Elderly Swedish Jewish Men and Egalitarianism: A Narrative Study

Elisabeth Punzi, University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg, Sweden

Abstract

This work is based on interviews with four elderly Jewish men, members of a Swedish congregation who advocate egalitarianism. A narrative analysis found that the participants’ perception of egalitarianism was connected to their own life experiences and to emotionally significant turning points in which the participants became aware how women were excluded. They perceived egalitarianism as a reassurance for a future Jewish life and described the development and preservation of traditions as intermingled rather than as opposed to each other. Gender equality in this study should not be viewed as specifically related to younger congregants and/or women but as connected to life experiences of the individual concerned.

Keywords: Egalitarianism, Narratives, Elderly men, Inclusion, Gender

Introduction

The term androcentric is occasionally used when Jewish religion and practice are described, and it has been shown that Jewish religious writings and halakhah were formulated by males, for other males, frequently treating women as subordinate (Adler 1998; Cohen 2005; Irshai 2010; Israel-Cohen 2012; Magid 2004; Plaskow 1990; Ross 2004; Shapira 2010). In addition, Jewish liturgy was traditionally designed for men, since ten adult Jewish men are needed to constitute a minyan; the number of individuals required for public prayer services (Halbertal and Cohen 2001; Israel-Cohen 2012; Legge and Misra 1998; Ross 2004). Furthermore, without at least ten adult Jewish men, there is no service, regardless of how many women are present (Cohen 2005).

During service, active participation from the congregation is demanded. The activities consist, for example, of leading the prayers, opening the Ark, chanting verses from the Torah, and receiving an aliya (the honor of being called to read from the Torah). Such participation demands some Hebrew literacy, as the practices are strictly ritualized and performed in Hebrew. Traditionally, Jewish men have since childhood received religious education and have had the opportunity to practice Hebrew the recitation of prayers and blessings (Adler 1998; Emmett 2007). Individuals who sense that they lack knowledge and practice might avoid participation in the services (Adler 1998; Sztokman 2011). Women, and also some men, who have not received religious education, might be reluctant to participate even in egalitarian services. (Eisman 2010; Emmett 2007).
During recent decades, major changes have occurred in a range of Jewish religious practices and congregations are adapting rapidly. (Barmash 2005; Legge and Misra 1998; Ross 2004). The ordination of female rabbis is increasing, religious schools are open to female students, and men and women are taking initiatives for including women as equal partners in rituals and services (Adler 1998; Barmash 2005; Israel-Cohen 2012; Magid 2004). This shift signifies that egalitarian services are becoming progressively more common (Barmash 2005; Emmett 2007).

Egalitarianism has been described as an issue that evokes intense emotions, and even as a subject that divides Judaism (Adler 1998; Charmé 2009; Legge and Misra 1998). Many religious Jews perceive *halakhah* as an unchanging and essential guide to religious life. Other religious Jews perceive *halakhah* as a complex and developing tradition that should be understood with respect to the contexts in which it was, and is, continually created (Biale 1984; Irshai 2010; Magid 2004; Plaskow 1990).

**Egalitarianism**

The majority of literature addressing egalitarianism has been written from feminist perspectives. (Charmé 2009; Halbertal and Cohen 2001; Israel-Cohen 2012; Ross 2004). Women understood that they were unjustly treated and marginalized in religious practices (Eisman 2010; Plaskow 1990; Ross 2004). Simultaneously, women educated themselves in religious texts and practices (Emmett 2007; Shapira 2012). Transforming Judaism from within became the primary goals in order to counteract androcentric interpretations, practices, and metaphors (Plaskow 1990).

The attitude towards egalitarianism is not linear. (Adler 1998; Emmett 2007; Halbertal and Cohen 2001; Legge and Misra 1998; Ross 2004). Both women and men who advocate egalitarianism might refer to *halakhic* arguments for including women in religious services and practices. For example, it has been argued that the Torah supports women’s inclusion, and such re-readings of the Torah are important for orthodox Jews who advocate egalitarianism (Legge and Misra 1998; Ross 2004; Shapira 2010). Others argue that all Jews, regardless of gender, should have equal access to religious practice, official roles, and education (Halbertal and Cohen 2001; Irshai 2013; Shapira 2012). Still others feel that their
religious practices need to correspond to values in the wider society and therefore advocate that religious practices should adapt to egalitarian values (Adler 1998; Charmé 2009; Emmett 2007; Plaskow 1990).

