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# The Lived Experiences of Anti-Semitism Encountered by Jewish Students on University Campuses: A Phenomenological Study

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# ABSTRACT

Campus climate informs student encounters on university campuses. Research indicates that discriminatory campus experiences impact the social, emotional, professional, and academic development of students. Although many studies discuss inequity among marginalized student groups, institutional Anti-Semitism is minimally discussed in scholarship. The current qualitative phenomenological study contributes to this literature gap by providing insight into the lived experiences of Jewish students in Counseling and Couple and Family Therapy programs who encountered Anti-Semitism at a public university. The guiding research question for this study was: What are the lived experiences of Jewish students who encounter Anti-Semitism on university campuses? Data collection involved online semi-structured interviews of participants and was followed by data analysis processes of thematic analysis and crosscase synthesis. Results indicated that being Jewish on campus includes four main challenges of (a) experiences of disclosing, externalizing, or embodying Jewish identity, (b) experiences of Anti-Semitism, (c) exclusionary experiences within multicultural education and courses, and (d) exclusionary experiences within social justice advocacy and minority status. Findings prompt future utilization of historical trauma informed instructional models and intergroup contact interventions within research and teaching in Counseling and Couple and Family Therapy programs.

**KEYWORDS:** institutional anti-Semitism, phenomenology, campus climate, Jewish identity, historical trauma informed instructional models.

Research has shown that campus climate informs student encounters on university campuses (Museus et al., 2008). Though people experience campus interactions differently, marginalized students face differentiation through university policies, practices, and peer/personnel interactions (Allen et al., 2020). Discriminatory campus experiences extend negative impacts onto students' social, emotional, professional, and academic development (Muñoz & Vigil, 2018; Campbell-Whatley et al., 2015). Recent literature indicates that underrepresented students (including Black, Asian, LGBTQIA+, Latinx, and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival individuals) encounter isolation, micro-aggressions, and mistaken identity on campus (Muñoz & Vigil, 2018). In fact, correlations between hostile campus climate and subsequent decreased adjustment, management of racialized discourse (Yeo et al. 2019), and lack of safety in disclosing identities (Allen et al., 2020) are noted among marginalized students. Overall, these findings are very concerning, and highlight discrimination against minorities within educational environments. This study focuses specifically on institutional Anti-Semitism experienced by Jewish identifying students enrolled in Master of Counseling

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and Couple and Family Therapy programs. Though Anti-Semitism is a growing problem in higher education, it is minimized and has not been well researched to date (Rubin, 2019).

# Literature Review

# **History of Anti-Semitism**

Semites are people of Arab descent, or those who face animosity within dominant culture. The term Anti-Semitism originated in Germany in 1879, derived from the word *Judenhass*, or Jew-Hatred (Rubin, 2017), and is mostly associated with Jews (Rubin, 2019). The Jewish people are a distinct group with Middle Eastern origins, yet racial and ethnic dynamics shifted for Jews after the Holocaust when light skinned immigrants entered the United States and were grouped as white people. Today, Jewish people are comprised of many races with intersecting identities (Farber & Poleg, 2019). While white-passing Jews enjoy privilege, it is important to recognize the violent acts perpetuated against Jewish identity (Rubin, 2017) and the experiences of Jewish Americans that differ greatly from those of white Christians. One collective concern faced by American Jews is fear of Anti-Semitism. In an anthropological study, Creese (2022) noted that fear is not only rooted in the experience of fearing, but also in the discourse that surrounds it and can become a product of cultural reinforcement and division of power. This lifestyle of trepidation is acknowledged in the updated non-binding definition of Anti-Semitism proposed by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) in the following words:

Anti-Semitism is a certain perception of Jews which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of anti-Semitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities (IHRA, 2018, para. 5).

Some scholars debate the definition (along with its subsequent examples) and believe it is taken out of context to silence free speech within institutions and anti-Israel sentiments. It has, however, been accepted and adopted by the United States, the European Union, governments, and many institutions of higher education. The seamless universal receptivity for the IHRA's statement impacts Jewish people in a multitude of ways. To increase the reader's understanding of the environments and attitudes that perpetuate Anti-Semitism, we present a historical review of Anti-Semitism in the United States that includes the history of Jews in America, *new Anti-Semitism*, online hate speech, and Anti-Semitism on university campuses.

# Anti-Semitism in the United States

Among the estimated 14 million Jews worldwide, the majority reside in the United States (5.7 million), and the next largest population resides in Israel (5.6 million). The Pew Research Center (2015) suggests that by 2050, most Jews will emigrate to Israel because it is the only nation with a Jewish majority. Jewish identification in the U.S. is heterogeneous, with ethnic, cultural, and religious affiliations. Shared experiences among secular and religious Jews include Holocaust atrocities, the State of Israel, and contemporary Anti-Semitism (Hodge & Boddie, 2021). Jews hold anticipatory fear of the physical and psychological damage that Anti-Semitism brings to Jewish identity. This collective apprehension is often more poignant than individual or familial-related encounters (Creese, 2022).

Anti-Semitism is based on stereotypes of Jews as a people and a nation with religious practices. When examining Anti-Semitism in America, it is helpful to include multiple perspectives as associated literature is scarce. Compared to global trends, levels of Anti-Semitism are lower in the U.S., however, still very problematic. Examples of Anti-Semitic acts are the desecration of Jewish graves, attacks on synagogues, death threats, and other expressed forms of hatred (Hodge & Boddie, 2021). Though many hate crimes against Jews are not considered criminal offenses and thus go unreported, these violent acts are traumatic for Jewish people (Levy, 2018). In 2010, 92% of Jews believed Anti-Semitism was a problem in America and in the following years, there has been a notable acceleration in Anti-Semitic incidents. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI, 2018) reported a 54% rise in religious hate crimes against Jews between 2014-2018, and among all hate crimes reported in 2017, 58%, or the majority were against Jews. Jews and African Americans were the most targeted groups for hate crimes among other marginalized communities in 2018 (FBI, 2018). Despite the increase and prevalence of Anti-Semitic crimes, scholars have largely ignored the phenomenon to date (Kressel & Kressel, 2016; Rosen et al., 2018).

