



INTRODUCTION AND METHODS

Last Spring term, students Laura Katan, Sarai Keestra, and Manya Eversley worked with Cathy Elliott, Senior Teaching Fellow in UCL Political Science, to find out more about experiences of being Jewish at UCL. The project received a small Liberating the Curriculum grant from the UCL Arena Centre for Research-based Education. We did this in the context of a significant increase in anti-Semitic hate crime in the UK between 2010 and 2015, as we are concerned that antisemitism may be leading to painful experiences for Jewish staff and students, causing distress as well as exclusions and (as importantly) self-exclusions from political and educational activity on campus. Our research made use of interpretivist research methods to elicit stories and narratives, which we presented in a podcast called 'JewCL' in which we disseminated the reoccurring themes uncovered through our semi-structured interviews. First we had to go through extensive data protection procedures and develop consent forms to protect the integrity and anonymity of our participants. We interviewed 26 Jewish students at UCL using semi-structured interviews (some exemplary quotes are displayed below.) We transcribed all our interviews using pseudonyms instead of our participants' names. In interpretivist research, stories are co-created. Instead of asking prepared questions, the idea is to be reflexive, where you learn as much about yourself as you do about your interviewee. After rigorous sampling of the enormous diversity of opinions available at UCL, we coded all the re-occurring themes in Nvivo. Finally, we compared all our nodes and talked about our research findings in the JewCL podcast.

OUR EXPERIENCE DOING UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH

The teaching method was intertwined with the learning and doing process, and we've found this project to be incredibly empowering. We actually got the opportunity to get practical experience of research and in this way you learn so much more. We had long discussions about what qualitative research is and what the best way would be to use it to capture unique human experiences that normally get lost in large scale quantitative research. It's a real skill to listen to someone and at the same time to think of a further question. By listening to and telling the stories of fellow students, we learned to tell our own stories and locate the ways in which we are embedded in flows of power and resistance, oppression and privilege, thought and feeling. Now we are sending out our podcast in the world and we are looking forward to hearing the responses and criticisms. Our project isn't over yet!

OUR MAIN RESEARCH FINDINGS

All our interviewees felt that UCL is by and large a welcoming and inclusive place for Jewish students most of the time. However, almost half of our interviewees felt some reticence about disclosing their Jewish identity because of fear of stereotyping, antisemitic comments or aggressive questioning on their stance on Israel, particularly with people they don't yet know well.

Six of our 26 interviewees had had experiences of hurtful conversations or interactions to do with the Holocaust. These ranged in type and severity from incidences of Holocaust denial literature being distributed (apparently by other students) on campus to tutors seeming to downplay the significance of the Holocaust in class to non-Jewish students trying to explain the meaning of the Holocaust insensitively to their Jewish friends. More than half our interviewees had experienced antisemitic comments or "jokes". We heard about remarks about Jewish appearance, antisemitic graffiti in the toilets, comments about Jews being rich/mean with money, Jews being part of a shadowy conspiracy that runs the world's businesses and so on. Antisemitic violence is unsurprisingly very rare on campus, but one of our interviewees had been chased down Gower Street for being Jewish.

Israel came up in every interview and there is as wide a range of views and opinions on the topic of Israel among our Jewish students. However, most of our interviewees have a deep emotional link to Israel, whether through prayer, because they have spent time there, because they have friends and family in Israel or because they are Israeli citizens. This causes a lot of complicated feelings at times when the tone of student or tutors' discourse about Israel is very negative or aggressive, and particularly when there is stereotyping and conflation between the Israeli government and Jews as a whole. Jewish students feel the need to work through their still-evolving ideas and opinions about Israel and feel that the space is not always there, even in classrooms. Ironically, those Jewish students who are most sympathetic to pro-Palestinian activism on campus feel the most hurt and shut-out by sometimes aggressive language, stereotyping and assumptions. There was uncertainty about what to do or where to go in case of antisemitic incidents. Jewish students were not sure who represented them and some expressed mistrust of the Student Union. Overall, we were surprised by the sheer diversity in opinions and we consider it important that all these perspectives are being heard.