It is reasonable to assume that since elderly Jewish men were raised during a time when the religious separation of men and women were commonplace, they would be opposed to egalitarianism. (Habertal and Cohen 2001). However, in practice, one finds community members who are male and/or elderly who are sympathetic to egalitarianism (Emmet 2007; Legge and Misra 1998; Sztokman 2011). It seems to be no straightforward connection between age or gender and whether egalitarianism is advocated or opposed (Legge and Misra 1998). Sztokman (2011) has interviewed fifty-four men, age 18-69, who belonged to Orthodox synagogues, about their perceptions of egalitarianism. In her interviews, it appears that Orthodox men might avoid breaking religious conventions and therefore adhere to traditional gender roles, even though they might have more nuanced private views. Consequently, the aim of this study was to investigate how elderly men perceive egalitarianism.

Materials and Methods

Participants and Procedure

Between May to September 2014, four men, age 70-89, members of a Jewish congregation in Gothenburg, Sweden, participated in the study. In a country of about nine million people, there are close to 18,000 Jews. The Conservative congregation to which the four participants belong has about 1,000 members whose affiliation range from modern Orthodox to Reform. The modern Orthodox services take place in a separate building. In the central synagogue, the services follow the Conservative movement. In this particular congregation, there are ongoing discussions and disputes concerning these egalitarian services. Currently, there are alternating services in the central synagogue; during the first three weeks in the month, men and women are separated, and during the fourth week services are egalitarian.

Elderly men who regularly participated in both forms of services and openly advocated egalitarianism were asked to participate in this study. They were all thoroughly educated in Judaism and religious practices, including Hebrew prayers. They had held at
least one official role such as board member of the synagogue, or the board of the congregation, or had experience in leading the services. All the participants were regularly engaged in cultural and social activities in the congregation.

The participants were informed that the interviews would constitute the basis for an article and that their privacy would be protected. They were also informed that they could choose to not answer questions they found sensitive or irrelevant.

**Interviews**

The interviews were conducted in settings preferred by the participants, such as outdoors in a park, or at their homes. Three interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. One participant felt uncomfortable with being audio-recorded and therefore notes were taken during the interview. These notes were afterwards read to the participant so that he could correct any misunderstanding.

The interviews were conducted by the author, and followed the free association narrative method (Hollway and Jefferson 2008). According to this method, narratives are means to understand the experiences and perceptions of the individuals concerned. The interviews are initiated with an open question, and follow-up questions are formulated so that the participants are free to associate and deepen their narratives about the topic. The participants are encouraged to express their own perceptions, and relate lived-through experiences in their own words, acting as storytellers rather than respondents (Hollway and Jefferson 2008). The interview is focused on specific topics and provides minimum structure, by utilizing open-ended questions.

In this study, the initial question was “Could you please tell me about your view of egalitarianism and how you came to advocate egalitarianism?” During the first 15-20 minutes, the interviewer mainly listened, sometimes formulating short questions to encourage the participant to expand the narrative. Thereafter, open-ended questions were introduced and ambiguities were discussed with the participants. In order to prevent misunderstandings in the forthcoming analysis, the interviewer towards the end of the interview described how she perceived what the participant was communicating, and asked the participant to reflect on this perception. The interviews lasted between 70 to 90 minutes.
Analysis

The narrative analysis might focus on the content or on the form of the narrative (Bamberg 2012; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber 1998). When the narrative is seen as a means to understand experiences and perceptions of the individual concerned, the story’s content, and its themes are the focus of attention (Bold 2012; Hollway and Jefferson 2008; Lieblich et al. 1998; McAdams 1993). Such an approach does not exclude narratives that are understood beyond their overt content, but rather understood with respect to contextual factors and the impact of the past as well as the future (Bamberg 2012; Hollway and Jefferson 2008; LeHunte and Golembiewski 2014; Lieblich et al. 1998; McAdams and Cox 2010). Since the history of Judaism itself might be seen as a typical narrative, this approach towards narrative analysis seems significant to be explored (Plaskow 1990). The Jewish past is told, re-told, and thereby repeatedly lived through; a classic example is the narrative about the exodus from Egypt, re-told and re-lived each Pesach. The re-telling, and the rituals that are associated with the re-telling, assure that the story will continue to exist in the future (Cohen, 2005). Furthermore, the Jewish narrative is not a definitive but an evolving narrative (Kaufman 2014; Plaskow 1990).