Various studies have uncovered possible contributing causes to increased Anti-Semitism over the last two decades. First, the ancient nature of Anti-Semitism is significant as Jews have been a historical minority throughout the world. Anti-Jewish propaganda and stereotypes have perpetuated violence against Jews over decades. Second, there is a link between the frequency of Anti-Semitic incidents and sizes of Jewish populations in specific regions (Hodge & Boddie, 2021). Locations with larger numbers of observant Jews invite in more hate crimes (Anti-Defamation League, [ADL], 2018) and a higher likelihood that Orthodox Jews will be targeted (Pew Research Center, 2013). Jewish hatred is also magnified by a majority-minority issue, as the Jewish people are a cultural minority that represent just 2% of the U.S. population. Compared to other groups, Jews often hold higher socioeconomic status, educational attainment, and income (Pew Research Center, 2013). These phenomena, along with tolerated micro-aggressions and "othering" of Jews create fertile ground for scapegoating and displaced anger of outside groups that are enacted through hate crimes and aggression (Farley, 2011). The internet and social media provide a dangerous platform for isolated voices that perpetuate conspiracy theories and myths about Anti-Semitism, the Holocaust, and Jews (Levin, 2001. As a result, Anti-Semitism is spread along a socio-political continuum.

#### **New Anti-Semitism**

In the early 2000's, Anti-Semitism shifted from a biological race affiliation with Jews to new Anti-Semitism, or animosity shown toward Israel and insensitivity toward Jewish experiences. New Anti-Semitism is a topic of scholarly debate since its uprise, and it is crucial for the research community to understand how it manifests and gains momentum. Activists and educators strongly influence new Anti-Semitism through publications and global governance that create boundaries for group belonging. After 9-11, for example, racial fields of governance were formed under the assumption that new Anti-Semitism is ethnoculturally associated with MENA (Middle Eastern and North African) people and Muslim-identifying people. In addition, the 2001 Durban interracial conference facilitated a global image of solidarity with Palestinian liberation, anti-colonialism, and consideration of Israel's actions as apartheid. The conference became a catalyst for pushing new Anti-Semitism forward, amplified by post-attendance scholarship. Anti-Semitism has since been reduced from complex concepts into simplistic ideas or opposites. Crimes committed against Jews are now viewed as generalized crimes against human beings (Romeyn, 2020). Meer (2013) pointed out that contemporary theories of race and racism pay little attention to Anti-Semitism. In this realm, many histories of racism are silenced, as is the racialization of Judaism and Islam. Barriers to measuring Anti-Semitism and

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Islamophobia are therefore rooted in semantic, ideological, and epistemological properties (Romeyn, 2020).

Trump's 2019 executive order to combat Anti-Semitism was received with mixed feelings among American Jews. The order is based on invoking Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that prohibits discrimination based on color, race, and national origin. It suggests that this title applies to forms of discrimination that are rooted in Anti-Semitism. The executive order utilizes the IHRA's definition of Anti-Semitism and highlights that Anti-Semitism is a polarizing aspect of public opinion for American Jews. It also determines who holds blame and responsibility for privilege in the dominant society. Questions of who is to blame for Anti-Semitism in the U.S. mirror Jews' dilemmas surrounding alignment with political parties and ideological orientations (Becker, 2020). Trump's 2020 middle east policy also caused a global uptick in anti-Semitic experiences (ADL, 2020; Specia, 2020). Healy et al. (2014) discuss the strong predictor of partisan bias on who is held to blame in leadership for communal concerns. Recognizing the role/s of partisan politics and ideological polarization in public policy of new Anti-Semitism is crucial as it influences the absence of legal universality pertaining to online hate speech, among other related topics (Becker, 2020).

## **Online Hate Speech**

Barriers to addressing new Anti-Semitism are complicated by internet-based hate speech, an evolving contemporary problem. To date, there is no known universal definition of hate speech. Although the 2019 United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech indicates that all forms of hate speech are harmful, not all speech is prohibited by international or state laws. Only in cases of incitement or dangerous speech is hate speech forbidden. Hate speech escapes censorship through coded language, which is not considered offensive within itself, but can quickly turn into Anti-Semitic messages (Milanović, 2022). At present, Anti-Semitic conspiracy theories are the most widely expressed forms of Anti-Semitism within social media because of coded language (Mulhall, 2021).

Hate speech circulates in verbal, published, and online formats. Anti-Semitic posts within social media (such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) are not surprising, but the absence of online regulation is worrisome. Additional concerns include the rapid pace in which online information spreads, and that it cannot be erased or destroyed. Related to the ancient nature of Anti-Semitism, results of several recent studies indicate burgeoning online Anti-Semitic posts after the COVID-19 pandemic. Conspiracy narratives against Jews date back to the Middle Ages when Jews were blamed for spreading pandemics such as the bubonic plague (The Black Death) in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and accused of poisoning wells in Europe and being the cause of Christian deaths and misfortunes (Milanović, 2022).

