this evidences her "ability to listen and learn" and "to recognize savvy political manoeuvring when she sees it" (1999, p. 5). Her agency is progressive. First she observes and learns and once Esther acquires these skills, she employs them when she hears of the plot to kill the king. Esther's initiative to seize this opportunity, Bronner notes, shows that she is "becoming an insider" (1999, p 5). Bronner further observes like Niditch (1995) that Esther has learned from Vashti's example and hence takes the path of passive resistance rather than bold disobedience. Here, Esther's dress and choice of words when she approaches the king to plead for her life and the lives of her people indicates a well thought out and carefully planned approach. This form of agency is a combination of self-definition, self-direction and self-discovery. "The agenda is Esther's alone," says Bronner (1999, p. 7). All credit for the success of this endeavour is attributed to Esther's knowledge and judicious use of subversive strategies. The external factors, as well as Esther's psychological assets, provide the impetus for the exercise and development of agency which she actively engages in and with.

Bronner concludes that "Esther's character and actions are circumscribed by her two environments, the Persian court and Jewish tradition, both of which are strongly male-oriented" (1999, p. 9), and Esther successfully navigates through them because she has learned to subvert both frames that circumscribe her. Her subversive ability is evidenced through getting the King to reverse a decree that cannot be reversed; exposing Haman's plot and taking him down; and delivering her people despite being a woman who is supposed to have no power. This active engagement and ability to balance the two environments portray an active agent.

The final reading in Model 2 is by Johnny Miles (2015) who focuses on Esther as an active agent, through the frame of the hero motif. In his article, "Reading Esther as Heroine: Persian Banquets, Ethnic Cleansing, and Identity Crisis", Miles depicts Esther as a courageous woman who made highly tactical decisions and remained actively

engaged with matters concerning her life, albeit through feigning submission. The banquets displaying "self-indulgence" and "opulence" clearly indicate "a situation in need of correction" (p. 133), says Miles. In this environment Esther plans her move using skill (2015, p. 137); she strategizes to make the best of it. Further, Esther is both manipulative and submissive as the situation demands. Hence, she "comes prepared for a business meeting befitting a Queen" (p. 137) when she has to appear before the king. She does not take her status as Queen for granted. Also, Esther acts "deferentially and obediently" at times while at others she actively seeks to win the "favour of others" (Miles, 2015, p. 135). Esther "uses her wits and sexuality to manipulate Ahasuerus and Haman: Ahasuerus by plying him with wine, Haman by appealing to his pride and ambitious desires" (Miles 2015, p. 135). In each of these descriptions of Esther, she is seen to be aware of the situation at hand, to have taken careful thought of it, and then responded in a manner that would bring about the outcome that she expected. The appearance of submissiveness, therefore, is intentional as deemed best according to the situation at hand.

Miles (2015, p. 140) says:

> Esther's body and sexuality did not belong to her. She was always at some man's disposal, a pawn constantly moved about, "taken" by Mordecai, "taken" to Hegai in the palace, and "taken" to the king. In addition, her continual identity effacement and underlying fear of her secret (Jewish) identity being exposed would have affected her self-esteem as well. But despite the lack of personal autonomy and the limitations of her circumscribed role or her isolation, she rose above those limitations as heroes do.

Thus, the author presents Esther as a woman who recognizes and intentionally feigns submission as a strategy devised of her own accord for her benefit. It would seem that Esther has discovered herself and exercises agency as part of self-direction. The internal and external influencers of agency serve as enablers as Esther uses them strategically and in combination to her advantage.

In Miles' (2015) reading, the author presents Esther as a representation of the Jews, and Haman as an enemy of the Jews (p. 134). In her presentation as a woman who represents the Jewish people, Esther once again is ascribed power that usually belonged to men in that society and culture. Miles observes that Esther's ability to reconcile and juggle dual identities indicates strategy in planning and executing action. She can adopt and maintain the paradoxical dual identities of both a Persian and a Jewess at the same time: "She is and is not Persian and Jewish, insider and outsider, 'us' and 'them,'" writes Miles (2015, p. 135). It is the acceptance of these dual identities that enables Esther to maintain self-esteem and self-concept as the "Other Woman." Hence, Esther's demonstration of her ability to successfully maintain dual identities indicates excellent skill and mastery of the art of subversion. In an environment where maintaining a single identity as a woman is difficult, maintaining two requires exceptional skill. This intentionality indicates that Esther is an active agent in matters that concern her life. Like the earlier readings, Esther uses the limitations imposed on her by society and tradition as enablers in order to benefit herself and her people. The focus in this model is subversiveness and how women actively use agency to navigate the patriarchal culture within which they live. This attribute causes Miles to elevate her to the status of a Jewish heroine and an active agent in her life.

Model 3 - Esther as a Type of the Diasporic Jewish People

Readings of Esther as a type of the diasporic Jewish people stem from the appropriation of the title of "heroine" to Esther. The focus lies in the outcome and lessons drawn from the manner in which this outcome was achieved, which could then be applied to the diasporic Jewish people. In this reading, masculine traits of redemption and power are ascribed to Esther based on the outcome. Some critics who focus on Esther as a type of the Jewish people are Kevin McGeough (2008), Sylvia Fishman (2002) and Orlando Costas (1998). These critics will be discussed briefly.

Kevin McGeough's (2008) presents Esther as a wise woman. In his article, "Esther the Hero: Going Beyond 'Wisdom' in Heroic Narratives" (2008), McGeough explores the *Book of Esther* to determine its genre, draws words of wisdom found in the Book of Proverbs and applies it to the characters within the *Book of Esther* for an

appraisal of their standing against these wisdom texts. He suggests that Esther is a heroine as she is seen to be "superseding expectations of daily behaviour set out in wisdom literature" (p. 53). Further, McGeough surveys the arguments for and against classifying this book as wisdom literature. He exposes the character flaws of Mordecai that other critics have brought to light and observes that Mordecai is only partially a hero, while Esther is recognized as a full hero (2008, p. 61).

McGeough (2008) further notes that Esther is more than a wise woman because "she behaves in a manner that goes beyond the everyday and beyond her own best" (p. 64). He observes that although "the typical wisdom teachings stress caution as found in Proverbs 20:2 to not provoke a king to anger, yet Esther clearly risks this by appearing before the king unannounced, putting her own life in jeopardy" (p. 63). He focuses on the need for heroes to go beyond the "normative behaviour" to respond to situations when the need arises. He argues that Esther is a role model for the diasporic Jewish people as "her position of weakness (as subaltern) reflects the subordinate position of Jews in a Diaspora setting" (White, as cited in McGeough, 2008, p. 54) and the diasporic Jews can learn from her example and step beyond "normative behaviour" when the opportunity arises. McGeough suggests that Esther is a heroine, but concludes on a contradictory note that although Esther provided an example for the diasporic Jewish people, by "acting outside the boundaries of normative behaviour" Esther is made out to be a "marginal figure" (p. 65). It would appear that while Esther's heroism is worth emulating by the diasporic Jewish people, her heroism is not for women to emulate in their personal lives. Esther as Model 3, therefore, is not significant for exploring the exercise of agency or the enablers and limitations of it, but rather for its significance of the outcome of exercising agency. In this presentation of Esther, the means do not seem to matter as much as the end.

The second critic of Model 3, Fishman (2002) reads Esther as a type of the Jewish people. In her article "Reading Esther: Cultural Impact on Responses to Biblical Heroines", Fishman deals with Megillat Esther or The Scroll of Esther and raises a few feminist concerns. She explores the responses of a few of the medieval rabbis to the *Book of Esther* to observe if they may have shared similar concerns. "Medieval exegetes valorised Esther not as a 'proper Jewish woman,' but as a model for all Jews, including

Jewish men," Fishman notes (2002 p. 5). Also, Esther is constructed such that, "the exiled Jews are symbolized and championed by one quadrupally disadvantaged individual—a woman, an orphan, a Jew, and a captive in the king's court" (Fishman, 2002, p. 10). Also, Fishman says that another medieval rabbi named Zecharia ben Sarukh found a type of the Jewish people in Esther's statesmanship. "Her tactful use of 'timing' to save the Jewish people; her other strategies, such as the use of location in bringing the King and Haman into her house; finding favour by preparing a wine banquet" (Fishman, 2002, p. 5) are some tactics that the Jewish people can learn from Esther's example.

Fishman suggests that Esther who started with no agency ends with "all the agency in the kingdom" (2002, p. 16) and gains power and thus is an example for the Jewish people. She says,

> Medieval exegetes valorised Esther not as a "proper Jewish woman," but as model for all Jews, including Jewish men. The rabbis of medieval Europe often saw the *Book of Esther* as a how-to book or self-help manual for Jewish survival among the elite classes in Diaspora communities. Esther was interpreted as the epitome of the clever courtier who understands how a subject should approach a ruler in order to accomplish difficult goals (Fishman, 2002, p. 5).

According to Fishman's quote above, Esther is the symbol of courage, strength and power which she achieves through her subversive skills. Esther is an agent to a certain extent who has used the means available to her as enablers to agency.

The final reading in Model 3 is by Orlando Costas (1998). In an article titled "The Subversiveness of Faith" (1998), Costas approaches the *Book of Esther* from a theological perspective to analyse the context of the real lives of oppressed people living in the 21st century. Esther is credited with remembering her roots, her vocation and her God. These memories, Costas (1998) argues, are what keep her humble and lead to her success in saving the Jewish people. Her position as Queen, therefore, was not used for personal gain but for the benefit of the Jewish people. Esther believes in her role as the child of God, which is evident through her loyalty and "commitment" to him (p. 72).

Costas suggests that Esther is a woman who resisted assimilation into the foreign culture thereby remaining faithful to God. Esther's reward for her faithfulness is her becoming Queen.

Costas (1998) positions Esther as a woman who submits to God's appointed purpose for her life and sets out to fulfil it. His Esther is a bold leader and an example for the oppressed people. Also, Esther is "observant and graceful, politically astute and prophetically courageous" (p. 74). Costas regards Esther's initiative to appear before the King to plead for her own life and those of the Jewish people as a mark of leadership (1998, p. 75). Esther is exercising agency for the greater good of the Jewish people. Agency exercised is justified by the result. Although at times Esther requires coercing in order to exercise her agentive abilities (Costas, 1988, p. 71), a reminder of her mission helps her to refocus. Costas (1998) believes those who desire to help free the oppressed should emulate the principles of humility, self-sacrifice and faithfulness to God.

In locating Esther within the theological framework as an emissary of God, Costas (1998) sees Esther as a role model—a champion for oppressed societies. Esther must internalize her role as the agent of man. The difference in this model is that a higher authority (God) is invoked calling for the internalization of the concept of subjugation. Additionally, Esther's role as a pawn in the hands of men appears to be justified because God is seen to demand the sacrifice of Esther for the greater good of society. Personal interests are to be set aside in the interests of serving others, as expressed through Costas' words: "The fact of the matter is that the life-vocation of the people of God is to be one of service rather than of survival or achieving personal success" (1998, p. 71). Costas' reading would seem to suggest that women and the diasporic Jewish people would do well to remember their heritage within patriarchal traditions and to remain faithful to the values they have acquired through these traditions. The analysis seems to suggest further that women must not only remain as victims but must surrender fully to the will of God. Costas' (1998) reading of Esther suggests that female agency—when framed within a theological design and purpose—unwittingly reinforces and justifies patriarchal traditions of female subservience to male authority.

To conclude, the literature review of three dominant readings of the *Book of Esther* provides a background and a framework for this study to explore various interpretations to be able to position critical perspectives of Hadassah in *Hadassah: One Night with the King* for modern readership. This review has highlighted a range of ways in which the biblical *Book of Esther* is analysed in regards to representations of women. Readings within Model 1 expose the subjugated role of women within the patriarchal tradition. Readings from Model 2 portray Esther as a subversive woman while readings from Model 3 subject Esther to the ultimate authority of God. The three models suggest that texts may be interpreted variously depending on the perspective of the reader. Also, these models indicate the complexity of agency. The presentations of Esther by the scholars indicate opportunities for the reader to creatively exercise agency despite the limitations imposed. Also, these models portray the power that women can appropriate to themselves through deploying strategies to work from within the system. The Models reiterate the unequal position of women within what is still very much a patriarchal society. Models 1 and 2 expose and ridicule the patriarchal society that subjugates women while Model 3 reinforces the subservient role of women. The comparison of the protagonists' agency in *Hadassah: One Night with the King* against the framework of the three models will bring to the fore the dominant model within which the protagonists can be positioned. This positioning can influence the reader by reinforcing the subjugated role of women or by providing the impetus to exercise agency and move toward empowerment. Also, the positioning of the protagonists will bring to the fore issues with male authorship in the presentation of female agency.

This study will conclude with the presentations of female agency as evidenced in the life of the main protagonists within the text *Hadassah: One Night with the King* in comparison to the readings established here in reference to the biblical *Book of Esther*. The three models will be used as comparative lenses in order to answer the question on female agency. The main question that guides this study is 'how are Hadassah and Kesselman in *Hadassah: One Night with the King* presented regarding female agency against the dominant readings of Esther outlined in this study?' In answering this question, several other secondary questions are relevant: What kind of women are Hadassah bin Abihail [Esther in the memoir of *Hadassah: One Night with the King*] and

Kesselman [Hadassah Kesselman, the reader of the memoir]? Do they conform, entirely or in part, to the portrait of the biblical Esther as expressed in Models 1, 2 or 3 in this

CHAPTER 3 – DISCOVERING AGENCY: THE EARLY YEARS

This chapter presents an analysis of the presentation of female agency within the first chapter of the modern text, *Hadassah: One Night with the King*, using the dominant models discussed in chapter 2 of this study as a framework. The first chapter of *Hadassah: One Night with the King* introduces one main protagonist Hadassah Kesselman who shares the same first name with the second protagonist, Hadassah bin Abihail. Hadassah bin Abihail, however lives only in the memoir that Hadassah Kesselman is reading and is the substitute for the biblical Esther in *Hadassah: One Night with the King*. For the purposes of this study, Hadassah Kesselman will be referred to as Kesselman while Hadassah bin Abihail is referred to as Hadassah. This study explores the relationships, positioning, voices, settings, structure, characterization and imagery as they contribute towards an understanding of the limitations and the enablers of Kesselman and Hadassah's agency. There are points of convergence and contradictions between Kesselman and Hadassah in *Hadassah: One Night with the King* and the three dominant models of Esther established in the previous chapter of this study. The analysis seeks to ascertain the dominant frame, i.e., Model 1, 2 or 3 – Esther as stereotype, subversive and type of the Jewish people - within which the main protagonists are portrayed. The study seeks to understand the purpose for the portrayal of these protagonists in this light and the impact this portrayal has on the reader.

Setting the Scene: Kesselman and the Museum

The setting of the opening of the text *Hadassah: One Night with the King* in modern-day Jerusalem and in a prominent Museum in Israel, guides the reader to view Kesselman within a frame of limited agency. This reading is possible because of the potential for the setting to influence reader's understanding of the text as established by critics (Skinner, 2003, p. 3). Also, Van Dijk (2006) observes that, "Ideologies are not only expressed by discourse—and hence should not be reduced to discourse either—but also may be expressed and enacted by other social practices" (p. 138). The social practice that Van Dijk refers to here is the Jewish culture that is brought to bear on the

reader – a culture in which women are viewed as inferior to men. The contrasting opening of *Hadassah: One Night with the King* in comparison to the opening of the *Book of Esther,* highlights the impact the settings have in guiding the reader toward a particular orientation of reading. Jerusalem is the city of the Jews while Persia, where the biblical *Book of Esther* opens, is a nation far away from the Jewish city. *Hadassah: One Night with the King* opens in a Museum while the *Book of Esther* opens in a Palace. The Museum is a cloistered building with restricted entry, secret chambers and passages that hide ancient traditions, and as such, evoke images of a confined and restricted environment. In contrast is the Palace in the biblical *Book of Esther* where the King throws parties with abundant food:

> For a full 180 days he displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom and the splendour and glory of his majesty. When these days were over, the king gave a banquet, lasting seven days, in the enclosed garden of the king's palace, for all the people from the least to the greatest who were in the citadel of Susa (Esther 1:4-5).