In interview studies, the interactional nature of interviews is sometimes neglected, which in turn implies that data is discussed as neutral findings (Keen 2012; Potter and Hepburn 2005). The position of the interviewer, and/or the interaction, cannot be fully represented in the final report, and it is the responsibility of the researcher to reflect on one’s position (Smith, Hollway and Mishler, 2005). The interviewer in this study is female and a member of “The Association for Egalitarian Judaism” in Sweden. The participants were aware of this and it cannot be excluded that the position of the interviewer influenced the participants’ narratives. Simultaneously, it should be acknowledged that the participants had openly advocated egalitarianism prior to being asked to participate. Nevertheless, a male interviewer, or an interviewer perceived to be opposed to egalitarianism, might have influenced the narratives in different directions. Therefore, this study should be viewed as contributing one perspective on how some elderly Swedish Jewish men perceive and advocate egalitarianism.
The participants have been given the assumed names Robert, Ted, Salomon, and Marcus. In order to protect the privacy of the participants, personal characteristics are not offered. In a narrative analysis, it must be determined whether individual or common themes should be prioritized (Bold 2012). In this study, common themes were given priority. Simultaneously, the results of the study could demonstrate that the themes incorporate individual experiences. In this particular case, homogeneity (over heterogeneity) concerning age, attitudes, level of religious activity, and attitude towards egalitarianism was prioritized since the aim of the study was to investigate the reasons these elderly men advocate for and perceive of egalitarianism.

Moreover, the question of sample size should not be neglected. In each qualitative study, the number of participants necessary for an appropriate analysis needs to be evaluated. Small sample sizes, and even case studies, provide opportunity to investigate particularities and detailed analysis of data (Creswell 2013; Sandelowski 1995). The relatively small number of participants in this study allows for an in-depth analysis of the free-flowing narratives that evolved during the interviews (Crouch and McKenzie 2006).

Results

Four themes were identified in the participant’s narratives: (1) A life perspective, (2) Inclusion, (3) Change and preservation, (4) Turning points. The themes are not mutually exclusive, nor are they definite or clear-cut, and are preferably seen as a conceptualization of a multi-faceted phenomenon.

A Life Perspective

When the participants were asked to describe their view of egalitarianism, their narratives evolved with respect to their life-experiences and childhood memories. Salomon for example said:

I have to start talking about my parents, and how it was when I was a child. My mother was very… innovative, and successful. She took care of the economy and my father was somewhat in the background. So for me… the thought that women should just be at home taking care of the children was never valid.
As seen above, one participant perceived egalitarianism as a perspective that had been natural for him throughout his life, even though separation of men and women were officially commonplace. Other participants however described that being raised in a male-oriented context, they had complied with the norms, but later in life, egalitarianism became important for them. Robert described his early life experiences;

It was exclusively male and I became used to it. It was natural to me... men took care of the official religious life. That was the way it was supposed to be. I was only five when I started to study the Torah among all these men.

Regardless of whether the participants admitted that during childhood they took equality for granted, their view of egalitarianism had to be understood with respect to their life experiences. The participants described that their view of themselves, of women and men, and of the world in general developed throughout life. This development became intermingled with an increasing interest in religious practices and traditions, and a desire to contribute to the preservation of Jewish life. Salomon stated:

As human beings we always develop... Religious practices weren’t that important to me when I was young. When I took my Bar Mitzva, it was just something I did. I didn’t have so many religious thoughts then. But it became more important. And also the thought of how we could survive as a congregation. Egalitarianism promotes the interest in Jewish life. And the women often transfer the interest to the children. I came to the conclusion that women are needed.

The participants appreciated egalitarianism as an assurance that religious practice and Jewish traditions would persist in the future, and they wanted to contribute to this persistence. This perception became increasingly important with age, as described by Marcus:

I know there are those who think that I am wrong. They can have their opinions. I have mine. If they think that their wives have no importance outside home, it’s their problem. When I was young, it was hard for me to speak up. But I know that women are competent and it’s time that we include the other half of the Jewish people. When you become older, you don’t care so much what others think anymore.

**Inclusion**

Throughout the interviews, the participants described the exclusion of women from official religious life as a loss to Jewish traditions and religion. They understood that religious and non-religious Jewish lives, as well as the odds of surviving as a congregation and as a people, were limited if some members are excluded from religious practices. Moreover, the
participants believed that Jewish congregations need women. This need was described as multi-layered. On a basic level, women were described as numerically needed. Gathering enough men for the minyan was difficult. Excluding women merely hinders services, said Robert:

My opinion is that men and women need each other, and that everyone counts. Both genders have religious needs, and we should never use religion to regard others as inferior. I have met rabbis who are full of wisdom, and have been educated in the best schools who say that women count and that things have changed. So… why should I try to prove that only men count.