Another reason for increased online Anti-Semitism in the past ten years is the overall expansion of online media forums and global networks. Online presence and interactions have flourished (Kemp, 2021), resulting in heightened online hate speech. Researchers have discovered a troubling continuum of instigators' online announcements of intentionality to commit hate crimes prior to carrying out attacks. These internet-based notifications lead to violence, as demonstrated in synagogue attacks that occurred between 2019-2022 (Barak-Cheney & Saltiel, 2022). Thus, online forums become safe spaces for extremist voices (Milanović, 2022). In addition, the discrepancy between the IHRA definition of Anti-Semitism and state law's refusal to recognize Anti-Semitic incidents as hate crimes is incongruent. According to Bossetta (2022), it is less important to focus on the quantity of online users and instead identify media content that radicalizes people and groups. It is also crucial to understand why some groups are radicalized more than others. Research indicates that aggression toward Jews effects their wellness (Marsigilia & Kulis, 2015). Correlations between Anti-Semitism, higher stress levels, and decreased life satisfaction have been noted in recent scholarship (Rosen

et al., 2018). This information is relevant to apparent disruption in the wellbeing of Jewish students in academic environments.

#### Anti-Semitism on University Campuses

The history of institutional Anti-Semitism began with policies that limited the number of accepted Jewish students and discouraged qualified Jews from applying to institutions of higher education (Mayhew et al., 2018). Currently, Anti-Semitism is on the rise across university campuses (ADL, 2022). In the American Jewish Committee's (2021) State of Antisemitism in America Report, 24% of the Jewish people surveyed had experienced an Anti-Semitic attack within an educational institution and 50% believed that Anti-Semitism has increased on campuses over the past five years. Studies show a troubling upward trend in Anti-Semitic incidents on campus (Mayhew et al., 2018; Wright et al., 2021). Holocaust- denialism, increased Anti-Israel sentiments, and Jewish conspiracy theories are related areas of concern (Rubin, 2017).

Despite this evidence, counselor education is rarely inclusive of Jewish needs, history, ethnic, or cultural considerations (Farber & Poleg, 2019). As such, Jewish students debate where and how to display their intersectional identities on university campuses (Rubin, 2017) and whether it is safe to do so. They report a profound lack of support from campus personnel within classroom discussions, forums, and learning activities (Farber & Poleg, 2019). Literature suggests that acknowledgment of marginalized voices and use of culturally responsive campus practices and policies can strengthen students' sense of belonging (Shelton, 2019), however, further information is needed to support the inclusion of Jewish students. A phenomenological study contributes to this gap in research by providing insight into the lived experiences of Jewish students who encountered Anti-Semitism at a public university.

#### **Case and Methodology**

This phenomenological study (van Manen, 1990) depicts the lived experiences of four Jewish students enrolled in Master of Counseling and Couple and Family Therapy programs (and alumni) that encountered institutional Anti-Semitism. The guiding research question for this study is: what are the lived experiences of Jewish students who encounter Anti-Semitism on university campuses? Phenomenology delves into the universal essence of a specific phenomenon (van Manen, 1990) and positions the researcher in a naturalistic setting. The design involves in-depth interpretation of participant narratives, theoretical application, and deeper construction of meaning (Creswell, 2018). The primary goal of phenomenology is to describe the essential truths and meaning derived from individual lived experiences within the world (Neubauer et al., 2019).

We integrated a blended contemporary *Lifeworld research* approach for this study that bridges gaps between descriptive and hermeneutic phenomenology. The Lifeworld research design examines how daily encounters manifest in the life-worlds of individuals through consideration of factors such as sociality, selfhood, embodiment, spatiality, and temporality (Neubauer et al., 2019; Ashworth, 2003). The Self of the researcher is openly invited into the inquiry rather than neutralized through bracketing as in descriptive phenomenology (Neubauer et al., 2019). This level of authenticity was consistent with my (first author's) first-hand encounters as a Jewish professor that were woven into all stages of the study.

The study sample size was intentionally small to highlight extensive details unique to each individual participant rather than to generalize the information learned (Creswell, 2013). The sensitive nature of this inquiry and its focus caused some hesitation among participants regarding self-disclosure of Jewish identity. As noted in the literature review, the association of fear with Anti-Semitism also surrounds related public discourse (Creese, 2022). All

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participants reported experiences of rejection or minimization from university personnel when addressing Anti-Semitism to the authors upon introduction to the study. Perceived micro-aggressions affect the wellness of Jews (Marsiglia & Kulis, 2015) so concern for each participant's well-being was of utmost importance to us throughout data collection, analysis, and member checking processes. My regard for the ambivalence of discussing Anti-Semitism (Creese, 2022) was present within roles of interviewer and first author that I further explain in a statement of positionality.

#### **Statement of Positionality**

The invisibility of Jewish students shrouded in the shadow of institutional Anti-Semitism prompted us to explore this phenomenon and publish the article. Within our positions as assistant professor and teacher's assistant, we both witnessed Anti-Semitic incidents on campus and coded hate speech among students. Though we acknowledged systemic oppression of other marginalized communities, we were particularly concerned about the blatant omittance of Jewish voices from university correspondence, calendars, and coursework. Due to the silencing of Anti-Semitism within the participants' programs, we validated their uncertainty to disclose related lived experiences. We decided that I (the first author) would interview the participants alone to create sanctuary through shared Jewish identity and understanding.

I am a Jewish assistant professor and Holocaust granddaughter. I have experienced institutional Anti-Semitism as a faculty member and therefore integrated my lifeworld encounters into the study as a source of guiding humility (Neubauer et al., 2019). Like the participants, I felt dread in the pit of my stomach and tightness in my chest when acknowledging that the study content would eventually be publicized. I was exposed early to the threat and consequences of externalizing my Jewish ethnicity within multiple environments. I, therefore, "flew under the radar" in academia and rarely mentioned Judaism on campus. It was not until several courageous Jewish students addressed institutional Anti-Semitism in a recent discussion that I realized the extent of my avoidance. Here I was, the only Jewish faculty member in the Department of Counseling, by-passing social justice responsibilities for fear of externalizing my deepest feelings as a Jew. I confronted personal ambivalence to support students in fighting Anti-Semitism and invited my research assistant to co-author this paper with me, as she expressed interest in related advocacy. This phenomenological inquiry is a product of the participants' urgency to speak out about campus oppression and our responsiveness to their anguish. Though we did not engage in bracketing, I was aware of personal biases as the only Jewish author throughout the study and therefore requested (1) an outside peer reviewer to read the manuscript and provide objective feedback, (2) member-checking for three out of four participants, and (3) engagement in triangulation and rich data descriptions to demonstrate trustworthiness (Creswell, 2013). Further details about my parallel process as a wounded Jewish researcher are woven into the analysis, results, discussion, and conclusion sections of this paper.

