

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

by

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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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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Overview of Study	1
Research Questions	8
Operational Definitions	9
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	12
Overview	12
Feminist Standpoint Theories	13
Black Feminist Standpoint	15
The Jewish Feminist Experience	17
Jewish Feminist Standpoint	19
Jewish Identity	24
Summary	29
III. METHODOLOGY	31
Rationale for Qualitative Methodology	31
Personal Narrative	32
Sample and Selection Process	48
Description of Participants	49

	Data Collection	52
	Role of Shared Cultural Assumptions	53
	Data Analysis Process	54
IV.	FINDINGS	56
	Introduction	56
	Case Studies	60
	Leah	60
	Lillith	67
	Sarah	74
	Ruth	82
	Hannah	86
	Deborah	93
	Rachel	100
	Esther	106
	Miriam	111
	Tovah	116
	Eve	121
	Summary	125
V.	Discussion and Conclusion	127
	Overview	127
	Discussion	128

Being Jewish	128
Being a Feminist	132
Being a Jewish Feminist	133
Negotiating the Environment as Jews	134
Negotiating the Environment as Feminists	137
The Role of Academia	138
The Role of Husbands	140
Implications of Research	142
Implications for Theory	142
Feminist Standpoint	142
Jewish Identity	144
Adult Development	145
Geographic Location - Cultural Environment	145
Racial or Ethnic Identity	147
Implications for Practice	148
Limitations of the Study	149
Future Research	151
Personal Journey	151

<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>155</b>
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**LIST OF TABLES**

<b>Table 1: Participant Demographic Information</b>	<b>51</b>
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<b>Table 2: Information on Participants by Pseudonym</b>	<b>59</b>
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**APPENDIXES**

<b>A. Interview Guide</b>	<b>158</b>
<b>B. Informed Consent</b>	<b>162</b>
<b>C. Coding Categories</b>	<b>166</b>
<b>D. Curriculum Vitae</b>	<b>168</b>