This imagery implies a sense of openness and abundance expressed through the lavish and extravagant banquets open "to every man's pleasure" (Esther 1:8). In the biblical *Book of Esther* Queen Vashti also threw her feast (Esther 1:9) implying freedom, openness and a certain level of autonomy for women. In contrast, the first character the reader is introduced to in *Hadassah: One Night with the King*, Kesselman is a dependent child being led by her father into the Museum. The opening of *Hadassah: One Night with the King* sets up the reading of Kesselman within a frame of restricted agency through the imagery of the Museum and the Jewish culture. Fuchs (2013) suggests that Esther's agency as defined in Model 1 is limited through literary constructs. Similarly, the opening of *Hadassah: One Night with the King* through reference to the "opportunity structures" such as Jewish culture, land and setting portrays an environment consisting of limitations for women.

Similar to the setting of the opening of *Hadassah: One Night with the King*, the structure also contributes towards framing Kesselman as a woman with limited agency through its content, size and position. The lean frame narrative consisting of only ten

pages forms the total of Kesselman's story, after which the novel gives way to the story of Hadassah, through the memoir that Kesselman reads which begins on page 22 of *Hadassah: One Night with the King.* A text within a text, the memoir or Scroll is structured as a frame narrative with a lean frame (seven pages) opening on to a memoir (350 pages) and closing on a return to the lean frame (five pages). The letter (in the form of a Scroll) recounts Hadassah Abihail's life in her words. In these 350 pages, Kesselman exists only as a reader, at the end of which, she re-emerges briefly, and only to conclude her narrative. In the final chapter, Kesselman is given five pages in which she attempts to recount Hadassah's story to her husband while on their brief honeymoon, but he falls asleep (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 365). Through the limited space allocated for Kesselman's narrative and given that the content of the novel is dominated by Hadassah's story, it would seem that the author presents Kesselman within a frame of limited agency through the structure of *Hadassah: One Night with the King*. While the biblical *Book of Esther* predominantly deals with the narrative of Esther, *Hadassah: One Night with the King* has the memoir of Hadassah bin Abihail embedded within the narrative of Hadassah Kesselman (a text within a text) and thereby differs from the structure of the biblical *Book of Esther.*

One other literary aspect that implies a limitation on Kesselman's agency is the mode of narration. Kesselman's story is told by an *extradiegetic* narrator who although omniscient stands outside the story. Gennette (as cited in Rimmon-Kenan, 1983, p. 95) notes, "A narrator who is, as it were, 'above' or superior to the story he narrates is 'extradiegetic' like the level of which he is a part". For this study, Gennette's view of the narrator standing above the narrative is relevant. Kesselman's voice is controlled by the narrator. This poses a limitation on her speaking voice – "the power of the bodily agent" that Bamberg (2012) speaks about. The lack of power of Kesselman's voice as a bodily agent creates a distance in the relationship between Kesselman and the reader. This distance is further enhanced through the limited dialogue that the third person narrative mode allows, limiting the opportunity for Kesselman to speak. The mode of narration of Kesselman's narrative in *Hadassah: One Night with the King* parallels Esther's in the *Book of Esther*: Esther's story is told through the third person omniscient narrator thereby imposing a limitation on Esther's speaking voice. Because Esther's

words are powerful when she is given an opportunity to speak, the limitation of her voice imposed through the mode of narration is obvious. The power in Esther's voice is evident in the three moments that she speaks. The first is when she intends to thwart Haman's plans by inviting the King to a banquet as a way perhaps of winning his favour prior to making a request. The narrative records, "And Esther answered, 'If it seem good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him'" [Esther 5:4]. On the second occasion Esther invites Haman and the King to the second banquet. Finally, Esther speaks pleading for her life and the life of her people. Because her speaking voice evidences her agentive ability to execute clever strategies, the loss of it highlights the significance of voice for agency. Through the mode of narration, the authors grant or limit agency to Esther and Kesselman.

As a character, although Kesselman is both curious and probing as is evident through the question, "Father, where are you taking me?" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 15), limited agency is implied through the use of the word 'taking'. Although the question reflects her confidence in establishing her right to ask, know and understand, she is not a fully autonomous woman as she is led by her father. The question also accentuates the complexities of her position as daughter and bride-to-be. Why is she, at the threshold of her maiden years positioned in this light, as curious, expectant and perhaps anxious about the future? She finds herself in what Bamberg (2012) calls a "semi-agentive status" where the "discourses are construed as inherently contradictive and in competition with one another, so that [Kesselman is] forced to choose" (p. 2). Kesselman's appeal to her father to know where she is destined shows her vulnerability. This vulnerability is reinforced as the story progresses as she loses the control she gains to her father.

The portrayal of Kesselman's father, as a warm, caring and loving man is comforting on one level but his manner towards her appears patronizing in the context of agency. Kesselman's trust in her father appears to be influencing her self-perception which is a psychological asset that shapes her decisions. In the context of female agency, her father's endearing language towards Kesselman, reinforces his position of trust, as her primary guardian, which in turn influences her to feel obligated to obey him. An example of this is when Kesselman's father takes her to the Museum a few days before

her wedding, without a full explanation. When she asks her father a legitimate question "Why today?"… "With the wedding just a few days away? This is no time for sightseeing, Poppa" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 16) he responds, "My child, have you ever known me to waste your time?" (p. 16).

> It was an odd question to pose so flippantly, but she pondered it nevertheless while she scrambled up the steps after him. In fact, he had always been a quiet, mild- mannered father, and she had to admit after consideration that he had never been one to yank her about on useless errands (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 16).

Poppa's response does not directly answer her question but instead encourages her to affirm his trustworthiness. However, this does not advance Kesselman's growth. There is no understanding for her as a woman about why she has been brought to the Museum. It leaves them in a relationship that Tenney & Olsen (2004, p. 16) describe as an "amiable stalemate". Kesselman keeps asking questions but instead of answering her questions, her father sidesteps the issues. Thus, based on this "amiable stalemate", Kesselman completely surrenders to her father's leading to honour the tradition of the Scroll.

Her father's part in leading her to keep this tradition seems to impact on her psyche so much so that Kesselman, who had appeared to be capable of being an active agent at the start of the narrative, seems to accept being coerced by her soft-spoken father. Thus, the introduction into this dominant matriarchal tradition is initiated, endorsed and enforced by Kesselman's father through her trust in him. Ironically, this trust serves as a limitation to her agency.

Kesselman's introduction into the Scroll tradition is symbolic of the burden on women to uphold the traditions that have been perpetuated for centuries to sustain patriarchal societies. Kesselman's initiation into this tradition is led by a man and endorsed by other women - her maternal aunts, and grandmother- highlighting the role that women play in perpetuating these traditions that continue to subjugate women. To the reader, this passage highlights the subtle influence of men to lead women into positions where they can be coerced into submitting to power and authority. Because Kesselman is not given the ability to freely choose or reject the tradition, it can be argued that her father's influence serves as a limitation to her agency.

Kesselman's act of finally signing the Scroll indicates a critical decision point for her yet. When brought to the inner chamber and asked to "step forward and sign" the Scroll (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 19) Hadassah responds with the question, "What am I signing?" (p. 19). Her response indicates that she still has no understanding of this critical action. The Museum staffer's concern, "So she has been told nothing" (p. 19**)** can be noted. This signals the extent to which the father expects Kesselman to do his bidding without providing her enough information. It places her as subject to her father. Yet Kesselman is intelligent, fluent in Hebrew (p. 20) and English and has the benefit of being raised in the modern world. Though positioned as a modern bride-to-be, clear links to her past and to her ancestry are evident. She is standing at a critical point of tension between the old and the new; between that which is familiar versus the unfamiliar. However, her signing the Scroll, "Hadassah Kesselman" (p.22) marks the end of her dilemma of standing between two positions, and signals the beginning of her role as subject through the surrender to the Scroll's power and her father's request to "just sign" (p. 22). It is a 'forced choice' (Davies, 1991, p. 46) achieved through coercion. Kesselman perceives herself as a daughter and defines herself within that context. Her obedience and filial obligation take precedence over her ambitions and therefore agency. Her father's words "I have *brought you here*" (p. 18) (emphasis added) signal a destination and a limitation on agency through the connotation of having been 'brought' to a particular point. They point to her father's influence on her self-perception as the daughter of a responsible father and the influence of intangible assets on the choices that Kesselman makes. At this point, Kesselman does have the capacity for agency but does not have the impetus to exercise it because her attitude to her father's authority influences her.

Portraying Kesselman in this light signals the difficulties, for women, in working towards gaining full autonomy. Kesselman's position highlights the predicament of women standing between two discourses. The discourse of agency seems to be offering Kesselman the possibilities of a future with hope for empowerment while the discourse of obligation, respect, trust in men seem to be influences that can keep women in the role of subjects. The authors, Tenney & Olsen (2004), portray Kesselman in this light perhaps to reframe an ancient text within the modern context. The two discourses

reflects the reality of the dilemma faced by modern readers who are influenced by biblical texts similarly positioned within discourses of the Christian and Jewish traditions and the feminist causes for freedom and liberation. Kesselman's position at the opening of the text indicates the choice that women must make, to be constituted by the discourses, or, constitute the discourses around them in order to forge a way forward from that which holds them back.

Kesselman's predicament of indecision and then surrender is not unique to the protagonist in *Hadassah: One Night with the King* as she shares similarities to the biblical Esther. Kesselman does not appear very strategic at this point. She is naïve and accepts to read the Scroll without comprehending the gravity of the consequences of reading it. Her curiosity is subsumed by the narrative, time and events that progress rapidly from one to another. However, through her acceptance to read the Scroll and to be influenced by its power, Kesselman aligns closely with Fuchs' (2013) biblical Esther as outlined in Model 1. A man does not own her as is Fuchs' (2013) Esther of Model 1, nor is she an object of the male gaze. However, she displays characteristics of the biblical Esther of Model 1 - Esther as stereotype - by following the tradition of her maternal ancestors (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 21). In obeying her father and reading the parchment (p. 22). Kesselman asks and accepts while the biblical Esther listens to her father, Mordecai about her role and her calling and accepts *her position.* In this regard, Kesselman parallels the biblical Esther. Both followed their father's directions. Kesselman chooses to remain within the defined boundaries once she has tested them rather than attempt to challenge, subvert or circumvent. She is also owned by the author who through literary construct limits her agency. From this perspective, Kesselman identifies with Fuchs' (2013) Esther of Model 1 whose agency was limited through the literary construct. Also, for Kesselman, several external influencers play a part. Apart from the contexts of her relationship with her father and aunts, her position as a young bride to be, as well as internal influencers such as self-perception, serve as limitations to her agency which she has not yet overcome. At this point in the novel, Kesselman is curious but accepting contrary to the opening of this chapter where Kesselman was curious and questioning. Although Kesselman's curiosity indicated the presence of and capacity for agency at the beginning of the chapter, by its close, her acceptance of her

role as subject, mimics the stereotypical form of agency as in Klein's (2013) Esther of Model 1 where agency is subtly exercised but only in order to conform to the stereotypical role allocated to women.

The influence of Hadassah's father's on her ability to exercise or limit agency demonstrates the significance of self-perception on agency. In the first chapter of *Hadassah: One Night with the King*, Kesselman's father, is, in himself, not necessarily a limitation but rather Kesselman's perception of her dutifulness as a daughter serves as a limitation to agency.

From a feminist perspective, the portrayal of Kesselman as conforming to the stereotypical, submissive models of femininity is a window into how women become "embodied subjects" (Showden, 2011, p. 3). How do such women break through social constraints to believe in themselves and begin exercising agency that leads to their empowerment if they are dependent on men? At this early point at the close of the first chapter of *Hadassah: One Night with the King*, the novel leaves this question open to the reader as it introduces the next protagonist, Hadassah Abihail, the substitute for the biblical Queen Esther, to the reader, and to Kesselman through the memoir. For the next forty-nine chapters of *Hadassah: One Night with the King*, Kesselman's life is subsumed into Hadassah Abihail's memoir, which begins with a greeting that marks the significance of Kesselman's role as prospective bride, "Dear Candidate for Bride to the King" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 22). This opening positions the next protagonist, Hadassah, as a subject to the King similar to the opening of the first chapter which positioned Kesselman as a daughter who is subject to her father. Also, the opening provides Kesselman with the opportunity to learn of the benefits and perils of agency through Hadassah's life.

Setting the Scene: Hadassah in her Early Years

At the beginning of the embedded narrative, Hadassah bin Abihail is reflecting on her early life and ascent to the throne through her memoir. The Scroll—or letter—is addressed to a future successor. This memoir is framed as a guide to negotiate the terrifying experience of being a Queen candidate. It also highlights the weight of her position: "Danger often lurks where destiny beckons. That is why the right approach

demands even more than just prudence or solemnity" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 24).The Scroll emphasizes the importance of the role of Queen candidate and the significance of learning the right approach in preparation for that one night which could either make her powerful as Queen or powerless as a concubine.

Hadassah's reflection begins with a change in the narrative mode which is significant to the representation of agency. This change from Kesselman's narrative, which is in third person omniscient narration, to first-person narration, creates a more intimate and intense relationship between the narrator Hadassah bin Abihail and the reader, Kesselman, and between Hadassah and the implied reader. This shift in narrative mode also assigns more power to Hadassah as she becomes the "speaking subject as a bodily agent (i.e., as bodily present in situ and vivo and interactively involved)" (Bamberg, 2012, p. 106) in the writing of her narrative rather than being "a disembodied, reflective, and rational mind that, in other narrative approaches, seems to lurk behind what is surfacing in talk" (Bamberg, 2012, p. 106). Also, using Gennette's description (as cited in Rimmon-Kenan, 1983, p. 95) of the homodiegetic narrator as "one who takes part in [the narrative] at least in some manifestation of his 'self'" Hadassah's voice allows her to articulate her perspectives, judgments, emotions and memories directly to the narratee—in this case, the aspiring Queen candidate. The mode of narration through the power it affords Hadassah in projecting her voice directly serves as an enabler for Hadassah's agency. Because of the power the authors Tenney & Olsen (2004) give to the narrator of the memoir through the mode of narration, the setting of Hadassah's narrative arguably has a more significant influence on the reader Kesselman and the modern-day reader of the text. Because this is a literary imposition, however, it is not a reflection of her agentive capacity but rather a nuance of the writers' portrayal of a strong woman in Hadassah. Through her voice, Hadassah is given power to influence the reader and to have a more intimate relationship with the reader.

However, limits and threats to Hadassah's voice are established in the memoir through the figure of Haman. Fear is a significant theme in the memoir just as it was in the *Book of Esther.* As Alter (1981) observes, there are no "free-motifs" in the biblical narrative (p. 79). By beginning Hadassah's narrative with her earliest "horrific" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 29) memories of her parents' murders, the tone of fear is set for

Hadassah. This fear is emphasized through Haman and his clans' insignia, the "twisted cross" (p. 53), which is tattooed on their arms and backs. Through this symbol of the twisted cross and its association with Nazis and the Holocaust, the text is brought closer to home, the reader and contemporary life. The fear instilled through the memory of her parents' murders makes an indelible mark in Hadassah's mind and "haunts" (p. 30) her. She reflects on her inability to even make a sound during the murderous event because she was too traumatized. Fear here serves as a limitation as it impacts on her self-perception as an insecure individual which Hadassah internalizes and operates under. It affects her self-perception as powerless against the murderers, her self-definition as a foreigner, and her eventual self-direction in seeking to bring them to justice. The influence is such that even years later she recollects with vivid detail the events that occurred many years before: "My nose was filled with overpowering and terrifying scents—an earthy aroma that I would later learn was blood, the sweaty odour of the attackers, even the goatish, salty smell of my own all-encompassing fear" (p. 31). The frame of fear is established in the opening of Hadassah's narrative and extends to Kesselman and the modern readers of the novel drawing attention to the brute and evil power that rests with these men and the women's powerlessness against them.