# **Participant Recruitment and Data Collection**

After Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, we began recruitment of research participants. We first utilized a purposeful sample for the initial three participants and then a snowball sample to recruit more participants that were alumni or students in similar programs at other universities. Invitations were sent to three Jewish graduate students enrolled in Counseling and Couple and Family Therapy programs (and one associated alum) at a public university. Since we had facilitated several presentations and discussion forums about Anti-Semitism for faculty and students within the university department, the first three students were familiar with the study focus and expressed interest in participation. The snowball sample

method then allowed for the engagement of up to seven additional Jewish students from outside universities, other departments within the same public university, or alumni that had graduated from related programs through recommendations from the initial participants. Though several potential candidates inquired about joining, only one additional person completed the study. The four participants received emailed invitation letters and consent forms that specified the qualifying factors for participation (Jewish student identity within a university environment). We offered each participant optional attendance at an introductory Zoom meeting. The purpose of this meeting was to clarify any questions and mitigate possible study-related concerns or triggers. Due to the previous silencing of participants' Anti-Semitic experiences within their programs, resources were provided within the consent forms in the case of potential distress when discussing such encounters.

Once each participant signed consent forms, every person was invited to attend a private online semi-structured interview. Meetings were offered virtually rather than in-person in the Fall of 2022. Our rationale for this decision was that most university operations within the participants' programs were still conducted virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We aimed for consistency with university protocol and accommodation of students' comfort levels with regard to meetings. Since all students expressed familiarity with Zoom and most preferred virtual interviews, we chose the online forum. In the helping professions, unstructured interviews are not recommended due to the volume of information received and subsequent difficulty for the researcher to interpret complex data (McLeod, 2010). Audio and video recordings of each interview were requested from participants, but not required. We offered each person one- hour long interviews to capture rich data that was unique to individual meaning-making (Creswell, 2013). Also, a fluid interview structure in qualitative research can be helpful in uncovering the "how" or "why" (Yin, 2018, p. 118) of a specific phenomenon, which we found appropriate for the structure of the guiding research question. We realized that some people might require additional time to articulate their lived experiences within a semistructured interview timeframe. We also noted some students' verbalized ambivalence about discussing their oppression and offered them more time for conversation if needed. Participants were notified that a second follow-up meeting could be scheduled if deemed necessary by the interviewer and interviewee. After the first round of interviews was completed, however, there were no requests for second ones. The interview questions were:

- 1. Tell me a bit about yourself and what your Jewish identity means to you?
- **2.** Have you experienced any anti-Semitic or anti-Israel encounters on campus within classes or among peers? If so, please provide examples.
- **3.** What have your experiences been communicating your needs as a Jewishidentifying student to campus personnel, professors, or peers? Please provide examples.
- **4.** Do you feel campuses and university personnel could improve on addressing anti-Semitic and anti-Israel concerns on campus, and if so, how?
- 5. Anything else you'd like to say or add?

# **Data Analysis**

After four interviews were conducted and recorded, we transcribed all data verbatim and uploaded the information to a confidential online folder for the purpose of interpretation and analysis. We began with thematic analysis, reviewed all transcribed interviews, and recorded poignant themes and quotes while re-reading the transcriptions. Thematic analysis is a qualitative method that identifies, analyzes, and reports themes or patterns within a data set. This method of analysis also minimally organizes data, but more so- describes the themes in rich and complex detail. Thematic analysis is compatible with a constructionist paradigm and

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provides "theoretical freedom" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78) to acknowledge a theoretical position, though the researcher need not subscribe to full theory development. Since it is not rigidly connected to a pre-existing theory, thematic analysis allows for more flexibility in theory integration. It is contextual in nature and seeks to theorize sociocultural dynamics and structural conditions. Thematic analysis is a recursive method that is non-linear and makes space for the researcher in an active role of identifying, selecting, and reporting themes from the data while maintaining transparency of theoretical position (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Because this phenomenological study involved the sociocultural construct of institutional Anti-Semitism, we concluded that it was an effective analysis method. After reviewing the themes, we conducted a cross-case synthesis (Yin, 2018) of all four participants. For cross-case synthesis, we re-read the main topics that emerged in thematic analysis and then examined the similarities and differences between individual cases. We then created several versions of a diagram that represented the four shared lived experiences of participants within the context of being Jewish on campus. Finally, we presented the results (Yin, 2018).

Although I (the first author) acknowledged my positionality from the data collection phase, an additional status of *wounded researcher* (Romanyshyn, 2010) was transparentized when I reviewed the interviews. I was attentive to emotions that arose while reading participants' words and agonized over the thought of misrepresenting their narratives. This did not surprise me, as the wounded researcher is often *chased* by a personal desire to address disenfranchised matter through scholarship (Romanyshyn, 2010; Craig, 2008). I realized the responsibility I held to transfer participants' deepest truths to the reader and thus to attain "epistemological humility" (Romanyshyn, 2010, p. 278). To demonstrate trustworthiness, I completed Creswell's (2018) qualitative strategies of (a) outside peer review, (b) clarifying researcher bias, (c) triangulation, and (d) providing rich descriptions for the primary purpose of transferability.