Additionally, the participants said that women could contribute new approaches and reflections on Jewish tradition and religious practices. Ted remarked:

For me it’s very simple. Women are part of Jewish life, and if we want to have a Jewish life, women are just as important as men… in all aspects of life… I don’t know if there are differences between men and women or not, that’s beyond my capacity. But I sense that women are more open-minded. Women should not be stand-ins for men. Women’s participation might contribute something different.

The participants claimed that women were needed, since Jewish tradition and religious practices could benefit from a more inclusive approach. Inclusion is also important in the case of converts, who could also contribute with new perspectives, experiences and even heightened observance. Robert felt sad when he had heard about converts who were excluded from services: “I became so disillusioned and thought, I don’t want to go to the synagogue anymore. I don’t want to be part of this. But then I thought, I have to go there and show my support.” Thereafter Robert added details to his view of inclusion:

We would gain so much in a human sense… It would be another sense of religiosity and community if we stopped separating people, and if we stopped being picky regarding who counts or not. We could have a sense of togetherness… a nicer atmosphere in many ways. We all count and we are all welcome. I also think the educational level would benefit from egalitarianism. The women I have listened to, they pose such intelligent questions. They are not just there passing time as some men are. I sense that the women are really interested in religious questions.

Robert showed that concern for others should be at the center of the religious activities, and expressed a concern that Jewish life could not be reduced to a catalogue of rules and laws. The other participants agreed with Robert.

At the same time, the participants emphasized that inclusion, and egalitarianism, were dependent on education and practice, as voiced by Ted:
To participate in the Jewish service, you need to be active... And therefore, you need education, and initially it needs to be simple. The basic prayers... some Hebrew for beginners. So that you can participate and sense that you belong. Otherwise, you feel alienated and if you feel alienated you don’t want to go there. So education for women is needed, and for many men as well, that is fundamental if we want to have an active Jewish life.

Throughout the interviews, the participants described the importance of education. They said that since they were men, they had the opportunity to make mistakes while practicing during childhood and adolescence, opportunities that were not available to women. They strongly believed that women, as well as men, who felt insecure about religious practices and liturgy, should be encouraged to further their learning and practice; so that gradually they could be integrated into the services.

**Change and Preservation**

During the interviews, the participants reflected on how religious activities and traditions could be understood with respect to change as well as preservation. When they spoke about change concerning religious traditions, they emphasized the fact that the world is constantly changing. They perceived both change and preservation as harmonizing for Jewish religious and non-religious life, rather than as opposed to each other. Salomon straightforwardly said; “I view change as a prerequisite for preservation.”

Furthermore, the participants spoke about change as a part of life. For example, participants who had been raised in male-oriented contexts described that they came to realize that the separation of men and women could be questioned and challenged. Through their increased learning they came to the conclusion that egalitarianism and separation were topics that could be interpreted from many perspectives, with different conclusions, and that the classic texts were ambiguous. They acknowledged that interpretations are seldom definite, and therefore religious traditions should be open to re-interpretation and growth. Ted explained:

Rabbis say that the Torah was given to the people. Not the men or the women, but the people. I think that is beautiful. I think and believe that it’s not a dream. And such an approach might also be perceived as valid by modern people. I mean... society changes. We need to see things from new perspectives. We have always adapted to changes and that’s how we survived. We cannot be a museum of something that happened thousands of years ago. We should keep the traditions. That’s important. But we also have to adjust.
The participants perceived religious practices as a part of life that could not be separated from other parts of life. For example, they reflected on the lives of their children and thought that separation of men and women could alienate modern women and men. The participants suggested attention to new perspectives on religious practices, rather than argue that everyone should adapt to tradition. Robert said, “If we listen to young people with other perspectives and lifestyles, we might learn important things and gain insight that is helpful for Jewishness as a whole.” Marcus described “an attitude of already knowing everything… that’s not Jewish,” stressing the word “not.” The participants believed that the core of Jewishness was to continually re-interpret and advance knowledge and practices, and egalitarianism was perceived as an assurance of ongoing education and future observance. Marcus continued his narrative:

Why should men be seen as superior or more important? Always reading, always interpreting and educating oneself… that is true Jewishness, for all Jews.