Of particular importance is Haman's role in the memoir [Scroll] in conveying the power of patriarchy as well as the role that women played and can play, both in sowing as well as eradicating evil. This is particularly evident in the story of Haman's birth, drawn from the story of Saul and elaborated in the modern text *Hadassah: One Night with the King.* Haman is a descendent of King Agag, an Amalekite who was at war with Israel. The prophet Samuel had given direct command that everything in Amalek should be destroyed and every single living person executed (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 33). However, contrary to G-d's order through the prophet Samuel, King Saul spares Agag, "I shall hold you prisoner until such time as I decide whether to slay you personally in obedience to YHWH's command…" (p. 37) he says. This act of disobedience on Saul's part enables an opportunity for King Agag's wife to visit him, sleep with him and escape in the darkness carrying his seed (p. 38) thereby enabling the perpetuating of wickedness that God wanted destroyed. King Agag's wife who "possessed the hardiness for which her people were legendary" (p. 43) uses the darkness of the night to evade capture,

disguise herself as "a widowed countrywoman to a band of Kenites" (p. 43) and create a new life as the wife of one of the sons of a shepherd (p. 43). Her escape enabled King Agag's family to be rebuilt with each generation growing with more intense hatred toward the Hebrews: "Each mother cooing to her baby tales of Hebrew treachery. Each father fanning the flames of his children's resentment and rage" (p. 44) until "five centuries later" (p. 44) Haman is born. If Saul erred by not destroying Agag upon capture, it is the woman, Agag's wife, who made the best of the situation to further her cause. This incident is significant to the memoir because of the example of the woman's exercise of agency which is bold and strategic and reflected in Hadassah's actions later in *Hadassah: One Night with the King*. What this woman sets in motion, Hadassah/Esther will end. The woman helped Agag when he was helpless and later Hadassah/Esther will help Mordecai when he is helpless. The subtexts portray the strength of women and the utilization of this strength either for good or evil.

Fear serves as a limitation as well as an enabler for the exercise of agency. The reader is reminded of the position of women within patriarchal society. While their powerlessness against great odds is acknowledged, so is their creative potential to seize opportunities to stand up against the evil that surrounds them. For instance, while the power of men is reinforced through Vashti's banishment in the biblical *Book of Esther,* her defiance as a source of feminine strength/power is not to be minimized. Similarly, Esther's creativity in destroying Haman's power in both the biblical text and *Hadassah: One Night with the King* is not to be ignored.

In pointing to the *Book of Esther* as its source-text, *Hadassah: One Night with the King* leaves room for anticipating female empowerment. However, such empowerment is only possible to women who confront and overcome the threat of fear. The Scroll goes to great lengths to establish the context for the world of fear that Hadassah inherits and charts her experience with confronting fear through her reminisces in the memoir or Scroll. For instance, by comparing the "Ishtar Gate" that had stood "open and unwatched" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 59), with Hadassah's present home whose doors are kept closed, the author illustrates for Kesselman's benefit, two very different worlds that impact on Hadassah's agency. Hadassah's family went into Babylon feeling free and safe but were murdered there, while Hadassah is kept like

"a virtual prisoner" (p. 70), within her home. However, she does not feel safe or free from fear as expressed by her fear of strangers. She says, "Strangers – the few who came by the house for this or that purpose, or the Jewish children Rachel would sometimes bring into the home to play – frightened me" (p. 70). Fear, triggered by her parents' murder is described in the novel as "a thick fog of pain" from which recovery is "as slow as eternity itself" (p. 59). This explains how her upbringing is characterized by "physical isolation" and "emotional devastation" (p. 70). Fear also extends into their adopting new identities to protect their real identities from being revealed. Not only did Mordecai, have a "Persian name, he dressed as a Persian, talked like one, and only a handful knew otherwise" (p. 67). Also, Hadassah was required to speak in Persian as well. Mordecai's "eyes, which were brown and large and always darting alertly about to assess his current surroundings or the character of someone nearby" (p. 66)—cause Hadassah to have a "wariness that never rested" (p. 66). Thus, Hadassah's life in Persia is characterized by fear of her identity being revealed, fear of being noticed, and fear of humans beside Rachel the Jewish housekeeper and Mordecai. Hadassah "[plays] alone under Rachel's watch care and [listens] to her stories of Israel and its kings" and grows up as "a quiet child"' (p. 71) out of the view of the society in which she lived.

The above examples reveal both the significant influence of the mind and the depth of the impact that psychological assets, such as self-perception driven by fear, can have on agency. Although a child, Hadassah's fearful memory of her parents' murders impacts her acceptance of being held within the confines of her home at least until she reaches teenage years. Fear here causes Hadassah to become what Showden (2011) calls the "embodied subject". The restriction of Hadassah's freedom reflects the restrictions imposed on women who live within that patriarchal society. Women, like Rachel and the King of Agag's wife who serve to perpetuate the ideologies of men, are placed beside women and men to 'nurture' them into a particular view of the world shaped by men. Rachel's and King Agag's wife's examples testify to the far-reaching impact of psychological assets. Their roles portray the magnitude of changes required within societies, cultures and thought processes to work towards enabling women to gain full agency.

Hadassah's inability to exercise agency in her early years is impacted by fear and parallels Fuchs' (2013) Esther of Model 1. Like the biblical Esther, Hadassah recognizes her position as a foreigner in Persia and the presence of evil around her. This fear influences her self-perception so that it remains as a constant limitation to her agency - even beyond her childhood. Hadassah's understanding of herself as "different, yet forbidden to speak" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 70) signals fear as the reason for her loss of voice. Hence, fear causes the perception of less power which serves as a limitation to exercise agency.

Hadassah's absent mother is left with providing Hadassah with a way out of fear. This is achieved through the role of Hadassah's memory of her mother's empowering voice. Her mother's words, "It is a star, Hadassah, and we gave it to you because you are our bright star and because we want you to carry on this family legacy and all it stands for" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 30) echo in Hadassah's mind and serve as a recurring theme in leading her toward her goal. Hadassah's mother's words become her final legacy. That same night tragically and unexpectedly, her murder, along with her husband and son changes the course of history and sets the stage for the future role that Hadassah will play in saving the Jewish nation. Hence, although structural restrictions of the space allocated to Hadassah's mother's voice serve on the surface as a limitation to agency, the impact of the brief moments she shared with Hadassah serve as an enabler of agency. Her mother's words in this instance serve as an enabler that influences her self-perception and triggers her thoughts about becoming the "bright star". Hadassah's recognition and willingness to carry on her parent's legacy and be the bright star resembles Costas' (1998) Esther of Model 3 in which Esther accepts her position as chosen of God for the delivery of the Jewish people. In this Hadassah serves as a type of the Jewish people. In her intent to seek resolution, Hadassah resembles Bronner's (1998) Esther of Model 2 as she chooses to remain within the system and work within it to achieve her goal. Bronner's Esther listens and learns till she becomes an insider, similarly Hadassah listens and remembers her mother's words till she becomes an insider in the Palace and manages to achieve her goal of becoming Queen.

The role of Hadassah's mother in *Hadassah: One Night with the King* demonstrates how the struggle for female agency within the patriarchal tradition comes

at great cost. On the night of the murder, Hadassah's life is saved, protected by her "mother's silhouette" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 30). Her mother becomes a saviour figure as she, through her dead body, conceals and covers Hadassah and hence preserves her daughter's life. The recollection of her mother's sacrifice becomes a formative moment and leaves a deep imprint on Hadassah's life: "I knew, somehow, that something profoundly mine, the anchor of my being, was forever changed" (p. 31). At this point, the influence of her mother's sacrifice extends beyond the moment of her mother's death. It reinforces the power of memory shaping the psychological asset of self-definition and self-direction that drives agency. This agency appeals to that of Bronner's (1998) Esther of Model 2 where Hadassah and Esther through recollections observe and learn from their various encounters and use these lessons to achieve their causes. Just as Hadassah emerges covered in her mother's blood but does not understand the significance of her mother's sacrifice until much later, the novel shows [through this example] the long, excruciating and challenging journey for female agency that leads to empowerment.

Vashti - The Queen's Agency

Although not the main protagonist, a discussion of agency in the *Book of Esther* would be incomplete without Vashti, as she sets the stage and triggers the concern about agency within the *Book of Esther*. Vashti, disobeys the King's orders to appear before him when summoned. Nadar (2003) notes that Vashti was called to present herself before the king as a "sexual object" and not a queen because it is her beauty that the men and the king wanted to see (p. 113). In refusing men their request, she has subverted men's desire to objectify her as a woman. She exercises her freedom of choice and appropriates power to herself as an individual. For a woman to appropriate power in this manner is not expected and is perceived as a threat to men. Thus, a group of important men gather and make a decision to banish Vashti from her role as Queen. Thus, her defiance caused her to lose her position as Queen. Vashti exits the text upon her banishment as she does not appear anymore in the *Book of Esther*. However, her absence is powerful because she has exited the text without surrendering to the powers she perceived to be oppressive.

In addition, although silenced through her absence from the narrative and her banishment as Queen, her sacrifice has left a legacy for all women in which her voice echoes powerfully and strongly. Nadar (2003) suggests that silence can be perceived as a technique that the implied author uses to keep the reader focused on the voices that are heard in a text (p. 110). If this was the intent for silencing of Vashti, then it has failed. Stone says of the power that her silence offers: "The king's advisors recognized that Vashti's bravery was fuel for other women to find their voices; they knew the positive influence of her courage" (2013, p. 125). Vashti demonstrates, through her example, the perils of agency as well as the power that women can assume. In the *Book of Esther*, Vashti serves as an example to women in situations of powerlessness through her defiance to become subject to men, even though it would cost her life (Costas, 1988, p. 70). She sets the terms of her life and lives by it. Not even the most powerful man on earth, the King, can take that privilege from her. Through her example of defiance, she epitomizes the woman who holds the power and can respond to a specific circumstance as she chooses. Vashti demonstrates a mature sense of the capacity for - and the practice of - agency. She exercises agency boldly and fearlessly.

In *Hadassah: One Night with the King*, the physical and psychological, explicit and severe violence meted out against Vashti, symbolizes the punishment extended to women who are brave, bold and powerful. Vashti is forcefully silenced.

> A dark hand clamped over her mouth. Two more hands grabbed the sides of her heaving shoulders. And then a long blade began to stab – up, down, up, down, up, down… (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 123).

The tone and setting of the scene in which Vashti is violated within *Hadassah: One Night with the King* directs the focus of the reader to two core considerations of agency: power and freedom. The authors through the words, "cold and moonless desert night" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 122), foreshadow what is to come using pathetic fallacy. High and low positions juxtaposed amplify the effect of the tension between Vashti's position as queen and victim. The men "padded quietly up the stairs" and entered into the room where Vashti lay on "the low bed" (p. 123). Men attempt to take away her freedom to speak quietly and in secret by clamping her mouth, a somewhat ironic act as there is nothing left for which to silence her. What they could not

accomplish in broad daylight – display Vashti's nakedness to the people - they do in the darkness of the night and in private by violating her. The text captures the fear that men had of Vashti through the conversation between two men: "And what does one do with a banished queen, you idiot, let her go out and become a symbol of martyrdom? An icon for the very rebellious female spirit that earned her dismissal in the first place?" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 125). In portraying Vashti's loss of voice in this manner, the authors, highlight the potential danger of powerful women to patriarchy, as the men are portrayed as socially and psychologically weak despite being physically stronger.

Vashti, although not a free agent, by exerting her right to freedom at the cost of her life, sets an example for women. Vashti's actions set the precedent for Esther and cautions her to be aware of the powerless condition of women, although they may hold positions that appear to have power (Costas, 1988, p. 70). Vashti's is a selfless act of courage and bravery for the greater good of women. The consequences of Vashti's defiance serves as an example for Esther to reject open defiance and follow a path of less direct resistance by working from within like Niditch's (1995) Esther of Model 2. Vashti's example provides the base for Model 2 whereby Esther's portrayal as a subversive character is possible. Vashti's agency is mature and evidences the influence of self-definition, self-direction and self-discovery through her intentional and wilful act as she does not detract from the power of her agency. The Vashti Model is critical to this study as it provides another option for women who may not find the Esther models appropriate. Also, Vashti's Model suggests the dangers of yielding unexpected power single-handedly against the established sources of power. Perhaps the authors use Vashti's example to also highlight the ultimate sacrifice that some must make in the cause of women's struggle for empowerment.

As the previous examples have indicated, the limitations of agency are often imposed upon women and the struggle for women is to circumvent these limitations.

CHAPTER 4 – EXERCISING AGENCY: COMING OF AGE

Chapter 4 of the thesis traces Hadassah's growing development regarding her physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual self, through the lens of female agency and its limitations and enablers. Chapter 4 covers Hadassah's life from the time that she becomes a teenager through to her years just prior to her retirement. It covers chapters 2-50 of *Hadassah: One Night with the King* and forms its inner frame, the memoir or the Scroll. In this Scroll, Hadassah reflects back on her life, providing lessons for the reader of the Scroll, Kesselman. This chapter of the thesis explores the development of Hadassah's agency using four lenses – adventurer, game-changer, prisoner, harlot and avenger.

Hadassah the Adventurer

Self- definition and self-discovery characterize the coming of age years of Hadassah's life as an adventurer. As an only child, confined within her home with only two adults to converse with, Hadassah is socially, physically and emotionally isolated from the society she lives in. Her life is governed by fear until she encounters the priest, Jacob on one of his visits to Persia. The priest triggers emotions that lead to rebellion and anger which serve as enablers that lead her toward an understanding of her identity and purpose in life beyond the confines of her home.

Hadassah's meeting with Jacob, the priest, awakens Hadassah from her childhood and initiates her growth into a woman. Just before the priest's arrival, Hadassah "grudgingly admires" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 75) Mordecai's confidence about hearing God's voice, and states that she does "not possess the maturity to distinguish…from the multitude of childish choruses going off" (p. 75) in her head. Yet, it is the priest who helps give her clarity. The novel achieves this for Hadassah through breaking stereotypes of saviour figures through the characterization of the priest. Jacob, the priest is described in unflattering terms, as a "wiry old man, slow of foot and even slower of speech; his hand [is] bony and nearly the size of a small dog" (p. 77). Yet, this man who is aged, filthy and appears ragged, speaks of a faith that keeps his "heart strong" (p. 79) and "head clear" (p. 79). Using the metaphor of a child-father relationship, he describes the exhilarating experience of his entry into the holy presence

of God, offering hope when there seems to be none. Of his time in the temple at Jerusalem, Jacob narrates: "My whole being would throb with this awareness of His person. I thought I could feel His heart," and "…have you ever seen a young child greet a beloved father after a long absence? The little arms pumping, the little legs churning, the leap into his arms, the tears in the father's eyes? I felt like that" (p. 79). The contrast of his physical appearance against his pure child-like joy and confidence in the presence of God causes Hadassah to forget his ugliness and connect spirituality to something beyond outward appearances.