#### Trustworthiness

An outside peer reviewer who is a professor of Research Methodology (unrelated to Counseling or Couple and Family Therapy) in a different department of the public university where the study was conducted reviewed the study after all analysis procedures were complete. She read the manuscript and provided objective written feedback to us. She met with us to answer questions and to ensure that feedback was implemented. I (the first author) requested an additional conversation with the peer reviewer to discuss my feelings as a wounded researcher.

Triangulation incorporates the researchers' integration of evidence that enhances specific topics represented in the study and includes coding themes, member checking, and provision of thick data (Creswell, 2013). In this phenomenological inquiry, we engaged in triangulation first through thematic analysis and cross-case synthesis. Thick descriptions of the data were documented following interviews with participants that allowed for robust expression of their lived experiences. I (the first author) engaged three out of four participants in member checking as a final attempt to verify the accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2013).

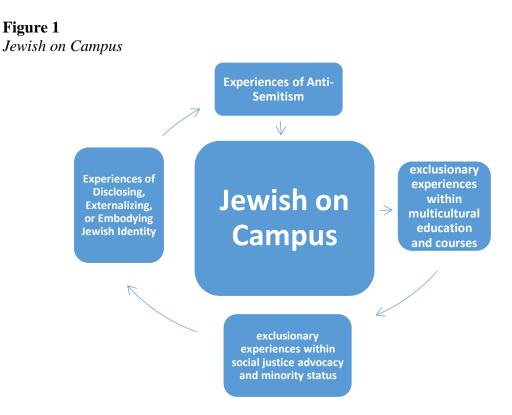
I sent three participants (the fourth could not be located due to alumni status) several pages from the data analysis and results sections of the manuscript, where many of their personal quotes and statements were featured. The document included options for interviewees to express agreement, disagreement, concerns, corrections, or comments associated with our proposed assertations. Aside from one correction, all participants shared comments about their feelings or reactions after reviewing the document. One student stated that it was very difficult to read the narratives (including her own) and ended her commentary with the words "fuck this". Her words referred to the relentless pain of institutional Anti-Semitism. The second student noted that member checking was a fascinating process for him and said, "I wish I could

have had some of these conversations with my peers while going through the multicultural counseling class". He indicated that the process of engaging in the discussion as a Jew was most significant. The third participant reiterated that exclusion from the academic calendar and course planning for Jewish students is a larger issue that should be discussed further in the context of institutional Anti-Semitism. He said that Jewish exclusion from the academic calendar calendar places Jews in a forced position of choosing between holidays or falling behind in coursework, as noted here:

By not recognizing major Jewish holidays on the academic calendar, and "suggesting" rather than mandating through practice guidelines and policy, a meta message is created that states Jewish students are less important and not worthy of consideration of appropriate accommodation laying the groundwork for oppression and Anti-Semitism.

The comments received from member-checking stirred my (first author's) genuine compassion for the participants' pain and appreciation for their truths. Though my ambivalence about misrepresenting students' perspectives in the data persisted, I considered this fear a validation of trustworthiness and ethics. After sharing parts of the manuscript with students, my heart felt lighter, and I was again attuned to my parallel process. I recognized that the researcher's journey holds no less archetypal significance than that of the participant, though it must be simultaneously tended to with equal amounts of warmth and curiosity (Romanyshyn, 2010; Lowinsky, 2009). The resolve to hold both rites of passage dear opened authentic space throughout all remaining stages of study interpretations, revisions, and conceptualization.

# Results



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Cross-case synthesis revealed that being Jewish on campus led to encountered challenges of (a) experiences of disclosing, externalizing, or embodying Jewish identity, (b) experiences of Anti-Semitism, (c) exclusionary experiences within multicultural education and courses, and (d) exclusionary experiences within social justice advocacy and minority status. As seen in figure 1., the four main lived encounters were informed by the intersectionality of participants' interdependent and overlapping discriminatory experiences (Crenshaw, 1989) of being Jewish on campus. We elaborated upon each theme and added students' quotes to demonstrate rich expression in qualitative research (Creswell, 2018).

### Experiences of Disclosing, Externalizing, or Embodying Jewish Identity

The first central theme that emerged in cross-case synthesis was experiences of disclosing, externalizing, or embodying Jewish identity. The expression, perception, and safety considerations in disclosing Jewish identity on campus were mentioned by all four participants. Students did not feel safe disclosing their Jewish identity for fear of discriminatory reactions from institutional personnel. All interviewees spoke about their deliberations of where, and with whom to share their Jewishness with. One student said, "I think for Judaism, there's such a thing as being in the closet…" Another noted how Jewish people must censor or minimize their Jewishness to be somewhat accepted by the dominant culture in the following statement: "…We have learned that to fully…participate in society you cannot be too Jewish."

Participants' narratives about externalizing or embodying Jewish identity were congruent with Rubin's (2019) definition of internalized Anti-Semitism. Some Jews internalize Anti-Semitism by hiding their Jewishness from non-Jews for fear of public Jewish identification (Altman et al., 2010). This phenomenon includes the creation of physical and social adjustments so as not to appear "too Jewish" or closeting one's identity to fit into mainstream society. Though internalized Anti-Semitism is a contemporary way of being for younger Jews (Rubin, 2019), we noted that three out of four participants coupled internalization with transgenerational Anti-Semitic experiences, an integral part of their Jewish identity. One student expressed, "...So, I'm a granddaughter of Holocaust survivors, which is a huge piece of my Jewish identity". Similarly, another interviewee described a childhood attack on his parent related to her Jewish heritage. He described his early realization of such hatred in the following words: "Because I knew…you know, my Mom has stitches in her head from rocks being thrown at her… because she was Jewish". Yet another participant shared snippets of a conversation she had with her mother after learning that her grandparents' entrepreneurial nature was a response to Anti-Semitism, as indicated below:

I remember one time saying to my Mom, wow... cause looking at what my grandparents did, a lot of them owned their own stores ... and when I said to my Mom, wow, so entrepreneurial, my Mom was like, no we're not... no one would give the Jews a job, so we had to start our own stores. Like, it was a need... you weren't allowed to work here, so they started their own thing.

