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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.

Tropes

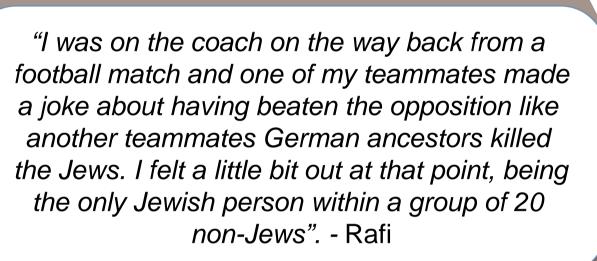


"I was talking to a friend yesterday, and he was like "I was in Marks and Spencer's – yeah, that Jewish supermarket"— and I was like Marks and Spencer's is not Jewish, and he was like "Nah, they're all owned by Jews, all the big companies are owned by Jews", and it was really interesting because he doesn't mean that in a kind of denigrating, antisemitic manner, I think people just have genuine misconceptions. Marks and Spencer's is not Jewish, Waitrose is not Jewish, it's John Lewis; couldn't have less of a Jewish name if it tried"- Saul.

"We were in the student bar, and I mentioned that I never cooked but got Itsu half price at the end of the day instead. And one of my friends said 'She can afford it, she's Jewish, she's rich'. People don't mean it maliciously, it's just a stereotype, it's so ingrained." - Katie

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The



"They had this protest about animal testing at UCL, at there was a woman holding a sign with a picture showing victims of human experimentation in Nazi death camps with the caption 'UCL carried out 2000 animal experiments, stop the Holocaust' then pictures of animals juxtaposed with that. And I walked past and I turned around and I couldn't believe what I had seen. I think in that situation there are a lot of people who are very easily intimidated, especially amongst Jewish students at UCL, who would not feel safe". - John

Feeling

presenieu



"I think that for me that my relationship to Israel is very religious and completely inseparable from my Jewish identity, and I think it's a problem with campuses all over the country and all over the world that being a student basically means that you're going to support the boycott of Israel and you're going to be anti-Israel. I can't disassociate myself from that, and therefore I feel like a lot of student spaces are unwelcoming." - Ruth

Palestine

Sometimes you don't want to get into these conversations, it goes round and round in circles. You have a set opinion and are very set in your mind, and I'm not going to try and convince you 5 minutes before the next class (...) In Freshers I was eating with my friends in halls, and some guy from my course just sat down and we got talking about something and it came up that I was Jewish, and he went straight in there, "What do you think about the Arab-Israeli conflict?". - Zoe

600/MO

"When I found Holocaust denial leaflets, I didn't know who to go to. I felt like the Union isn't the space to talk about anti-semitism because I'm not going to be taken seriously... they never made any attempt to suggest that they are there for Jewish students. I think the Union represents a very specific – most students don't vote to the election and aren't

involved in that. When it comes down to discovering something you should report of the minorities officer, (...), then I thought no, they're not the people to talk to about anti-Semitism about".- Ruth

"If you think about it when the Union passed the BDS motion it means that anyone who works in the student union has to support that or they cant be there. Which does bar any Zionist student from being there and just looking at statistics most Zionist students are likely to be Jewish so it does have an effect.(...) I think there is something which has an undertone of it is shameful to be Zionist and a bit shameful to be Jewish because its all related to Israel". - Rachel

"People on the sports team would make comments on my Jew-curls and Jew- nose, and stereotypical comments like that." - David

"I've subconsciously absorbed this idea that to be visibly Jewish, people perceive you as being uglier." – Zoe

"Something that has started getting to me recently is people who aren't Jewish asking me whether a person looks Jewish, as if there is some ultimate Jew we all aspire to look like or what a Jew looks like". - Tamara

"Am I ashamed of looking like I could be Jewish? I don't think so, but I don't want people to think I'm religious" - Zoe

"I emailed one of my lecturers to let them know I was going to be missing one of our lecturers for a Jewish festival, and saying I would catch up on the work as I have every year since I was 11. He replied very patronisingly saying maybe I should consult my family elder and explain what is at stake and questioning my commitment to university". - Rachel

"I mentioned that I went to a Jewish school and my supervisor made a comment about how I was a 'good Jewish girl'. It was really unnecessary and a bit strange". - Katie

"I was at a party and someone pretty high up (a UCL professor) said 'You Jews all fucking stick together, don't you?'. And this is someone who I respect, and he was a bit drunk, and the next day he apologised. But yeah, it wasn't great". -Adam



Jewish Teachers