Jacob's experience is characterized by uncertainty of self, yet certainty of following God's will for his life. Jacob's testimony introduces Hadassah—and by extension, Kesselman the reader—to the experience of the way human ugliness and sinfulness dissipates when God is worshipped, because that worship is pure and holy. Jacob relates:

> I tingled with the knowledge that I stood in the presence of the Being who created the universe, who created me. And that anything could happen. I could be ushered into glories unspeakable. I could be granted the kingship of Israel. I could be struck dead. Who knows? When you are in the presence of the King of Kings, destiny – not just your own, but the world's – can change in the twinkling of an eye. (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 80)

Jacob's description of his paradoxical position - uncertainty of self versus certainty in God; his ability to feel fully accepted by God although physically weak and filthy; the reality of physical danger yet his confidence of salvation - causes Hadassah to feel that "something wonderful was happening" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 80). Although she does not realize what this "something wonderful" is at that time, her encounter is described in terms of anticipation "a sensation like when someone stands behind you and you feel their eyes upon you, and the hair begins to tingle across the back of your neck" (p. 80). This experience with Jacob provides Hadassah with the impetus to begin thinking differently.

The changes triggered by Hadassah's encounter with the priest impact on her perceptions of life and her attitude to her environment. Her mind changes from being "grateful for the embrace" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 71) of her home, towards an

endeavour for freedom from "the sheer repetition of sights, sounds and smells in the house" (p. 85) that now appear oppressive. Hadassah's changed attitude reflects a change in self- perception, a psychological asset. This change is also highlighted through juxtaposing Mordecai's and Hadassah's responses to the priest. Mordecai "whispered a prayer" (p. 83) to God and becomes more pious in his faith while Hadassah becomes angry because "G-d had failed to protect His own" (p. 83). While the priest rejoices in his knowledge of God, Hadassah rages because of the same. However, this anger leads Hadassah toward "an unmistakable inner urge to regain the sense of" (p. 83) God's presence, which she says, "lays the foundation for decisions that wound up saving [her] life" (p. 83) and those of her posterity. It can be argued that Jacob, the priest, serves as an enabler for Hadassah's agency by awakening her to a new experience that she later finds empowering. This awakening assigns significance to Hadassah's spiritual life and gives her the impetus to live with a purpose, so much so, that she records it for posterity: "there was one visitor in particular who, my young Queen candidate, became the prime reason for my relating this whole part of our lives" (p. 77). The priest, although an external influencer, has an impact on Hadassah which seems to raise her self-perception.

While in *Hadassah: One Night with the King*, it is Jacob the priest who helps Hadassah define her spiritual goals, in the *Book of Esther*, it is Mordecai who triggers in Esther the need to reach out to a higher source of power and initiates in her an awakening similar to that of Hadassah's encounter with the priest. Mordecai achieves this by warning Esther that her life too would be at stake if she did not respond to the threat that Haman had issued to annihilate the Jews. Esther fasts for three days to muster the courage to appear before the King. Empowered by that experience, Esther's perspective changes like Hadassah's does after her encounter with the priest. In the biblical *Book of Esther* Mordecai serves the role that Jacob the priest does in *Hadassah: One Night with the King*. Mordecai's influence serves as an enabler to Esther's agency in his encouragement to appear before the King. Jacob, the priest in *Hadassah: One Night with the King* similarly seems to boost Hadassah's self-perception and thereby serves as an enabler for her agency.

In her deliberate preparation to exercise agency from within her home, Hadassah resembles Bronner's (1998) Esther of Model 2. She works from within the system rather

than destabilizing her family or openly rebelling against Mordecai. Further, Hadassah somewhat resembles Niditch's (1995) Esther of Model 2. Hadassah is transformed from being a passive observer to becoming an active agent after the priest's visit. Like Niditch's (1995) Esther of Model 2, Hadassah too acts out of an awareness of herself as a person capable of agency, in this phase. For instance, she waits for Mordecai to begin snoring and slips "out into the cool night air and [climbs] onto the roof" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 85). Once on the roof she proceeds to "crawl", "stay low", "move stealthily" and "peer out" of the "outer wall" (p. 85). Her potential for agency is established through these descriptions and her future outside the walls of her home and in the palace is foreshadowed through Hadassah's view of the palace, which to her "seemed so far away" (p. 86), yet "decreed matters of great consequence. Decisions of life and death" (p. 86).

In addition to her intentions discussed in the preceding paragraphs that reveal her capabilities for agency, Hadassah's encounter with the priest reveals the paradoxical nature of the influencers of agency. For instance, it appears that in *Hadassah: One Night with the King*, Mordecai is a limitation while Jacob, the priest is an enabler. In some contexts, Mordecai serves both as a limitation and an enabler in the biblical *Book of Esther*. Hadassah, through the lens of an adventurer also reveals the impact of self-perception on agency at this particular point in life and the deeper influence that impacts on decisions she makes thereafter regarding self-direction. Self-discovery also impacts on Hadassah's agency as she discovers her capacity for agency and embraces her identity as a woman with a purpose. What has been argued this far is the influencers of agency in this instance do not have inherent traits. Influencers may serve paradoxical roles, but agency is ultimately a choice made by the individual.

As choice is an important aspect of the development of an individual, a discussion of the novel's treatment of the necklace as a 'coming of age' symbol is important. The necklace symbolizes Mordecai's recognition of her womanhood and the beginning of Hadassah's potential for independence. The necklace also marks another significant moment of Hadassah's agency - spiritual awakening followed by her physical maturity. Hadassah's parents present her with the six-pointed star medallion on her seventh birthday.

> It is a star, Hadassah, and we gave it to you because you are our bright star and because we want you to carry on this family legacy and all it stands for. You can put it on, dearest, but you'll have to wait awhile before keeping it on for good. This is a woman's neckpiece" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 30).

She was too young to recognize the significance of the medallion as she admits that she 'had only the barest understanding' of "this family heritage (p. 30) then. However, Mordecai reminds her of its significance as he hands it to her when she comes of age.

Mordecai's symbolic handover of the necklace to Hadassah is also symbolic of the transfer of power to her although he does not realize it. Hadassah describes this encounter with womanhood as having "a profound effect" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 88) on her. "To put it simply, puberty caused my stored-up rage to surge and break out of its restraints. And the target this time, I am ashamed to say, was my poor dear lifesaver, Poppa Mordecai" (p. 88) she says. Her progression out of childhood into adulthood moves through "delayed grief" (p. 91) for her dead mother, followed by the "first taste of adulthood with all its undertones of yearning and independence" (p. 91). This progression causes her to recognize her position as a dependent despite entering her childbearing years. She views herself as "an inmate at the hands" of Mordecai who she now describes as a "despot of a father-who-was-not-my-father" (p. 91) a "jailer" and "sadistic depriver of adolescent joys" (p. 89). In her early years, Hadassah had realized and accepted her confinement. However, the change in her perception at this stage in her life reveals her "resolve" to change "something" (p. 91) about her confinement. Her reflection that "it was only a matter of weeks before these emotions escalated into an unquenchable thirst to physically leave the home" (p. 92) indicates her intentions to exercise agency as an endeavour for freedom.

The endeavour for freedom discussed in the earlier paragraph occurs as a result of her change in perceptions of her environment around her. Most of the segment on Hadassah as adventurer is marked by a change in her perception and attitudes with little physical action. The brief moments when Hadassah does act, however, appear to be fearless and bold. In her intentions to exercise agency, Hadassah resembles Niditch's (1995) Esther of Model 2 where both women, Esther and Hadassah, remain within the system and strategize to subvert the structures that they find oppressive. Where

Hadassah does act, she resembles Esther in Model 2 as her actions are intended to subvert although from within the system. In the *Book of Esther*, Mordecai's coercion of Esther to appear before the King to plead for the lives of the Jewish people serves as an enabler for Esther's agency. Whereas in *Hadassah: One Night with the King*, Mordecai's action in gifting the necklace together with all the memories and responsibilities it represents, serves as a trigger for Hadassah's preparation to act subversively: "I remember how your parents wanted you to wear this when you had finally left your childhood behind. It is a special symbol of our people …" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p.88). Interestingly, the necklace episode also provides opportunities to explore parallels between Hadassah and Vashti. For instance, Mordecai's surprise and shock at discovering that Hadassah had reached puberty parallels the chamberlain's confusion with Vashti's response in defying the King's orders to appear before him. While Mordecai's handing the necklace symbolizes his recognition of Hadassah's potential for agency as a developing teenager, the chamberlains issue an edict to void Vashti's agency. Like Mordecai who serves as an enabler foreshadowing Hadassah's agency, the King's demand communicated by the chamberlains serve as enablers to Vashti's agency as her response to appear before the King triggers her to exercise agency in open rebellion.

Hadassah the Game Changer

The preceding argument has established Hadassah's capacity for agency and her ability to strategize in order to exercise agency. Having established that, it is useful to consider how Hadassah develops and assumes confidence to draw from her agentive ability the power she needs for action. Hadassah's encounter with the priest has changed her self-perception from that of a victim to that of a woman with purpose. Her anger with God is resolved and she has begun to heal from the grief of losing her mother. Mordecai has handed her the necklace as she came of age. As a woman wearing the neckpiece given to her by her parents, the empowerment her mother had spoken of symbolized through the necklace is now hers.

Hadassah's development, though, is treated in the novel, incrementally, beginning with measured steps exercised first within her home to exercise agency and

apply strategy to achieve her goals. She shows her ability to use her wit in circumventing the 'rules' that are intended to control her. As a developing teenager, Hadassah is introduced to Jesse, Rachel's grandson. Her confinement is contrasted with Jesse's freedom in order to accentuate the difference in treatment between males and females within that society. Jesse is a free young lad who roams the streets as and when he pleases. He is not restricted by anyone or by his residence or gender. Jesse's freedom creates awareness of her plight and she takes measures to escape her predicament. She makes "Momma Rachel" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 92) complicit by attributing to her the ideas about cross-dressing, thus normalizing it - "I remember *you* have said that Jewish folks like to dress up and fool people into thinking that girls are boys and boys are girls" (p. 92) [emphasis added]. Next, she requests Rachel to cross dress her so she could step outside into society – "Would you dress me up like a boy? Maybe even a non-Jewish one?" (p. 92). She succeeds in both convincing Rachel to help her and in cross-dressing. Once in her disguise, she ventures out boldly, confidently, excitedly and fully aware that she is "alone" (p. 94) in this adventure:

> I felt like the wind was new, more brisk, cooler upon my face. It seemed like my legs were full of energy, my feet as light as air. I fought the urge to throw out my arms and burst into song. What a feeling! (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 94)

In stepping outside her house disguised as a boy, Hadassah attempts to appropriate the agency of men to herself by pretending to be one of them. However, her pretence is short-lived as she cannot remember her way back home and needs Jesse to show her the way. Her inability to sustain this pretence, signals the inability for women to appropriate men's agency to themselves through pretence. However, this episode is important, among other things, in that it identifies the important role of Jesse in Hadassah's development towards agency. As friend and potential lover he inducts Hadassah to challenges and new worlds she had not previously crossed into.

Hadassah's development in the context of agency is evident through her insistence in accepting the King's invite and entering the Palace in the disguise of a boy. After her initial adventure into the city, Hadassah seems to have more confidence in herself and her ability to wear the disguise. When Mordecai speaks of the King's

invitation, she asserts herself and insists on going to the Palace. Her tone of voice and stature take Mordecai by surprise. Hadassah's ability to hold her ground and secure his agreement for her to accompany him in the disguise of a boy is a significant development in her ability to exercise agency. Hadassah appropriates the male domain of voice and the exercise of female agency by taking on two personas as she enters the palace – a boy and a woman. This double persona positions Hadassah as an insider and an outsider allowing her to partake of the male world although she is a woman. Through this double persona Hadassah appropriates to herself power that belongs to men. This position reflects her journey towards self-discovery similar to Bronner's (1998) Esther of Model 2 who juggled the Jewish and Persian personas at the same time. Esther is forced into the personas while Hadassah deliberately takes them on. Esther's personas are both female while Hadassah's are male and female. Hadassah's attempts to subvert the oppressive patriarchal system from within in the disguise of a male displays agency similar to Bronner's (1998) Esther who successfully balanced two personas.

Hadassah's introduction into the palace (in her disguise) overwhelms her because it awakens her to the reality of a world dominated by wealth and controlled by men. The sight of the royal concubines who she mistakes for "perfectly coloured statues of beautiful young women" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 110), makes her feel awkward as does the sight of excessive food and wine. Her disorientation is expressed by her desire for "a normal sight upon which to rest [her] gaze" (p. 113). Hadassah's distress is further increased when she witnesses a scene of excessive male power and authority with a thousand men raising their cups to toast the King before drinking it. The scene causes her to feel disgusted and panicky. Through this encounter Hadassah is forced to face the realities of the patriarchal world and her vulnerability as a woman. Both her personas clash at this point and Hadassah finds it difficult to reconcile the two opposing realities – women as objects versus women as real people.

What this section of the thesis has tried to do is to demonstrate how through cross-dressing Hadassah can assume the male persona and learn about the realities of that worldview from within. As a game changer, Hadassah's agency begins with her intentions to change the circumstances she lives in. This development of agency progresses to her directly defying her father. In leaving her home, Hadassah disobeys her

father, and in so doing, parallels Vashti's act of disobedience towards the king. Both women, Hadassah and Vashti also appear resolute regardless of the consequences. Hadassah, steps out of the confines of her home boldly as a woman in men's clothes while Vashti stays within the confines of her court, refusing to step out to entertain the King. In both instances, 'stepping-out' and 'staying-in' are particular and deliberate forms of agency exercised by the respective protagonists. Both women resist the labels of femininity they are defined by and subvert the use of femininity. Hadassah discards women's clothes for men's attire while Vashti rejects the king's invitation and refuses to parade her beauty for the king's pleasure. While Hadassah crosses the threshold of female identity, Vashti rewrites female identity by refusing to cross the threshold of the king's court to parade her beauty. In both instances, the women exercise agency to subvert the stereotypes of female submission to male authority. The examples of Hadassah and Esther in this context suggest that there is a choice each protagonist must make in perceiving and responding to opportunities for exercising agency.

What this section has been interested in establishing is the process of the development of Hadassah's agency. Self-discovery and a change in self-perception from child to adult initiates the development of her agency. Changed self-perception through the spiritual and physical awakening trigger further development of her agency as she responds to these awakenings and acts on her intent to change her circumstances. Having recognized her capacity for agency in the 'coming of age' phase, Hadassah acts as a game changer in circumventing female stereotypes through cross-dressing and stepping out in the disguise of men. Her game-changing role enables her to see the raw power of male authority up close preparing her for the next phase of her journey when she must cope with the realities of being a prisoner in the king's harem.

Hadassah the Prisoner

This segment of the thesis entitled 'Hadassah the Prisoner' is interested in establishing the continued development of Hadassah's agency. In the segment above, Hadassah has had temporary freedom to explore male authority and power. She is deprived of that freedom when she is identified as a potential candidate for the King's harem and is forcefully recruited for this purpose. Although held against her will in the

harem, Hadassah's responses to her circumstances and opportunities portray a woman capable of agency. As she enters the harem, she is initially deprived of her voice, choice and freedom. While she had previously seen the Palace guards as "keeping intruders out" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 143), she now sees them as "keeping terrified occupants in" (p. 143). While her first visit to the harem with Jesse had been euphoric now the "place loomed as a fate worse than death. A chamber of horrors and of unknown and unspeakable outcomes" (p. 140). Hadassah feels defeated and robbed of the potential future she could have had and her freedom. She is a prisoner within the harem walls. However, as the novel goes on to suggest, Hadassah's perception of her situation does not seem to limit her agency. On the contrary, she makes the best of the circumstances that she finds herself in**.** She does this through a series of quick discussions, beginning with her name. Very early in her life at the harem, she protects her Jewish identity by substituting her real name for Star in the harem. When quizzed about her name, she starts "Ha_" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 141) then pauses when she realizes that she was about to reveal her identity to a stranger, proceeds to give herself the name "Star" (p. 141). Naming herself signals her functioning similar to Vashti under her terms.