An additional aspect of embodying Jewish identity that was shared by three out of four participants was that Judaism as a culture and ethnicity (in addition to a religion) is ignored. A student noted that the intricacy of Jewish identity is not acknowledged or taught. "...I do think it's complex because Judaism is a religion and...also an ethnicity". Another participant spoke about the minimal understanding of Judaism in higher education and said, "Because the education around Judaism is so lacking...as to even why it's not a religion, it's a culture...". Interviewees' perceptions were consistent with ongoing public non-recognition of intersectional identities among Jews (Farber & Poleg, 2019).

Jewish people are too often grouped into one collective category, yet comprise several distinct ethnic origins such as Sephardim, Mizrachim, and Ashkenazim (MacDonald-Dennis, 2006). To address this concern, we later discussed the need to integrate historical trauma informed instructional models that prompt acknowledgement of multiple heritages among Jews. We also recognized the need for intergroup contact activities (such as team building and small group conversations) to promote reflectivity and increase compassion for Jewish perspectives (Reimer et al., 2022). These initiatives are helpful in confronting Anti-Semitic experiences, as discussed in the next sub-section.

## **Anti-Semitic Experiences**

Anti-Semitism experiences were common among all interviewees. Three out of four students encountered Anti-Semitic micro-aggressions as children, adolescents, and adults. Three participants received early and consistent messages from family and others that people hate Jews. Students also endured Anti-Semitic and Anti-Israel statements from peers in verbal, social media, and classroom-based formats. Below, a student reiterated the early fear of perceived hatred and harm due to their Jewish identity: "...And it also started when I...really understood that people hate Jews ...when I became...an old enough kid to understand...what hate speech was". Yet another participant echoed this message of potential harm from non-Jews:

And so, the message that you get is like, this is a part of you that you don't really share because it gives a reason for people to, not only just not like you, but actually want to hurt you.

Participants attributed the micro-aggressions to refusal to acknowledge Jewish identity, racial slurs, stereotyping, and mistreatment. Students named aggressions that were spoken or communicated within the graduate-level classroom:

I have had some students...say things like...Jews are good at math...at finance...things like that. Like, ask him...he's Jewish...I've heard that come up in a class...that's the kind of comment that I go along with but it...just increases my tension and wariness of everybody.

Another interviewee spoke candidly about the slurs that she was subjected to within several university environments. At first, she referenced endurance of general racial slurs: "So, in the academic world, stuff like that...happened. I...experienced micro-aggressions my whole life in terms of being called slurs...". She then recalled a specific memory where she was ridiculed in a derogatory term that was equated explicitly to her Jewish identity. She shared a tidbit of that encounter here: "I remember one time in college there was one girl who always would take it to the next level with me...and...would...call me stupid Jew. We were...friends and I said to her...that's not OK..."

While interviewees recognized the overt micro-aggressions depicted above, they also believed that their own internalized Anti-Semitism contributed to a concerning normalization of such encounters within the educational environment. This was evidenced by participants' seeming tolerance of insensitive questions from university personnel and Anti-Semitic campus experiences. For example, one participant noted:" ...I certainly was feeling quite fragile...but I think that I was also mistreated". Another student admitted that she is used to such moments. "...I say it with a laugh because...this was the experience. It's not weird for me, this is what my parents experienced, this is what I experienced, and it was normal, it was common". There

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appeared to be a strong transgenerational component that bound her to family members and ancestry through mutual micro-aggressions.

In addition to internalized Anti-Semitism, interviewees faced Anti-Israel statements from peers through social media, verbal discourse, and within classroom conversations. Congruent with research on connections between Anti-Semitism and Anti-Israeli sentiments (Shenhav-Goldberg & Kopstein, 2020), students expressed how assumptions about their alignment with the State of Israel increased Anti-Semitic interactions among peers. One student recounted a friend's statement, "I saw that you support the IDF, and um, we can't be friends." Another participant saw that peers were posting Anti-Israel memes on social media that equated Israeli current events directly to Judaism. She told her peers "...I am a Jew, I am telling you that what you are posting is hurtful to Jews in America who have nothing to do with the State of Israel, and it's also wrong, but you don't care..."

Similar to this exchange, other participants shared common encounters of non-Jewish faculty's bold Anti-Semitic statements expressed without informed opinions. One student confronted this troubling phenomenon in an angry tone: "...And stop telling me what is and is not Anti-Semitic when you are not a Jew!". In fact, students became frustrated and outraged when faculty and students in their programs seemingly "knew better" about being Jewish. Another participant voiced a related concern that scholarly university personnel assume more about Jews without asking them. She said," ...But to come to a master's program with educated people, who...that's the problem- they're so educated that they know so much better than I do about my own culture!" Interviewee reported feeling resentful of peers who feigned understanding of Jewish culture without lived experience.

Historical trauma informed educational models exceed models of multicultural counseling (Ratts et al., 2016) and cultural competence (Berry-Edwards, 2016) in addressing Anti-Semitic and Anti-Israel experiences by challenging systemic inequity for both the oppressed and the oppressors. These models expand the focus from individual group identification to recognition of social group interplay for both entities (Howard, 2020). This level of collective intentionality is crucial in honoring the participants' perspectives, as it highlights the impact of macro and mezzo systems on micro-level encounters (Howard, 2020). Western university culture too often dismisses students' collective experiences (Abrams, 2022), which in this paper are informed by Jewish intersectional identities. Therefore, recognition of interconnectedness and interdependence between marginalized groups and dominant culture promotes advocacy for the needs of minority communities. Extended further, university personnel can "challenge the complacent self within dominant culture" (Hughes, 2019, p. 6) through engagement in multicultural research, education, and practice (Howard, 2020). Acknowledgment of institutional racism is also elaborated upon in the following sub-section in the context of students' exclusion from multicultural education.

