

**THE OUTSIDER WITHIN: SENSE OF SELF
IN JEWISH FEMINIST WOMEN**

by

Phyllis A. Greenberg

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APPROVED:

Rosemary Blieszner, Chairperson

Katherine R. Allen

Ann Kilkelly

Karen A. Roberto

Sandra Stith

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(ABSTRACT)

Both Judaism and feminism encompass a wide range of practices and beliefs. Both are often misrepresented in popular media and educational settings. Outcomes of these misrepresentations can vary from social slights to dangerous anti-semitic and sexist behaviors, all of which have potential of interfering with development among Jewish and feminist people.

Because religion, culture, and ideology contribute to adult identity in important ways, and because Judaism and feminism are poorly understood within the general population, research on the experience and meaning of Judaism and feminism is warranted.

In this study I explored the development of Jewish and feminist identity among a sample of adult women residing in an area with small Jewish and feminist populations. Participants discussed how they negotiated the patriarchal

hierarchy found in Judaism and in society at large, and they assessed the influence of residing in their community on their Jewish and feminist identities.

Feminist standpoint theory guided development of the interview questions and procedures. This approach brings women, who often have been at the margins of research, to a central focus. Jewish feminist women are often outsiders within the Jewish community, the feminist community, and the general community. They share the usual concerns of patriarchy noted by other feminists, but also must contend with patriarchy within Judaism and anti-semitism within the feminist and general communities. Feminist standpoint theory focuses attention on these multiple, intersecting elements of influence on identity.

The results of this study reveal variation in the meaning of Judaism and feminism in women's lives. Although all of the participants used Jewish as a cultural identity, some also used it as an ethnic, racial, spiritual, or religious designation.

Participants in this study found that their Jewish and feminist ideologies for the most part, coexisted well. Any

conflict between the two ideologies was generally resolved by reframing the Jewish perspective.

All of the participants reported that living in an ideologically conservative and predominantly Christian environment influenced their sense of self. For most of the women the influence contributed to a clearer definition of and stronger identification with both Jewish and feminist ideologies.

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