Hadassah's portrait as a victor rather than a victim, suggests the significance of psychological assets for agency and highlights the positive influence of optimism in building self-perception and in turn agency. Hadassah's agency parallels Vashti who defied being victimized. Vashti refuses to stand before the King naked, Hadassah refuses to stay lying on the bed after her capture. Both women define their positions.

Hadassah works within the physical limitations and utilizes her mental powers to empower herself in an effort to find the King's favour and become Queen. Powerless to fight her way out of the physical control of men, Hadassah astutely and perceptively works on building a relationship with Hegai, the chief eunuch in an attempt to get to the king. Hadassah intends to appropriate power to herself by becoming Queen. Thus Hadassah's actions are framed by this perspective and aim. Hadassah internalizes and interprets Hegai's words, "This is the beginning of a wonderful life for you, or it can be if you let it" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 148), as she chooses. She masks her genuine intentions and initiates a comfortable relationship with Hegai. She deliberately compliments him: "You are indeed persuasive, noble Hegai. I shudder to think what this

harem would consist of without your convincing oratory" (p. 148) and seizes opportunities to appropriate him honour. These strategic decisions result in the development of a relationship of trust between Hadassah and Hegai. Hadassah is seen to be navigating the limitations imposed on her with great care and tact. She is exercising agency as Showden observes, where "the past helps locate the future, and sets up the 'probabilities' of future actions" (2011, p. 17). This application of agency through strategy and planning parallels the agency of Miles' (2015) Esther in Model 2 as a wise woman and that of Niditch's (1995) Esther of Model 2 who exercises agency from within for subverting the oppressive systems.

Although Hadassah is deprived of her voice, choice and freedom, she speaks, chooses and experiences a certain amount of freedom in her own way. Hadassah exercises agency albeit within the limitations imposed on her because she chooses to perceive herself as a victor rather than a victim. She attempts to assist the other girls in the harem, breaks out of the physical boundaries placed on her by exiting out of the window and by making friends with Hegai. All these activities are deliberate and intentional and portray a woman who understood the odds against her posed by male authority yet chooses to work within it, in order to achieve the outcome she desires. Although a prisoner, she rewrites the terms of her life within the confines of the Palace walls. Approaching agency from Drydyk's (2013) view of agency as a process, there is a form of subversive agency exercised by Hadassah as she intentionally seeks to find favour with Hegai. She manipulates his feelings so as to make him feel important and valued, resembling Klein's (2003) Esther of Model 1. However, in the exercise of agency, Hadassah is similar to Niditch's (1995) Esther who stays within the system but manipulates it to her advantage. Like Niditch's Esther, Hadassah passively resists the system using her dual persona as she sees fit to her advantage.

Hadassah the Harlot

Another lens that the novel provides in the exercise of female agency is the dual roles Hadassah plays as both "maiden and harlot" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 166). Hadassah enacts a strategy to achieve her goal to gain favour with the King. Her preparations include extensive mental and emotional sacrifice in order to make her "one

night with the King" count. Moreover, she channels all her "youth", "beauty", and all "thinking processes and knowledge" (p. 193) into the opportunity to become queen. Hadassah creates a virtual lover of the King and wills herself to fall in love with this virtual lover. She rationalises stories of his irrational behaviour in order to create a liking toward him. She then proceeds to build on this imagination by developing a desire for reciprocal feelings from him. Of her relationship with this imagined King she says:

> I imagined being tenderly embraced by the King, returning his kisses. I found that soon I began to desire the King in a wide variety of ways: to crave his presence, his words, his trust – as well as that moment of our physical union. I could now spend hours thinking about bringing a smile to his face, melting his royal reserve, causing him to laugh (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 194).

Hadassah makes a conscious and deliberate effort to the extent that she begins to believe in her imagined desires for the King "with a longing [she] never knew [she] possessed" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 194). She convinces herself that the King can help her fulfil her destiny to serve YHWH, to motivate her and drive her toward her goal of becoming Queen. Hadassah internalizes her position although it is in her imagination so much so that "like an impatient bride awaiting the return of her husband from war" (p. 194) she looks forward to her night with the King.

The image of Hadassah portrayed here is of a maiden who is inexperienced with men, trying to be ready for the King, a very experienced man with women. Her imagination provides her with the opportunity to increase her resolve and thereby her agency in preparation for her one night with the King. She recognizes that physical intimacy is inadequate and decides to use her intellect to her advantage. Hadassah exercises agency that is mature, tactful and intense to do everything she can in her power to achieve her goal of gaining the King's favour and becoming his queen. She is similar to Niditch's (1995) Esther of Model 2 as she remains within the system but strategically subverts it from within. Like Niditch's Esther of Model 2 Hadassah in her early years is naïve and does not exercise agency. However, once in the harem, she accepts her position as a candidate for the King and builds on her agentive abilities to become a mature woman.

Empowered by her mission to help Jesse and to fulfil God's purpose for her life, Hadassah makes sacrifices to forge ahead with her plan. After a conversation with Jesse, with whom she is re-connected in the palace, Hadassah expresses the certainty of her intent: "I knew then that being chosen Queen was the only way my life—or his—would ever be made right" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 179). Jesse reinforces her resolve when he tells her to "Win. That is the best thing you can do. Win the King's favour and become his queen. That is our only hope – for you, for your family and mine, for the Jews of Persia." (p. 188). To this point, Jesse and Hadassah had shared a very close relationship which had introduced to her "a whole new crop of emotion" (p. 167). She had also entertained the idea of "being Jesse's wife" (p. 167) before Jesse was turned into a eunuch and Hadassah was taken to the harem of the King. She realizes that Jesse's "emasculation had not quenched his love for [her]" (p. 197) nor hers for "she felt it too" (p. 197). However, she uses "sheer will power" (p. 197) to temporarily set aside her feelings for Jesse and fall in love with the King as a matter of their survival

In addition to her emotional struggle, (although convinced she must fulfil God's will), Hadassah struggles to reconcile her religion with her actions – "Did the Jewish code by which I vowed to live mention a penalty for an act some might label fornication – even though it was coerced?" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 178) – and she asks both Jesse and Mordecai for their opinions. Hadassah feels her need to continue the family legacy although she is burdened with grief and regret at the unfortunate circumstances that she finds herself in. She "sighs with the heaviness of a woman carrying burdens beyond belief" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 181) as she is challenged by the tension between the responsibilities she has to carry out against following her wishes. "I learned long ago, after the death of our families, that sometimes we have to live with far less than our highest wish" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 181) she says in an attempt to convince herself further to accept her position.

Hadassah's struggle with her emotional and religious responsibility versus desires as observed above supports her position of being the maiden and the harlot – two contradictory roles that somehow need to blend. These emotional and religious challenges are critical to her agency as they create in her an awareness of the limitations of agency and depict evidence of her ability to rationalize her thought processes, clarify

her intentions and focus on her goal. Self-discovery and self-direction are both at play here as evidence of her agency.

Hadassah's execution of her carefully thought-through manoeuvres to become Queen suggests the continuing development of her agency. Although an open invite to all the Palace jewellery is granted to her by Hegai, she rejects being objectified and therefore does not take up the offer. She decides to wear "a simple gown and only one adornment" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 190) for her one night with the King. In doing so, she writes the terms with which she will enter the King's presence. She works out a plan to leave a memory with the King by giving him the only piece of jewellery "as a gift – the means by which [the King will] remember [her] name" (p. 190). This piece of jewellery is significant as it represents her name in the harem – Star. Hadassah's plan is reinforced by the example of Olandra of Parthia who had spent the night before with the King laden with jewellery but sick in the stomach. She hears how Olandra is stripped of her jewellery and sent to the concubine quarters. "So while other girls gathered in huddles to reconceive their approach, I retired to my suite in order to work on the last part of my preparation, the one everyone seemed to be overlooking. The mind" (p. 193), she says. Hadassah considers the impact she will have on the King and works on preparing to make minds meet. Confident of her plan to engage him in conversation, she "smiles warmly" (p. 165) at Hegai's advice to focus on the king and repeatedly tells herself: "Focus on him. Focus on Him" (p. 165). This becomes her mantra. She secretly reads in her spare time to become more knowledgeable (p. 166). She prays for "unquenchable desire for the man [the King]" (p. 193). Next she proceeds to prepare herself to be physically appealing. She washes her hair in "milk" (p. 202) and prepares it to suit the "Persian ideal" (p. 202). She prepares to "please [the King] with every part of [herself]" (p. 201) by giving herself completely to him, emotionally, physically, intellectually and romantically. After agonizing moments of anxiety and fear, she goes forth to spend her night with the King with God's spirit filling her (p. 201) and "thrilling" her with "a sense of purpose and destiny" unlike any she had known before (p. 202). She attributes her success to the lessons she learned from the Chamberlain, Hegai, and the writings of Solomon so as to focus on the King and give herself completely to him.

Hadassah displays a mature sense of agency in her handling the preparations for her night with the King and aligns with Model 2 of Esther. She is strategic and exercises agency at the opportune moments in order to subvert the limitations imposed on her. She strategizes, observes, re-strategizes and adapts to the changing needs around her and successfully enters the sphere reserved for men through her intellectual preparation.

Hadassah's night with the King demonstrates her ability to put into practice what she mentally and emotionally prepares. After much anxiety, doubt and fear, Hadassah - a young, sexually inexperienced and powerless girl, stands in the presence of the most powerful and sexually experienced man in Persia. Hadassah combines acts of a maiden with that of a harlot to surprise the King and catch and keep his attention. Then she executes her careful plan. She tells him her name is "Star" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 215) "unclasps the Kashmiri cloak" (p. 215) to reveal the only piece of jewellery she wears, engages in a conversation with him about it at the first opportunity and gives him the necklace. She then proceeds to offer herself up to him although ironically it is he who has taken her forcefully for himself. She intentionally "smiles" (p. 216) and flatters the King – "I am the one feeling joy at being so close to you" (p. 217), and then makes a request of him: "I want to know you" (p. 217). Although the King is surprised by her request, he welcomes it and engages in conversation with her that continued into "the early hours of the morning" (p. 222). Although a sexual encounter was expected that night, the "little Hadassah from the backstreets of Susa, a little Jewish girl…" (p. 217) accomplished "something far more special and profound" (221) by focusing on the King and responding to his innermost needs rather than wants. This attracts "far more" (p. 218) than his favour as he touches Hadassah's cheek "with a wondrously tender look" (p. 218) indicating his pleasure. Hence, she subverts the "King's desires" (p. 221) for her as a virgin for his bed and redirects his attention toward her "rare" (p. 218) qualities as a companion and partner.

Hadassah navigates the difficult night with the King with grace and tact demonstrating her mature agency. The juxtaposition of the two roles in the series of surprises that Hadassah presents highlights her tact and aligns her to Miles' (2015) Esther of Model 2. The King has no clue about Hadassah's intentions as her fantasy merges with reality through her will. Like the woman in the Arabian Night tales, she

subverts the King's intent to rape her by engaging him intellectually all night and leads him beyond his physical desires. Instead of her being the object, she subtly directs him back to an actual object of the necklace; instead of satisfying him physically, she satisfies him intellectually and thereby Hadassah emerges the victor. Hadassah does more than subvert as she transcends the limitations imposed on her as a woman confined within the Palace walls by redefining the terms of her engagement with life. In this Hadassah is like Miles' (2015) Esther, a wise woman who feigns submission while working within it to subvert and to re-write her narrative within the limitations imposed on her. She also parallels Vashti who wrote her script by exerting unexpected power. Vashti refuses to undress while Hadassah willingly undresses yet both women refuse to be treated as objects. Vashti is silent yet powerful; so is Hadassah. They both re-write their narratives on their terms. The modern reader is reminded of the resilience Hadassah displays and her ability to keep focused despite the emotional pain. She shows courage and strength and defies being defined as a stereotypical woman.

The portrayal of Hadassah falling in love with the King is a construct of the plot in order to portray Hadassah as a strong woman and, arguably, to reinforce a type of femininity that draws on romance genres. Hadassah is clearly in love with Jesse who "openly drapes his arm around [her] shoulder" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 198) even as she prepares to enter the King's chambers. This fictional romance with the King is a strategy, a disingenuous one that enables Hadassah to subvert her impending rape. By falling in love with the King, her sexual encounter would become mutual. The significant impact Hadassah's determination has had on her is evident through her ability to translate her imagination in real life to the King. She convinces herself and the reader that there was mutual love in saying "We fell in love" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 221). Also, when their relationship is consummated, she says there was "mutual hunger" (p. 244). Hadassah is portrayed with a choice of being a victim or a victor. The choice to be a victor plays a strategic role for her ultimate victory as that guides the exercise of her agency to become Queen and to accomplish her goal to save the Jewish nation. The authors seem to highlight the significant role of psychological assets in women who live under oppressive situations.

This phase of Hadassah's development in playing the role of harlot and maiden is characterized by confidence and empowerment. She persistently works towards her goal, gives her all, and overcomes every barrier that she faces with strength and fortitude. She makes several sacrifices and forges ahead confidently. To the modern reader, Hadassah's journey symbolizes women's journey towards empowerment and the persistence required to survive or achieve. Her journey reveals the struggles and the barriers that could be perceived as limitations, and how these can be overcome.

Hadassah the Avenger

After her night with the King which left an undeniable impression on the King, Hadassah is appointed "Queen of Persia" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 242) and her name is changed to "Esther" (p. 241). With her mission accomplished to become Queen, Hadassah's attention now turns towards her ultimate goal, finding her parents' murderers and bringing them to justice. The image of the twisted cross, tattooed on the back of the murderers, remains fresh in Hadassah's mind. She learns the murderer Haman's reputation of being a brutal man. She begins her journey to seek him out and seek revenge.

This segment of the thesis, 'Hadassah as avenger', explores her role as an empowered woman who implements a well-planned strategy to influence the King, destroy Haman, the villain, and save her people. Becoming Queen required great skill and effort, just as destroying Haman would. Thus her subsequent visit to the King, uninvited, was a decision between saving lives or surrendering herself and the Jewish people to the brutal villain Haman to be annihilated. However, Hadassah is aware that an unsummoned entry could spell her death unless the King extended his sceptre. Hence, Hadassah's second entry into the King's presence is not any easier than the first visit. She realizes the import of Mordecai's statement: "Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 195) when she is faced with the prospect that her death and the fate of her people lie in her hands. Her reflection: "There was no way to absorb this, no way to process its full import. Not only could I not think it through, but I felt I was fighting to survive my very next breath" (p. 299) reveals her dilemma and the magnitude of the issue that she faced. Hadassah

realizes that as a Jew if she does not "go in to the King, implore his favour and plead for the sparing" of the Jewish people (p. 300), she could lose her life because she too is a Jewess. However, Hadassah accepts her role and responsibility toward her people - "I owed it to everyone – Mordecai, Jesse, even the Jews of Persia" (p. 304) and decides to act "with courage" (p. 304) regardless of the outcome. The decision propels her to exercise more agency as it empowers her; she recalls: "the knowledge of what I would do gave me direction, a sense of purpose" (p. 304). She realizes the risk and is willing to take it: "I will go in to the King unbidden, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish" (p. 304). Knowing that there "was only one course of action" (p. 307), she steps "willingly into a date with destiny" (p. 307). Using pathetic fallacy, the author describes the sombre atmosphere as Hadassah approaches the King: "The horizon of that day stood dark with thunderclouds holding no portent of whether they would linger or benignly pass over" (p. 307). Upon reaching the first step of the throne, Hadassah looks up at her husband's face only to see her husband who was also going to be her "judge and jury" (p. 311) seated with his lips "pursed and his eyes questioning" (p. 311) in surprise. Then there is a pause of uncertainty which Hadassah uses to force herself to smile reminding the King of their first meeting (p. 312). She also repeats the words spoken at their first meeting, "even at this moment of highest danger, of which I am well aware, your presence fills me with joy. I am overwhelmed when I come close to the one I love" (p. 312) triggering a "shared memory" (p. 312) between them. The response to this statement leads to the moment of her greatest fear and relief as the King lowers "the sceptre" (p. 312). The spectators "gasp" (p. 312) and the combination of "surprise" and maybe "relief" (p. 312) causes her to "swing around in alarm" (p. 312). She leans forward and touches the sceptre with "gratitude" (p. 312) to the King and God. Hadassah takes a risk for her people, her family and herself. She recognizes her role and her position and with clear direction steps forward to appear before the King, strategically appeals to him and accomplishes her mission.