Turning Points

In the narratives, there were descriptions of how specific incidents shaped the participants’ attitude towards egalitarianism. Something personal had happened to them, and from that point the egalitarian perspective became increasingly significant. Salomon related that he once saw a woman praying and crying in solitude; “I saw how lonely and sad she was… it was so obvious to me. Women also have religious needs.”

There were also descriptions of how participation in egalitarian services created a sense of community and heightened religiosity that in turn led to a conviction that egalitarianism enhances religious practices and congregational life. Robert described his first encounter with an egalitarian service:

When I saw all those people. It was so much life and energy, and everybody were together… I soon realized that this is the way it is supposed to be. There has to be a sense of community, so that everyone really feels that they belong, and are welcomed. Thus, it becomes a living congregation… for real… After that experience, I made up my mind.

The participants perceived women, and converts, as marginalized in traditional Judaism. They recalled experiences that prompted them to challenge excluding traditions. Marcus, who grew up in a male-dominated environment, understood that
developing meaningful and close relationships with his wife and daughter led him to re-evaluate his worldview:

Some people say that women have other duties and strengths, but that they are not as capable as men when it comes to religious practices. I think that is rubbish. My wife and my daughter proved to me that women are not inferior in any way. I couldn’t listen to such rubbish anymore! Why should there be a difference? Women have important professions and duties, why shouldn’t they count in the religious sphere? And all these women who have never had education but have learnt by themselves… I think that they should be regarded as more competent than the men.

In conclusion, participants experienced both positively and negatively turning points. On the one hand, they detailed encounters with heightened religiosity in egalitarian contexts, and on the other hand they described that exclusion or injustice made them come to a point where they openly questioned separation between men and women. Salomon said:

We who are coming of age, we have had time to think, and understand more. And we see things from a different perspective.

Discussion

The themes that were identified in the narratives seemed to be centered on two storylines. One storyline involved the perception of egalitarianism as connected to personal life experiences and change. The other storyline involved inclusion and concern for current and future Jewish life. Throughout the narratives, the participants spoke about gender equality, respect for others and concern about Jewish life and community. The storylines were not separate entities, but rather intermingled.

Personal Life Experiences

When the participants described their view on egalitarianism, their narratives involved childhood experiences, episodes in their adult life, and the evolving nature of life itself, and emotionally significant turning points.

Elderly religious men might be reluctant about social change, and, as advocating preservation of traditions (Gefler 2009). While this might be true for some men, this study suggests that elderly men might advocate changes concerning the role of women, and the way traditions and religious activities should be perceived and approached. The participants
indicated that empathic insights into the experiences of those who were excluded were significant for their personal development.

The narrative perspective of this study recognizes that individual narratives are influenced by contextual factors of personal life-experiences, perceptions, and activities related to social structures (Bold 2012; McAdams and Cox 2010). Men and women are not passively influenced by external factors, but are capable of autonomous reaction (McAdams and Cox 2010; McNay 2000). It should be noted that Sweden is a country in which equality between men and women is described as relatively established. The participants were likely to be influenced to support egalitarianism by the changes in their society. Throughout their narratives, they in fact referred to the necessity of adapting to changes in society. A possible interpretation proposes that the participants were trying to amalgamate two worlds: the secular egalitarian society, and the Jewish society.

Nevertheless, autonomous action and change are not mere questions of voluntarism, but related to the position of the agent and the power that is associated with that position (McGinity 2009; McNay, 2000). In traditional Jewish religion, men have held a dominant position (Adler 1998; Eisman 2010; Irshai 2010). The participants questioned this position and opted for change.

Men and women who advocate egalitarianism challenge centuries-old social structures and the perception that it is the duty of men to preserve Judaism (Thompson 2011; Sztokman 2011). Previous studies asserted that people who undergo life changes related to religion tend to accentuate involvement, learning, and human growth (Bauer and McAdams 2004; Suri 2010). Religious elderly people are likely to maintain the conviction that their efforts are meaningful and may have significant importance for others and for future generations (McAdams and Cox 2010; Suri 2010).

The narrative perspective sheds light on the complex reasons for these men to adhere to egalitarianism. It is therefore imperative for congregations and individuals who debate the pros and cons of egalitarianism to consider the subjective meaning of egalitarianism, rather than to only treat the issue as a question of cognitive evaluation.
Inclusion and Jewish life

In order to understand the perspective of the participants, it might be helpful to acknowledge that halakhah and traditions might be seen as static, or not oriented towards change (Adler 1990; Charmé 2009; Ladin 2014; Lerner 2014). However, these participants viewed halakhah and traditions as dynamic and open to reflection. Orthopraxy is a term that has two meanings: obedience to halakhah, and religiosity connected to social justice (Plaskow 1990). In Judaism, it refers to justice incorporates God’s concern for human beings, and also incorporate the halakhic obligation to commit to the well being of others (Lerner 2014; Plaskow 1990).