## **Exclusion Experiences Within Multicultural Education and Courses**

Jewish students' exclusionary experiences within multicultural education and coursework surfaced as a major concern for all participants who were current or former master's students in the Counseling and Couple and Family Therapy programs. Interviewees discovered that Jewish perspectives were not recognized, acknowledged, or taught within their graduate multicultural courses. They reiterated the uncomfortable position of being "lumped" into an over-simplified and inaccurate category of whiteness, though their experiences differed drastically from those of the dominant white culture. In the following statement, a participant recalled his dismay upon encountering indifference and exclusion of Jewishness within a course:

And, the Jewish experience was just, basically ignored...there were no guest speakers or anything like that... and our textbook...didn't mention Judaism... as an ethnicity or anything about the Jewish experience of being a minority or oppressed.

Students acknowledged that micro-aggressions targeting Judaism were left out of classroom discussions. The silencing of Jewish experiences within multicultural courses created an unwelcome learning environment wherein their feelings were invalidated, as conveyed in the following excerpt: "...It's never included. ...when we talk about micro-aggressions, I...lose count of the micro-aggressions I face on a daily basis in the workplace, from peers... but it's never talked about in our classes". Another participant felt that her contributions to the multicultural classroom were not valued, as she said, "...So, the message that is communicated by that absence is that, you know, my Jewish identity was not a legitimate or valued part of the conversation". From the nature of these dialogues, we understood that not only did Jewish students feel unheard and unseen, but they did not have a seat at the social justice table.

Participants were also privy to *cloaked* Anti-Semitism, or seemingly casual comments referred to as social justice gestures (Simon, 2021) in multicultural classes. One student remembered an encounter on campus that she felt personified cloaked Anti-Semitism: "...Especially if it's masked as, I am a social justice advocate, so I can't possibly hate Jews..." As a result, students felt alienated within program environments. Their sentiments align with a global minimization of Jewish oppression within multicultural education (MacDonald-Dennis, 2006).

To reduce isolating experiences, participants expressed their desire to discuss Anti-Semitism with university personnel, however, most expressed uncertainty about Jewish inclusion in multicultural courses. In fact, an interviewee said," ...Professors are wanting to know more, but still not getting it..." as they hesitated to elaborate upon this topic in the classroom. Students named a distinct invisibility of Jews as a marginalized group within their programs. One student felt that exclusion of their experience was ..."So deeply engrained in this, like no education around Judaism, no idea, and not only no education around Judaism, but not caring to learn more". Another spoke of the fear that speaking out would not be well received, and said, "... I feel nervous that I don't feel like the university necessarily has my back". In sum, a feeling of uneasiness about conversations with university personnel was characteristic across all cases.

A common institutional barrier related to exclusion from social justice advocacy is the non-existence of Jewish accommodations within diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) committees. The Heritage Foundation published a recent *Diversity Delusion* report that detailed extreme anti-Semitism expressed by DEI officers at the nation's top universities (Ahmed, 2022). The report indicated a "top-down" level of animosity projected onto Judaism that is present within institutions. Minimization of Jewish minority status and lack of advocacy for Jews are problematic among DEI committees. These aspects relate to the participants' exclusionary experiences within social justice advocacy and minority status.

# **Exclusionary Experiences Within Social Justice Advocacy and Minority Status**

Exclusionary experiences within social justice advocacy and minority status was the final shared experience among all participants. As Rubin (2017) stated, Jewish students occupy a space between the binary of being black or white that creates a questionable "grey area" in multicultural environments and can be detrimental for Jews. A participant shared a related sentiment: "...I grew up very othered. I felt very othered". Another interviewee spoke about justifying her minority status in a classroom discussion and it was still minimized by her professor:

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...I just said...being Jewish is not safe. It never was, it never will be and his answer to me was, "you don't know what it's like to be Black". I feel like there is a reluctance to legitimize Jewish experience of oppression in the United States.

The conceptualization that Jewish people are white and therefore do not experience oppression has been pervasive and harmful to Jewish students within social justice advocacy (Rubin, 2017). Interviewees described a false impression of Jewish safety and privilege perceived by non-Jews that was incongruent with their own lived experiences. One student expressed her feeling of alienation after discovering that a key model of cultural responsiveness was not inclusive of her Jewish status and categorized her identity as part of the white majority:

This is bullshit! This wheel does not at all talk about my experience because you are downplaying it to say that, yes, I'm a woman, yes, I'm essentially white, but I'm not white. I never was white, and I'll never be white because no one who hates me ever saw me as white.

Further, this participant shared her indignation upon being forced to quantify her oppression as a Jew relative to other marginalized people. She retorted: "I shouldn't have to sit here and explain to you how horrible it is. You should just have the empathy to recognize that being a minority in whatever capacity is difficult...without me having to quantify". While some marginalized trauma may be universal, we concluded that the continuous need to justify Anti-Semitism and Jewish historical trauma was detrimental to the well-being of Jewish students.

When advocating for justice, students felt pressured to speak up for themselves and for other Jews in the face of institutional indifference. They chose to do so in the realm of community support, though emphasized the discomfort associated with public advocacy. A student talked about his determination to advocate for his people and said, "...in the United States, Jews have been very passive...and that is not my nature even though it was around my Judaism for a long time". Another described her dread when speaking up for Jews in class: "...So if no one's gonna say something, I'm gonna say something...the absolute ...worst. Oh God, on the list of worst things, like things that I would hate to do, that's, that's, the top...I hated that!"