This particular event in Hadassah's life is significant to *Hadassah: One Night with the King* as a whole as it shows how agency leads towards empowerment. Hadassah displays resistance to the powers that oppress her. The last three of her acts of agency are critical to position her as a woman with a mature agency. She has learned how to

work within the system to achieve her goal. Her agency in this passage aligns to Model 2 in her ability to plan, organize and use language strategically to influence the King. She works from within the system to first learn like Niditch's (1995) Esther does and then uses the opportunities to act. However, Hadassah also parallels Model 3 in that she submits to a higher purpose and is willing to sacrifice herself in the process. Through her bold act to appear before the King, Hadassah resembles Vashti and her agency as a risk-taker. Vashti refuses to go to the King whereas Hadassah willingly goes. Vashti risks her life to protect it and is punished for it while Hadassah risks her life and is rewarded for it. They both take different risks and demonstrate the element of choice with taking risks. At the end, both reflect each other in their resolve and confidence to exercise self-determination. Through her example Hadassah speaks of courage and persistence to the modern reader while Vashti speaks of inspiration.

In the penultimate climactic act of agency, and armed with this renewed purpose and courage, Hadassah finally executes her plan to overcome Haman despite the impossibility "to change the law" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 304) and reverse the death sentence against the Jews. She invites the King to her "territory" (p. 313), determines the right moment for her request, and "in one of the most exquisite, destiny-defining moments" (p. 337) of her life, delivers the penultimate response that is bold, powerful and agentive. She says, "The very same man who murdered my family. This wicked, evil Haman is my foe, my enemy, your Majesty! For I am a Jew" (p. 337). The double adjectives serve to highlight the pent-up anger within her and conveys the forcefulness of her request. Haman seals his own fate when the King sees him with Hadassah almost "covering" (p. 338) her with his body appearing to violate her. "The scarf of death" (p. 339) is laid over [Haman's] face, the King's signet ring "yanked" (p. 339) "from his finger" (p. 339) and [he] hung on the gallows he had ironically built for Mordecai. Hadassah finds a way out for the Jewish people (p. 342) then hands the power back to Mordecai (p. 342). Her final act is perhaps the most significant as she is determined to "finish what King Saul…had failed to do. Exterminate the final ranks of Israel's oldest and most evil foe. Correct a centuries-old mistake" (p. 348). In the destruction of Haman, Hadassah closes off what the wife of King Agag started five centuries ago to perpetuate the patriarchal ideologies of men through the seed she plants and nurtures in

Haman's ancestors. Therefore, power and agency are both capabilities binding women five centuries ago to the present. The length of time and the power of evil parallel the difficulties for the development of female agency while revealing that persistence and creativity are strategies that work. Hadassah is a strong woman, who takes on the cause of the nation and the Jewish people and places that above her own. Her final act indicates her role as an avenger of her people and of her personal grief with Haman as her narrative ends with, "and a little girl's grief avenged" (p. 348) implying the success of her mission.

Hadassah's agency in this phase parallels Model 2 and 3 of the biblical Esther. She is like Bronner's (1998) Esther of Model 2 in using her beauty and her brains to work for her through intentionality she applies to achieve her goal of becoming Queen. Hadassah's process of self-discovery as she seeks clarification of her role and purpose, her physical and spiritual awakening resembles Bronner's (1998) Esther who discovers her purpose and functions from that frame of reference. Hadassah's love for her family—an internal quality and her determination for justice—impact on her self-definition and self-direction that serve as an enablers for agency. Her agency develops such that, although a young woman, without any military training or shrewdness, she defeats the powerful, ruthless enemy, Haman, and subverts his plans. Also, Hadassah successfully circumvents a Persian law that cannot be revoked through the "counter-edict" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 345) issued by Mordecai for the Jews to fight back. In using the means that she has access to, Hadassah demonstrates the creative ways to work around constraints. She lives in the place the enemy frequents, and strategizes from within to bring him down. She does what it takes to fulfil her plan. Her agency is developed through the use of tangible assets such as the privileges of massages, baths and Hegai as well as intangible assets such as self-definition, self-direction and self-discovery that lead toward empowerment. Hadassah displays a resistance to be defined as inferior which Tolbert (1983) says the biblical text is filled with (p. 23). In delivering the Jewish nation from annihilation, Hadassah's agency parallels the agency of Costas' (1998) Esther of Model 3, in which she fulfils her appointed purpose. The emblem of the necklace that Mordecai gives her for the second time symbolizes the completion of her transition from being a woman with little agency to an empowered woman with full

agency: “I felt his hand squeeze something into mine - a strangely familiar shape in a velvet cloth. I unwrapped it and gasped as I held up the old star necklace given to me by my parents” (p. 345). She is the “brightest star” (p. 30) fulfilling her mother’s desire for her.

Hadassah the avenger addresses two concerns of agency - power and justice. Hadassah brings to resolution the 500-year mistake and offers the reader hope for the future where wrongs could be righted. Hadassah’s example demonstrates the power of persistence, passive resistance and the use of psychological assets in exercising agency. Hadassah’s handing of power over to Mordecai once it is hers, symbolizes that the ultimate aim is not to wrench power from the oppressive forces but to seek justice and to be treated with equality.

CHAPTER 5 – LOSS OF AGENCY: FINAL YEARS

Chapter 5 of this thesis deals with the last two chapters of the modern text, *Hadassah: One Night with the King*. Hadassah is now a retired woman who is winding up her narrative within the memoir. What she decides to pass on to posterity at the end of her years carries a significant message to the reader as it comes after a reflection of her entire life till retirement. This chapter of the thesis is structured to view the presentation of agency through positioning the two protagonists as mentor and student. The role of Hadassah the mentor explores her final remarks to the Queen candidate. The role of Kesselman the student explores how the reader of the memoir (Kesselman) receives the message of the Scroll and responds to it.

Hadassah the Mentor/Model

In the final chapter of her narrative, Hadassah reflects on her life and her role in serving her husband. She is no longer Queen and takes up residence at the Candidate's Harem. She has lost her status, her power and her voice to be effective. This final section of Hadassah's memoir leads the reader back to the loss of agency during the absence—and eventual downfall—of her husband, King Xerxes. Given the emphasis on Haman's downfall in the *Book of Esther*, it is interesting to note that only one chapter of Hadassah's narrative in *Hadassah: One Night with the King* is given to the days after the liberation of the Jews – a time when Hadassah's agency and power had been brought to the fore. Hadassah's advice to Kesselman, the young bride-to-be, to "Heed the Chamberlain as though your life depended on it, because it may" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 350), reinforces her acceptance of her subservient role.

According to Hadassah's memoir, King Xerxes was a different man when it came to the battlefield. For instance, he left for war a month after their wedding (p. 255) and was reported to be an "irrational tyrant" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 266). He executed the engineers when the bridge they had constructed failed during the storm (p. 266). Encouraged by one victory at Thermopylae, he sets Athens on fire and attempts to destroy the Athenians who had taken shelter on an island when his navy is ambushed and the battle is lost. Without wealth to "resupply the army" (p. 272), King Xerxes

returns home defeated and depleted of finances. Hadassah explains that things between Hadassah and Xerxes were never the same after his return from war.

Upon her husband's return, Hadassah realizes that their relationship is based solely on the King's terms. Her disappointment and loss of agency are evident through her description of the King's priorities upon return from war:

> As for my reunion with the King? I am sorry to say that it took several days to happen. Xerxes was preoccupied and angry in those days, *far too distracted to entertain my joy* at his return. Beyond that, I am sorry to say, I had heard rumours that he had brought along a contingent of his favourite concubines on the trip. (Not exactly my favourite aspect of royal life.) *I waved at him from a high balcony, and he waved back with a smile, but that was all*. (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 275) [Emphasis added]

Up to this point, despite all the limitations, Hadassah has been portrayed as an active agent, a strategist who uses opportunities and limitations as enablers toward her journey of empowerment. She has been a game changer, both bold and courageous and unafraid to break out of the stereotype assigned to her, or to venture out alone and face the consequences of her actions.

Hadassah's agency at the close of her narrative resembles Klein's (2003) Esther of Model 1. Esther prioritizes her loyalty to Mordecai over her ambitions. Hadassah surrenders her ambitions to return to the child-parent relationship she had with Mordecai. Both women find themselves accepting their position as those who have accomplished their mission and fulfilled their role for YHWH. Their loss of agency is a regression. In her acceptance of God's plan for their lives Hadassah is like Costas' Esther of Model 3 who seems to be content in serving a higher purpose with her life rather than seeking out her desires.

At the end of the novel, however, after the climax of her empowerment and agency demonstrated through the destruction of Haman, Hadassah seems to experience a loss in her agency. Some examples are the loss of her access to the Palace and to Mordecai, loss of status as Queen and the loss of freedom as she is confined in the

candidate's harem. At this point, Hadassah's receding power and constraints on her agency are evident. Her story closes on a note of submission and surrender to patriarchal ideologies. Despite her agentic experiences, she has not been able to remain in that transcendent space. It is a sober moment for women, as it does not offer hope or an avenue for its escape. From a feminist perspective, it is tragic to see Hadassah at her retirement age surrender herself as she takes up "residence at the candidate's harem" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 350). This surrender is a regression from Model 2 to Model 1, subversion to submission. She attempts to be in denial: "I can truthfully say that the years have been kind" (p. 350) she says, although the reader knows more. Perhaps her desire to go to Israel offers some hope but as her narrative ends, she is still in Persia, with her fate a question that lingers in the minds of Kesselman and her father. Also, by revealing her true feelings and regrets for a life lost with Jesse - "I suppose if it were not for the terrible loss inflicted upon Jesse, as well as my very public legacy, we might have married" (p. 351) Hadassah confirms where her heart truly lay and highlights her inability to do what she truly desired.

In summary, Hadassah is seen at the close of the text with hope for a life with Jesse lost and her position with Mordecai similar to her early years – "he acts like a father of a ten-year-old" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p.351). Although once a powerful Queen, she is without a home, a husband or a meaningful life, confined to the harem with her days of glory gone - "Today I am no longer spoken of for my youth and beauty" (p. 349) she says. In sum, Hadassah leaves the reader wondering about the reasons for the nature of her advice to the young brides-to-be which appears to suggest that they take the easier path to survival.

Through the Scroll, Hadassah's advice to the descendants is to: "remember the protocols of the King's presence" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 350). This advice places Hadassah in a similar position as that of Fuchs' (2013) Esther who is treated as an object for the male gaze. The young bride-to-be is cautioned to "heed the Chamberlain as though your life depended on it, because it may" (p. 350), indicating that agency can only be exercised within the limitations of power that is allocated to women. She ought to "Bear gifts; do not ask for them" (p. 350), suggesting a sacrifice of self for the interest and the pleasure of the other, which in this case is a man. The advice to focus on the

King's pleasure: "It is about him. Focus on the King. Delight in his presence, and you'll already have all the attractiveness you need" (p. 350) discredits any focus on self or empowerment. It denies the woman the capacity to exercise her agentive abilities and instead of seeking to be empowered on her terms, suggests a return to being a follower of tradition in order to attain happiness. The final moral Hadassah attempts to teach, that is: "the King's favour is worth more than all the titles and pomposities a person could ever hoard" (p. 350) appears hollow in the light of the fact that her circumstances at the novel's close suppresses agency. The focus in all these admonitions is Hadassah's role as object.

It can be argued that Hadassah's counsel appeals also to the principles of the shame and honour theory (Klein 2003) as identified and discussed previously as an aspect of Model 1, honouring the male through the woman's shame. Also, through the request to women reading the Scroll to focus on the King, the Scroll appears to prioritize a woman's submission to a higher purpose and a denial of autonomy and self-empowerment or even seeking that which truly reflects a woman's right to choose her desires. In its intent, this agency aligns with Costas' (1998) Model 3 of Esther. To the reader, Hadassah seems to negate all that she has worked for by surrendering her agency. It is a surrender of her will and her motivation. After building herself up to become an empowered woman, this surrender signals a wariness that is difficult to explain.

Yet, Hadassah sets herself up as a model to the Queen candidate who comes after her, and all of the women in her line down to Kesselman and further. She serves as a mentor through sharing her honest, detailed reflection of her life experiences and her struggles as a child, teenager, young adult and finally, as a mature adult balancing the demands of her desires against those of her culture, society and the men in her life. She is a woman who is fully aware of her agentive abilities and is actively involved in the decisions that concern her life working within the structures she finds herself in. However, at the end of her narrative, she regresses. Perhaps, the authors, Tenney and Olsen (2004) intend to portray the realistic and dire implications that face women in the face of deeply ingrained patriarchal power.

Kesselman the Student

The thesis thus far has focused on Hadassah in *Hadassah: One Night with the King* and her biblical counterpart, Esther from the biblical text. Although Kesselman's narrative opens the text *Hadassah: One Night with the King*, Hadassah's narrative is framed within Kesselman's narrative and occupies 50 of the 52 chapters of *Hadassah: One Night with the King*. This section viewed through the lens of Kesselman as a Student of the Scroll, focuses on Kesselman, the modern bride-to-be and the presentation of her agency at the close of the text.

In the closing chapter of the text, *Hadassah: One Night with the King*, Kesselman emerges from reading the Scroll, a mentoring tool for her agency. Unlike Hadassah and Esther, Kesselman's opportunities for agency are greater as she is positioned within the novel in the context of a modern woman. For instance, Kesselman has the choice of a life partner unlike Hadassah and Esther who are forced into a marriage to strangers. The narrator observes "she had been picky, taking her time to find the one she would want to wake up with every morning for the rest of her life" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 18). As she emerges from her reading of the Scroll, Kesselman has the opportunity to define her role as a bride. Yet, on her wedding day, Hadassah appears to be pre-occupied with her ancestors. She senses a strong connection to her ancestral past and its ideologies. She says of Esther: "She is my ancestor, and I feel like she's here for my wedding" (p. 358), Also, Kesselman intentionally links herself to the ancient past by using the ancient perfume and wearing the Star of David necklace Hadassah wore on her wedding day. Through these actions, Kesselman demonstrates her desire to identify with the traditions of the past that objectified women and positioned them as subjects to men. This desire is an outcome of the influence on her self-perception as a descendant of Esther.