The participants viewed orthopraxy as connected to social justice and gender equality. Egalitarianism was perceived as enriching Judaism and religious practices. They also acknowledged that they were privileged compared to their female counterparts. In their narratives they expressed admiration for women who had learned the practices and the prayers by themselves, and simultaneously perceived that education for women was essential.

Conclusions

The men who participated in this study perceived traditions as essential to the preservation of the Jewish religion and traditions for the future. Questions of change and gender equality should not be viewed as specifically of concern to younger congregants and/or women. Based on the findings, it is recommended that as congregations discuss these issues, they should involve individuals of different ages and genders, and accept that elderly men might be interested and prepared to actively participate in achieving gender equality.

It should be noted that some men might develop a marginalizing attitude towards other men who surrender their male privileges (Sztokman 2011). While the men in this study openly advocated egalitarianism, there might also be men who hold egalitarian attitudes without publicly announcing it. This is understandable, considering the structures that are challenged. Moreover, the life experiences of men who do not publicly advocate egalitarianism might differ from the life experiences of the participants in this study, which
appear to be critical to the understanding how these men arrived at openly advocating egalitarianism.

Congregational life might benefit from openness to development, for example concerning reinterpretations of halakhah, and inclusion of women in official religious practices. Congregations might even lose members if they strictly adhere to a view that defines Jewish traditions as definite and closed to re-interpretation (Amyot and Sigelman 1996; Cutler 2010; Eisman 2010; Judd 1990; Ladin 2014; McGinity 2009; Thompson 2011). Openness and acceptance of different perspectives on Jewish traditions might counteract declining interest in Jewish congregational life (Sharot 1991; Sorkin 2004). The men that participated in this study believed that excluding women from religious practices is a loss to Judaism. The participants’ perception that change and traditions are intermingled, and that egalitarianism promotes a promising Jewish life in the future, is supported by scholarship in the field. From the perspective of the participants, past, present, and future Jewish life involves men and women, old and young, tradition and growth; and all have much to gain from inclusion, from a religious perspective, and a human aspect.

Limitations

The small number of participants is a limitation of this study. Nevertheless, it has been argued that narrative studies should focus on a relatively small number of participants in order to provide in-depth comprehension of the topic (Bold 2012; Lieblich et al. 1998). Methodological issues also limited the study. The participants were given no definition of the term egalitarianism, and the interviews were open-ended. This might have restricted the exploration of any general perception of egalitarianism. It might also be questioned if the findings are transferable to other individuals in other congregations. In addition, the Jewish community in Sweden is relatively small. Likewise, Sweden is a secular country in which equality between men and women is regarded as relatively accepted. These contextual aspects might have influenced the narratives of the participants. Yet, the narratives have the potential of contributing to the study of egalitarianism.

Another methodological concern is that the interviewer was familiar to the participants. This might have influenced the participants to accommodate to the
interviewer’s perspective. Equally, this may have contributed to a greater sense of being able to express one’s perception on egalitarianism openly.

Perhaps most notably, the study is limited by the inability to convey the full experiences of the participants, as some were very private. Hence analysis and discussion might have fragmentized the narratives rather than illuminate them.

**Future Studies**

This study was conducted in a community where the thoughts of elderly men vis-à-vis egalitarianism were not previously regarded with curiosity and they had not actually been asked about their motivations. The study represents a meaningful step in revealing not only their own narratives, but also a side of communal decision-making regarding egalitarianism. It therefore seems critical to deepen the inquiry. Further exploration may involve increasing the number of participants, the examination of common or contrasting narrative ground with the participants’ peers who are opposed to egalitarianism, or seeking participants in a parallel community in Sweden or elsewhere. Obviously, future studies should concern women of various ages in order to understand their perception of egalitarianism, what it means to be excluded, and how they perceive the opportunities, or lack of opportunities to study and practice Judaism.

**References**


Elderly Swedish Jewish Men and Egalitarianism


Elderly Swedish Jewish Men and Egalitarianism


LeHunte, Ben, and Jan A. Glembiewski. 2014. Stories have the power to save us: A neurological framework for the imperative to tell stories. Arts and Social Sciences Journal 5: 73-76.


Elderly Swedish Jewish Men and Egalitarianism