Despite differences in their reactions to advocacy, participants shared a sense of obligation to confront Jewish invisibility within higher education. We discuss the need to create more safe spaces on campus for Jewish students. Mayhew et al.'s (2018) examination of attitudes toward Jews concluded that spaces of sanctuary for free expression of worldview and intersectional identities are required for cultivating an appreciation of Jewish culture. The participants' narratives surrounding minimized minority status concerned us greatly, as their experiences were primarily unsafe. To address the lack of inclusion, we suggested the application of historical trauma-informed instructional models to encourage a greater degree of advocacy on behalf of marginalized communities (Howard, 2020). From a study that integrated autoethnography into historical trauma education (Abrams, 2022), we suggested increased exposure to lectures, stories, and documentaries of marginalized people (Berry-Edwards, 2016), including Jewish narratives. We also proposed intergroup contact group sessions and workshops comprised of faculty, students, and personnel that address Anti-Semitism. Intergroup contact activities promote greater levels of personal accountability for microaggressions and expanded contact with marginalized people and perspectives (Reimer et al., 2022). In the discussion and conclusion section, we elaborated upon future directions for inclusion of Jewish experiences on campus.

#### **Discussion and Conclusion**

This phenomenological study explored the research question of what are the lived experiences of Jewish students who encounter Anti-Semitism on university campuses? After interviewing four Jewish master's level students (and one alum) within Counseling and Couple and Family Therapy programs at a public university, we analyzed the data and concluded that their lived experiences were compatible with scholarly literature of institutional Anti-Semitism and related global trends. Further, cross-case synthesis revealed several important points of consideration pertaining to the educational challenges that Jewish students face. After in-depth discussion of the shared experiences among all participants, an apparent concern that emerged within counselor education and supervision is a lack of education surrounding Jewish experiences, history, and needs. To address this deficit, it is crucial to utilize instructional models that are historical trauma-informed and inclusive of Jewish transgenerational trauma. Studying topics of medieval Jewish persecution, the Holocaust, and new Anti-Semitism are integral for comprehensive multicultural education.

We recommended utilization of historical-trauma informed models and Intergroup Contact Theory as globally recognized theoretical frameworks and interventions (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Reimer et al., 2022). We struggled, however, to find a historical trauma-informed model that is specific to Jewish people's experiences in higher education. In a study conducted by the first author, the six core principles of the Black Perspective (Howard University School of Social Work, 2014) instructional model were applied to ancestral bonding between Jewish Holocaust descendants and their ancestors (Abrams, 2022). The inquiry found that extension of historical trauma models designed for other marginalized communities does affirm strengths embedded in Jewish resilience and creates space for accountability of the oppressor (Howard, 2020). In this model, students are asked to delve deeper into the principles of affirmation, strengths, diversity, vivification, social justice, and internationalization (Berry-Edwards, 2016). Integration of the Black Perspective interventions into counselor education and supervision could address experiences of Anti-Semitism on campus noted by participants, however, Jewish students' level of comfort or relatability to a model that is not specific to Jewish historical trauma is unknown and requires further investigation. In addition to historical trauma-informed models, Intergroup Contact Theory encourages learners to focus on intersectionality, interrelational dynamics, and personal worldview (Reimer et al., 2022). Both approaches are suggested for use in multicultural courses, educational forums, and social justice advocacy pertaining to Jewish experiences.

Limitations of this study included a small sample size, online interviews, and lack of comparison with participants who experienced marginalization due to additional intersectional identities (including Semites of Arab descent who also experience Anti-Semitism). Had we met with the participants in person, the interviews might have produced more in-depth information about the lived experiences of Anti-Semitism. In addition, we were unable to fully include the body language of participants during interviews, as this dynamic is significantly limited within online forum. Despite the challenge of a smaller sample size in transferability (Creswell, 2018), this study contains a strong cultural component that is unique to cases of historical trauma in underrepresented populations (Howard, 2020), as well as a blended contemporary Lifeworld research approach that examined daily encounters in the lifeworld of individuals through consideration of social and individual factors (Neubauer et al., 2019). A final limitation of the study was the absence of a historical trauma-informed educational model that is specific for Jewish students in the helping professions.

Future directions in research of Anti-Semitism on university campuses derived from this study include (1) utilization of larger sample sizes and mixed methodology, (2) integration of intersectional identities into participant selection, data collection, and data analyses (3) implementation of a historical trauma-informed instructional model that is specific for Jewish

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people, (5) integration of education on Anti-Semitism, the Holocaust, and other genocides into multicultural foundations of counseling curriculum, and (6) intentional conversations with global scholars and experts of genocide, Holocaust studies, and historical trauma about addressing institutional Anti-Semitism. Through future examination of Jewish student's lived experiences, intersectional identities, and transgenerational encounters, the inclusivity of marginalized students who are underrepresented in social justice advocacy can improve in multicultural education. Jewish-identifying students will then feel validated by university personnel and peers. Bringing voice to Jewish encounters of Anti-Semitism cultivates a stronger sense of belonging on campus, and ultimately increases positive social, emotional, and developmental growth in students.

# **Personal Conclusion**

It is difficult to quantify the level of attunement that I (the first author) gained from bearing witness to the participants' stories. Though my heart ached when I learned of silencing and exclusion, I am grateful to now hear unheard voices. I hope the study findings permeate the reader's mind and make space at the social justice table and on campus for Jewish students. In my commitment to respond to institutional Anti-Semitism, I am reminded of Elie Wiesel's (1986) famous words, "what hurts the victim most is not the cruelty of the oppressor, but the silence of the bystander". As a wounded researcher and a fellow Jew, I stand in solidarity with marginalized communities and use my voice in scholarship to reduce the suffering of systemic oppression.

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