Yet, the novel shows that she has more power as a woman in a modern setting through a reversal of roles. At the close of the novel, it is her husband, Jacob, who appears to be requiring support. Through a reversal of roles, on their wedding day, Jacob ben Yuda appears to parallel Hadassah's anxieties with regard to her encounter with the King, Surprisingly, In *Hadassah: One Night with the King*, Jacob ben Yuda is anxious about his appearance and puzzled by Kesselman's confidence. Jacob ben Yuda's

response upon seeing his bride to be suggests that he is unprepared for the bride's self-expression. He pulls her veil back, sees her smiling and "frowned at once" (p. 358) […] "Why are you smiling like that? Is everything all right? Do I look -?" (p. 358). "Most brides I've seen looked like they were about to pass out right about now. You're_" (p. 359). Jacob experiences a moment of self-doubt and is anxious about his physical appearance until Kesselman reassures him that he looks "wonderful" (p. 358) and proceeds to affirm and express her admiration for him: "I'm smiling because I'm so overjoyed to be in your presence. You are the most desirable and intoxicating man alive…" (p. 359). The reassurance that Jacob ben Yuda needs and that Kesselman gives to him, highlights the positioning of women as nurturers within the patriarchal culture. But this nurturing tendency is not necessarily empowering in this instance.

Kesselman's smile in the presence of her husband parallels Hadassah's smile on her first night with the King. She surprises the King with her smile and directs her focus solely on him. Both Hadassah and Kesselman attempt to please their husbands. Their desire to please their husbands stems out of their self-perception as nurturers and responsible for aiding men in maintaining their honour. On the other hand, Vashti, in comparison does not indulge herself in order to please the King's desires or to maintain his honour although she is from the biblical times and culture. She challenges the authority fearlessly and boldly and asserts herself. The contrasting responses of Vashti and Kesselman to their husbands' desire and needs, demonstrates the impact on their self-perception and self-definition. Vashti is a self-confident woman whereas Kesselman is in the process of developing her agency. Thus, through the modern day dilemma of self-doubt, the role of women in *Hadassah: One Night with the King* is stereotyped as subservient to men.

Both Jacob the priest and Jacob ben Yuda mark a significant milestone in the lives of Hadassah and Kesselman. Jacob the priest triggers a spiritual awakening in Hadassah. Through the use of the name Jacob for Kesselman's husband, the potential of an awakening for Kesselman is signalled. Jacob ben Yuda seems to have initiated in Kesselman the awareness of her position as the wife of the Prime Minister of Israel. Kesselman's response to this awareness is left unresolved at the close of the text. This example demonstrates Kesselman's capacity for agency. However, her self-perception as

a wife of Jacob ben Yuda seems to serve as a limitation to the exercise of agency. Despite all the resources provided to Kesselman through the Scroll, she makes her decision to be defined as a wife within the patriarchal society. Implied is the message for the reader that the escape from the centuries of patriarchal traditions and culture could prove challenging, and can be 'shocking'. A commitment like Hadassah's is required in order to overcome the structures that are oppressive.

Perhaps most importantly, the final scene of the novel contains the most significant lack of voice—and therefore agency. Kesselman's voice, which is heard very briefly at the opening of *Hadassah: One Night with the King* resurfaces at the close of the text. The nature of Kesselman's voice that resurfaces at the close of the text is one that plays a part in the world of romance, which imitates the world of the Scroll where women's virtues are celebrated for men's purposes. The novel allows Kesselman to respond to her husband's superficial questions about her jewellery and perfume, but limits any real communication between them on the night of their wedding. This is evident in their last exchange: "Jacob, there's a story I need to tell you" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 360). However, "before she was ten minutes into it, his head had settled against her chest, and he had begun to snore lightly" (p. 360-361), denying the opportunity for her voice to be heard. It would be possible to conclude that Jacob ben Yuda is either unable to understand feminine discourses or that he discounts it; here his actions demonstrate disinterest in her story and her loss of voice against the man's pre-occupation with the nation. The narrative of Kesselman ends then with this tension.

In marrying ben Yuda, it would seem that any time allocated to Kesselman in the future would have to be a State decision. This positions Kesselman as a subject to both ben Yuda and the State. The closure of the novel supports this reading. As the narrator declares: "There would be no honeymoon for this Hadassah, either. Jacob could not spare the time. Nor could the nation. For even the first day of marriage would be a busy day in the life of Jacob ben Yuda – Prime Minister of the nation of Israel" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 361). It is the terms of her husband that now must take priority, even over her honeymoon. Kesselman is in a safe position within the context of the culture of the text. However, her position also exposes her entrapment within it. On the other hand, the *Book of Esther* closes with Esther remaining within the kingdom and in the Palace.

She sets up the Purim festival and has the authority to write commands to the nation. Ironically, Esther has more agency at the close of the biblical text than does Hadassah at the closing of her narrative in the Scroll. Kesselman, has the capacity for agency but seems content not to exercise it. The novel ends abruptly with ben Yuda falling asleep in the middle of Kesselman's story and Kesselman accepting the prospect of "no honeymoon for this Hadassah" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 361). However, it is significant to note that the text closes with the terms of life prescribed by male authority which signals a loss of Kesselman's voice and a loss of agency.

Vashti's and Kesselman's "silence", serve very different purposes. Though Vashti's "silence" is bold, her exercise of power is short-lived. Despite this she remains a powerful example of women who sacrifice their lives for their convictions. Vashti's example demonstrates the consequences of the assertion of such power. Kesselman's "silence" is one of uncertainty as it creates a vacuum and leaves the reader with uncertainty of Kesselman's agency. In her silence, Kesselman seems quite pale in comparison to Vashti. The reasons for her loss of voice is unknown. The many unknowns leave the reader with the mystery of concluding with questions about who Kesselman is as a person and whether she will succumb to the limitation of agency imposed on her through patrikin.

The novel does not provide any confidence that she can overcome this limitation. Nevertheless, her "rueful smile" offers an opportunity for the reader to interpret Kesselman's narrative and thereby re-write her narratives in their own way offering a glimmer of hope to the modern woman.

In summary, Kesselman shows at the end of the novel that she has not shifted much regarding agency from where she was at the beginning of the text. As a stereotypical woman, she does not exercise agency for her benefit, but rather, remains content with her position. She resembles Fuchs' (2013) Esther of Model 1 with the capacity for agency but who does not seem to have the desire to change her position within that cultural context.

The presentation of Kesselman in this manner is significant for the work as a whole as it exposes the limitations of agency that are faced by modern women and the strength of the influence of the ideologies on the mind—as perceived by two male

authors. The representation portrays women's struggle to navigate cultural impositions such as respect and obligation that are deeply ingrained within their minds. Kesselman's experience reflects the complex and highly contextual nature of agency.

On initial reading for the presentation of agency, it is disappointing to observe that Kesselman, although from royal genealogy, becomes domesticated and settles for being the wife of Jacob ben Yuda. Kesselman's experience parallels Hadassah's experience of marriage to the King. He had no time for her either as he had affairs of the kingdom to manage. Marriage in both instances seems to be a transaction whereby the woman now becomes the man's other half, by taking his name and becoming subservient to him. Her actions may leave the modern reader wondering if there is hope for women, whether they be of royal lineage or commoners. The text, which opens with an exploratory question, "Father, where are you taking me?" concludes with Kesselman set to the sidelines as the wife of Jacob ben Yuda. In Kesselman's acceptance of her role as wife, the reader is left questioning about how women explore their identity through marriage, the male world and their husbands. The reader might ponder whether other modern readers would interpret the scroll differently and interrogate it or whether the authors see limits to the empowerment of women. From the perspective of the author of this thesis, this study shows that there are women who want to articulate their stories but it is for a world that does not appear ready.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Findings and Implications

This thesis has explored the presentation of female agency through the theoretical framework it established of three dominant readings of the book of Esther. Esther as – (i) stereotype, (ii) subversive and (iii) type of the Jewish people. The thesis has provided a critical study of female agency, involving the stories of several women, through a comparison of *Hadassah: One Night with the King* and the biblical *Book of Esther*. It concludes that agency is a deliberate choice and that the exercise of agency leads to empowerment and the lack of the exercise of agency leads to a loss of it. It also notes the challenges of sustaining agency for women in a patriarchal society. For instance, the main protagonists within *Hadassah: One Night with the King* have less agency at the close of the novel despite demonstrating the capacity for agency at various stages of the novel. This study notes, then, that the societal frameworks that women are shaped by, are patriarchal, built by men and for men and that women are constrained by these structures. Because these structures have been in place for centuries, there is a consistent, combined effort and commitment required by both men and women to drive changes to women's role and status within these societies. Also, since agency is a choice, women must be active agents in seeking their empowerment. The capacity for active agency can be developed through the conscious exercise of agency which leads to empowerment. On the other hand, the lack of exercising agency, leads to a real loss of agency that causes women to remain within circumstances or situations that could be oppressive. The thesis has shown that psychological assets play a significant role in influencing agency and in turn the empowerment of women through informing women's self-perception, self-direction and self-discovery. These assets are critical to women's empowerment.

Against the background of the concept of agency as an endeavour for freedom, this thesis notes that women must overcome patriarchal conditioning by actively engaging with their lives, and playing a role in their agency. In this regard, the novel provides, in varying degrees, examples of three strong women in the figures of Vashti, Esther and Hadassah who serve as role models for the modern protagonist, Kesselman.

The stories of Hadassah and Esther drawn from biblical times, provide Kesselman with the lessons of the struggles for women to sustain agency or to overcome patriarchal power. But at the close of the novel, it appears unclear what Kesselman will do with these lessons. Kesselman at the close of the novel, appears to be reflective but passive. Her passive stance, portrays her as a stereotypical woman who appears to be focused on her responsibilities as the wife of Jacob ben Yuda. It appears that at the close of the novel, Kesselman appears to conform to the patriarchal ideologies in which she is positioned as subject to her husband rather than applying what she learns through studying the lives of Hadassah, Esther and Vashti. Similarly, at the close of *Hadassah: One Night with the King*, the outer narrative, Hadassah relinquishes, to a certain extent, the power to be an active agent. She seems to desire her position as subject both to the King and Mordecai. This choice results in the loss of her agency.

From a feminist perspective, it is disappointing to see Hadassah's loss of agency at the close of the Scroll narrative as well as Kesselman's passive stance at the close of the novel because both Kesselman and Hadassah have demonstrated their capacity for agency. Hadassah has served as an example for Kesselman though both have been guided by their choices and unique contexts in each phase of their lives. Choice therefore is critical to agency. An active engagement with life could lead towards empowerment while inactivity could lead to the loss of and the capacity for agency. This is well demonstrated through the structure of the novel which has been illustrated in Appendix 1. The diagram reflects the circular agentive journey of the two protagonists within this patriarchal text that begins and ends within the patriarchal paradigm. In closing, a reminder of the text's structure might be of use. The outer framework of the diagram represents the androcentric modern text, *Hadassah: One Night with the King* while the inner frame represents the biblical narrative and the memoir of Hadassah. The outer lean frame is the narrative of Kesselman while the lengthy inner or middle frame is the narrative of Hadassah. Hadassah Kesselman is the reader of Hadassah bin Abihail's [Hadassah's] narrative presented in the form of the memoir that Hadassah has written for posterity. Kesselman is introduced briefly before she is immersed into the reading of Hadassah's narrative. The memoir is intertextually linked to the biblical Book of Esther, and is a retelling of the biblical Esther's narrative. What the diagram illustrates is the

circular motif of patriarchal culture that women find themselves enveloped by and within.

Beginning from the outer frame, the text portrays Kesselman as being conditioned and nurtured into the patriarchal traditions. Her perception of her father's authority is so strong that although she is exposed to all the lessons from Hadassah's experience in the Scroll, she chooses to remain within the tradition rather than exercise agency that leads to empowerment. Similarly, although Hadassah overcomes limitations during her teenage and adult years to become an empowered woman, at the close of the Scroll, she is portrayed with a loss of agency and with a longing to return to her position as a subject to her father.

The diagram in Appendix 1 captures the sobering message to the reader of the power of the patriarchal traditions that have been in existence for centuries and the difficulties, dangers and deliberate effort required to work towards exposing, attempting and escaping it.

Agency's concern is then about empowerment and how much power women have to be autonomous individuals. Women within patriarchal societies and traditions are often perceived to be inferior to men and, therefore, perceived to have less power as demonstrated through the analysis of *Hadassah: One Night with the King.* Men in patriarchal societies are ingrained with the notion of superiority which women are forced to internalize e.g. Rachel and Kesselman and their maternal relatives. It can be argued that such women and/or their elders help perpetuate the inferior status of women. However, as the study has demonstrated limitations are part of the fabric of the patriarchal system. The structure and the framework are based on a man's world. Women defer to men and their fathers because their psyche is ingrained with the notion of the superiority of men that they should trust and follow. This position of trust is what the authors call "amiable stalemate" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 16) that the women surrender to. Hadassah breaks out of the system but is unable to sustain it. Women's ability to perceive these limitations as enablers and utilize their creativity to overcome these limitations or identify opportunities to exercise agency, irrespective of the outcomes, is a critical step in re-appropriating power and taking the first step towards their empowerment. Because the discourses of power must be subverted, often, through

the only discourse available, which are the patriarchal discourses, it is important for women to learn to observe, strategize and then exercise agency to subtly re-appropriate power to themselves.

What the novel also shows is that there are recurring parallel themes between the biblical text and *Hadassah: One Night with the King*. The first is that all the women under study such as Vashti, Esther, Hadassah and Kesselman show a capacity for agency in varying degrees. Their ability to exercise agency is heavily reliant on psychological assets such as self-perception, self-worth, and self-definition which through their utilization serve as enablers to their exercise of agency. Choosing and acting on opportunities to grow so as to understand one's self, develop self-worth, achieve self-definition and self-discovery enable women to overcome the limitations of patriarchy and to exercise agency. Similarly, the internalization of their subjugated roles cause them to remain trapped within oppressive patriarchal ideologies.

The novel establishes that the exercise of agency as an endeavour for freedom is not easy and carries risks as the example of Vashti demonstrates. Many women in modern times may take the freedom they enjoy for granted but that freedom is often enabled through the price that women like Vashti pay through active agency which in some cases have even cost their lives. Vashti's agency is active as she directly challenges the King's authority. Her model of agency is one in which unexpected power is exerted through the re-writing of the scripts on her terms. Her power is dynamic, creative and matter of fact, confronting the politics of patriarchy head-on. She is direct and focused. Vashti assumes power that is hers rather than asking for it or finding ways to subvert the oppressive powers in order to obtain it. It is a direct confrontation which is dangerous, perilous and risky as it can come at a great cost. Vashti's agency shows courage, and boldness and is admirable, although it is not ideal in every situation. As Vashti's example has demonstrated, the yielding of power can be shocking and threatening to men. It signals a loss of control that result in men suppressing women further to ensure that they continue to have control over women. Also, men and women nurture girls and boys, ingraining in their psyche the established roles of men and women thereby serving to perpetuate and reinforce these ideologies. However, sometimes a sacrifice like Vashti's is required in order to break through deeply set

prejudices and limitations imposed on women. Vashti's agency does not conform to Model 1, 2 or 3. Instead her agency is characterized by open rebellion to oppressive forces. Her agency asserts power as a human being regardless of the social constructions and the limitations that may be perceived to be at play. As Fishman observes, her agency introduces the concept of "unexpected power" (2002, p. 15). This power defies definition.

While Vashti's courage is admirable, her open rebellion is not an ideal alternative to the three models. The path of passive resistance, or subversion, is recommended as a more moderate and effective form of agency that women can use to achieve their goals while also protecting their lives. This form of agency is like Esther's agency who used passive resistance from within the system. This form of agency re-appropriates power subtly through subversive means. Subversive agency is therefore, not openly confrontational, is quiet, yet effective. The challenge is to learn how to creatively and to consistently exercise agency tactfully and strategically to subvert the systems that are oppressive.

This study establishes that in a patriarchal culture in which men hold power, women can strategically re-appropriate power to themselves through the use of psychological assets. Psychological assets play a critical role in the exercise of agency. The study notes that there are many factors such as fear, obligation, coercion and trust that influence psychological assets which are broadly classified in this study as self-definition, self-direction and self-discovery. In this order each of these psychological assets contribute toward the progressive development of agency leading to empowerment. The perception of the influencers on these psychological assets serve as limitations or enablers. High levels of psychological assets contribute towards positive self-perception and self-definition. Similarly, low levels of psychological assets can contribute towards lower self-perception and lead to disempowerment. Kesselman is an example of a woman whose trust in her father, leads her to accept his decision for her life and this trust results in the loss of her voice, her choice and her power. Similarly, Hadassah at the close of the Scroll narrative romanticizes about her love for Xerxes and wishes she could sit on Mordecai's lap like she did as a child. This is surprising, given that she had become the Queen of Persia and the woman who saved the entire Jewish

nation from annihilation. The findings of this study demonstrate that psychological assets are critical to achieving one's goals as evident through Hadassah's journey to becoming Queen but the continued application of these assets is important to sustain agency.

The findings of this study note that empowerment cannot be achieved through a single method alone and that creative application and multiple methods applied consistently contribute towards the cause. The possibilities for the creative application of agency offers hope to the modern reader. But the study also demonstrates that female agency comes at a price, as in the case of Vashti and that for women like Hadassah and Kesselman, agency is not sustainable unless they work against the conditioning of patriarchal systems.

Limitations and enablers do not carry inherent characteristics but are dependent on the individual's perception at a particular point of decision-making. Because of the complexity and highly contextual nature of agency, no influencers such as fear, obligation, and respect can carry the inherent ability to be either an enabler or a limitation to agency. A consideration of the context, the capacity for and the will towards agency exercised by the individual in a given circumstance as well as conscious awareness remains critical to the effective exercise of female agency. A consideration of the past, the present and the future benefits serve as the best contributors to decision making. Implicit to the reader is the notion that conversations at every level about female agency would aid in the cause of women's empowerment and agency.

In conclusion, the text *Hadassah: One Night with the King* remains somewhat open with possibilities and the reader is left to assume what could be. Perhaps the answers lie in the sequel, *The Hadassah Covenant: A Queen's Legacy* (2005). *Hadassah: One Night with the King* is, finally, an "ideological structure" in the hands of the authors, constructed for "a symbolic as well as a functional purpose" (Tenney & Olsen, 2004, p. 16). Both the interpretation of the text and the response to it are left to the reader's discretion. The silence in the text is intentional and the filling in of that silence with the reader's voice could serve to either perpetuate the patriarchal ideologies or to expose them. It is obvious from the decisions that Kesselman has made so far, however, that women have not come far as they could, in the context of this text, despite

the lessons that are provided through the Scroll, in the context of modernity, and all its advantages. Hadassah takes the opportunity to creatively subvert the structures that she perceived to be oppressive, although she does not manage to completely break out of them. Although there is an awareness of female agency and women's capability to exercise it, women seem unable to escape from being "embodied subjects" (Showden 2011, p. 3) because the patriarchal ideologies have been the norm for them for too long. Like Kesselman's narrative that is left open, the choice for the reader is also left open. What will that response be?

Suggestions for Further Research and Final Remarks

The recommendations for future research stem from feminist concerns for the equality of women. To address and redress the inequality between women and men is an urgent but difficult task. As Tolbert argues, inequality "is so ingrained, so ancient, and so thoroughly codified in all cultural institutions, forcing society to see that the issue even exists" (Tolbert, 1983, p. 116) is a huge but necessary task. Welch (1997, p. 31) notes that even more urgent is the need to raise Christian feminist concerns based on ethics, which can be extended to this text through its association with the Bible. She asks and responds to her question:

> Why do Christian feminist ethicists turn to scripture as a resource for ethical claims about the dignity and equality of women? Christian feminist ethicists find themselves in a dilemma. They affirm the Kantian categorical imperative to treat other persons as ends only, and never as a means to an end. They believe that consistency and universality in moral principles requires applying this principle to women. Thus, social and legal structures which define women as instrumental, and not foundational, systems in which the value of women is seen in their usefulness to men, in their utility as helpers, wives, mothers, daughters, is morally untenable. And yet, the biblical tradition has been utilized to justify such

> instrumentality of women as being the expression of divine will. From the work of Elisabeth Cady Stanton in the nineteenth century to the analysis of the semiotics of rape and sexual violence in the work of the contemporary feminist theorist Mieke Bal, feminists have criticized the political use of Biblical texts to justify the denial of full humanity to women.

The influence of the Bible is undeniable. As the Bible is an active text read by communities of faith, who interpret it according to their contexts, it has the power to influence readers. In speaking of the impact of texts on spontaneous reading, de Wit observes that, "Spontaneous reading is intent on appropriation. The text is brought forward to the present, and the current context replaces the historical context; the oppressor of those days is given the facial features of the current oppressor" (2004, p. 10). Because reading is contextual, this opens the question: Are biblical fictional texts representing women's agency so that they feel empowered or do such texts reinforce women's subjugated and subservient roles? An analysis of additional fictional texts that are associated with the Bible or modern re-tellings of biblical narratives on their representation of female agency is a starting point for understanding the implications of such representations.

The second point is an extension of the one above. Although a singular act will not make a large impact, each singular effort contributes towards the feminist cause for liberation from oppressive structures. Tolbert captures the essence of this message when she says,

> The kind of vast structural alteration that feminism demands must occur gradually over a long period, and it will be achieved not by great acts of sacrifice, though those may occasionally be necessary, but by small, often unnoticed acts of subversion. Numerous such incremental changes, like erosion, will eventually bring down the fortress. (Tolbert, 1983, p. 121).

Further research into biblical fictional texts and the representation of female agency will aid in creating awareness and raise the consciousness of the implications of the texts to modern women reading these texts. Applying Milne's principle for biblical texts that: "If we want an authoritative sacred scripture that does not make it possible to

believe that women are secondary and inferior humans, it appears that we need to make new wine to fill our new wineskins" (as cited in Fewell, 1993, p. 244); in other words, we have to find new ways to bring about awareness and consciousness.

REFERENCES

Abrams, K. (1999). From autonomy to agency: Feminist perspectives on self-direction. *William & Mary Law Review, 40*(3), 806-846. Retrieved from http://scholarship.law.wm.edu/wmlr/vol40/iss3/6

Alsop, R., Bertelsen, M. F., & Holland, J. (2006). *Empowerment in practice: From analysis to implementation*. Retrieved from https://www.openknowledge.worldbank.org

Alter, R. (1981). *The art of biblical narrative*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Ao, A. (2016). *Hidden identity of women in church and society: A re-reading of the Book of Esther*. New Delhi, India: Christian World Imprints.

Bach, A. (Ed.). (1999). *Women in the Hebrew bible: A reader*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Balasundaram, S. (2009). *The structural violence of sterilization: Politics of sterilization in the plantation Tamil communities of Sri Lanka.* (Master's thesis), Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI. No. 1472991)

Bamberg, M. (2012). Narrative practice and identity navigation. In J. A. Holstein & J. F. Gubrium (Eds.), *Varieties of narrative analysis* (pp. 97-124). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Bowden, P., & Mummery, J. (2014). *Understanding feminism*. Retrieved from http://site.ebrary.com/lib/avondale/docDetail.action?docID=10553870

Bronner, L. L. (1998). Reclaiming Esther: From sex object to sage. *Jewish Bible Quarterly, 26*(1), 3-11.

Bryman, A., & Bell, E. (2011). *Business research methods* (3rd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cahill, T. (1998). *The gifts of the Jews: How a tribe of desert nomads changed the way everyone thinks and feels.* New York, NY: Nan A. Talese.

Charrad, M. M. (2010). Women's agency across cultures: Conceptualizing strengths and boundaries. *Women's Studies International Forum, 33*(6), 517-522. doi:10.1016/j.wsif.2010.09.004

Costas, O. E. (1988). The subversiveness of faith: Esther as a paradigm for a liberating theology. *The Ecumenical Review, 40*(1), 66-78.

Culler, J. (1997). *Literary theory: A very short introduction*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Davies, B. (1991). The concept of Agency: A feminist poststructuralist analysis. *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice*(30), 42-53.

de Wit, H., Jonker, L., Kool, M., & Schipani, D. (Eds.). (2004). *Through the eyes of another: Intercultural reading of the Bible*. Elkhart, IN: Evangel Press.

Dowell, M. (2016). A safe, encouraging space for women church leaders: Interview with Amy Jackson. *Christianity Today.* Retrieved from http://www.christianitytoday.org/inside-story/inside-ministry/2016/january/safe-encouraging-space-for-women-church-leaders.html

Druxes, H. (1996). *Resisting bodies: The negotiation of female agency in twentieth-century women's fiction*. Retrieved from https://books.google.com.au

Drydyk, J. (2013). Empowerment, agency, and power. *Journal of Global Ethics, 9*(3), 249-262. doi:10.1080/17449626.2013.818374

Emirbayer, M., & Mische, A. (1998). What is agency? *American Journal of Sociology, 103*(4), 962-1023. doi:10.1086/231294

Everett-Haynes, L. M. (2008). UA Professor explores feminist interpretations of Bible. Retrieved from https://uaatwork.arizona.edu/lqp/ua-professor-explores-feminist-interpretation-bible

Exum, C. (1999). Who's afraid of "The endangered ancestress". In A. Bach (Ed.), *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A reader* (pp. 44-65). New York: NY: Routledge.

Fedson, J. (2011). *Redeeming fiction: American evangelical fiction, gender, and culture* (Doctoral dissertation, The University of Western Australia). Retrieved from https://research-repository.uwa.edu.au

Fewell, D. N. (1993). Reading the bible ideologically: Feminist criticism. In S. L. McKenzie & S. R. Haynes (Eds.), *To each its own meaning: An introduction to biblical criticisms and their application*. London, England: Geoffrey Chapman.

Fishman, S. B. (2002). *Reading Esther: Cultural impact on responses to biblical heroines* [Working paper]. Brandeis University. Waltham, MA.

Fuchs, E. (2008). Biblical feminisms: Knowledge, theory and politics in the study of women in the Hebrew Bible. *Biblical Interpretation, 16*(3), 205-226.

Fuchs, E. (2013). Reading women in biblical narratives: Status and role of female heroines in the biblical narrative. In A. Bach (Ed.), *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A reader* (pp. 77-84). New York, NY: Routledge.

Gammage, S., Kabeer, N., & van der Meulen Rodgers, Y. (2016). Voice and agency: Where are we now? *Feminist Economics, 22*(1), 1-29. doi:10.1080/13545701.2015.1101308

Gubrium, J. F., Holstein, J. A., Marvasti, A. B., & McKinney, K. D. (Eds.). (2012). *The Sage handbook of interview research: The complexity of the craft* (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: Sage.

Kelly-Zukowski, M. (2005). The subversiveness of the marginalized women of scripture: Models of faith and action for twenty-first century women. *Gender Issues, 22*(4), 29-42. doi:10.1007/s12147-005-003-5

Kitzberger, I. R. (Ed.). (1999). *Personal voice in biblical interpretation*. London, England: Routledge.

Klein, E. (2014). *Psychological agency: Evidence from the urban fringe of Bamako*. [Working paper]. University of Oxford. Oxford, England.

Klein, L. R. (2003). *From Deborah to Esther: Sexual politics in the Hebrew Bible*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

Klugman, J., Hanmer, L., Twigg, S., Tazeen, H., McCleary Sills, J., & Santamaria, J. (2014). *Voice and agency: Empowering women and girls for shared prosperity*. Retrieved from https://openknowledge.worldbank.org

Liveris, L. B., Jasper, D. D., Astley, R. J., Beckford, P. J. A., Brummer, M. R., Brummer, P. V., . . . Hutch, M. R. (2007). *Ancient taboos and gender prejudice: Challenges for orthodox women and the church*. Brookfield, Scotland: Routledge.

Mackenzie, C., & Stoljar, N. (2000). *Relational autonomy: Feminist perspectives on autonomy, agency, and the social self*. Retrieved from https://books.google.com.au

McGeough, K. (2008). Esther the hero: Going beyond "wisdom" in heroic narratives. *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly, 70*(1), 44-65.

Meyers, D. T. (2014). *Philosophical feminism*. Retrieved from https://www.britannica.com/topic/philosophical-feminism

Mhango, H. C. (2004). *Reading the Bible through the eyes of women and the oppressed: In search for justice and liberation in Malawi.* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from http://theses.gla.ac.uk/id/eprint/2339

Miles, J. (2015). Reading Esther as heroine: Persian banquets, ethnic cleansing, and identity crisis. *Biblical Theology Bulletin: Journal of Bible and Culture, 45*(3), 131-143. doi:10.1177/0146107915590762

Mishra, N. K., & Tripathi, T. (2011). Conceptualising women's agency, autonomy and empowerment. *Economic and Political Weekly, 46*(11), 58-65.

Nadar, S. (2003). *Power, ideology and interpretation/s: Womanist and literary perspectives on the Book of Esther as resources for gender-social transformation* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from http://hdl.handle.net/10413/3449

Nadar, S. (2009). Beyond the "ordinary reader" and the "invisible intellectual": Shifting contextual bible study from liberation discourse to liberation pedagogy. *Old Testament Essays, 22*(2), 384-403.

Neill, C. (2013). Breaking the text: An introduction to Lacanian discourse analysis. *Theory & Psychology, 23*(3), 334-350. doi:10.1177/0959354312473520

Niditch, S. (1995). Esther: Folklore, wisdom, feminism and authority. In A. Brenner (Ed.), *A feminist companion to the Bible* (pp. 25-46). Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press.

Pollack, S. (2000). Reconceptualizing women's agency and empowerment. *Women & Criminal Justice, 12*(1), 75-89. doi:10.1300/J012v12n01_05

Richardson, L. (2002). Skirting a pleated text: De-disciplining an academic life. In E. A. S. Pierre & W. S. Pillow (Eds.), *Working the ruins: Feminist poststructural theory and methods in education* (pp. 328). New York, NY: Routledge.

Rimmon-Kenan, S. (1983). *Narrative fiction: Contemporary poetics*. New York, NY: Methuen.

Showden, C. R. (2011). *Choices women make: Agency in domestic violence, assisted reproduction, and sex work*. Retrieved from http://site/ebrary.com/lib/avondale

Skinner, M. L. (2003). *Locating Paul: Places of custody as narrative settings in Acts 21-28*. Leiden, Nederlands: Koninklijke Brill NV.

Stone, M. J. (2013). There's more than one way: Vashti, Esther, and women in ministry. *Review & Expositor, 110*(1), 123-130.

Tenney, T., & Olsen, M. A. (2004). *Hadassah: One night with the king*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House.

Tenney, T., & Olsen, M. A. (2005). *The Hadassah covenant: A queen's legacy*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House.

Tolbert, M. A. (1983). Defining the problem: The Bible and feminist hermeneutics. *Semeia, 28*, 113-126.

Tompkins, J. P. (Ed.) (1980). *Reader-response criticism from formalism to post-structuralism*. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.

Van Dijk, T. A. (2006). Ideology and discourse analysis. *Journal of Political Ideologies, 11*(2), 115-140. doi:10.1080/13569310600687908

Wardlow, H. (2006). *Wayward women: Sexuality and agency in a New Guinea society*. Retrieved from http://ebookcentral.proquest.com.databases.avondale.edu.au/lib/avondale

Welch, S. D. (1997). Biblical interpretation in Christian feminist ethics. *Studia Theologica - Nordic Journal of Theology, 51*(1), 30-43. doi:10.1080/00393389708600199

Appendix 1

Diagrammatic Representation of Agency in *Hadassah: One Night with the King*

