PERCEIVED ANTI-SEMITISM AT UC BERKELEY
Jewish Students' Subjective Experiences

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This study of the prevalence, nature, and implications of anti-Semitism at the University of California at Berkeley concludes that it does exist on a campus known for its intellectual and liberal values. Seventy percent of the study sample experienced or otherwise perceived negative experiences at UC Berkeley associated with Judaism. The most widely recognized manifestation of anti-Semitism was stereotypical comments made by fellow students, though there were several incidents involving faculty members.

On March 19, 1992, several dead cats were stolen from an animal science laboratory at Queens College, New York. The cats were subsequently found in the toilets of a university building, with a message written on the walls above: "We're going to do to the Jews what we did to the cats" (Anti-Defamation League, 1993, p. 5). This account is one of 114 anti-Semitic incidents reportedly occurring at 60 American college campuses that year (ADL, 1993, p. 5).

Although none of these reports emanated from the University of California at Berkeley (UC Berkeley), the Berkeley campus cannot claim immunity to anti-Jewish activity. This research explores the possible prevalence, nature, and implications of anti-Semitism on the UC Berkeley campus. This study is among the first to systematically examine Jewish students' subjective experiences of anti-Semitism on campus. The questions of concern are: Do UC Berkeley Jewish students generally perceive anti-Semitism to exist at UC Berkeley?; if so, how are UC Berkeley Jewish students affected by the anti-Semitism they perceive to exist at UC Berkeley?; and what form does this anti-Semitism take? My hypotheses are that (1) UC Berkeley Jewish students generally perceive anti-Semitism to exist at UC Berkeley and (2) UC Berkeley Jewish students are emotionally upset by the anti-Semitism they perceive to exist at UC Berkeley. Secondarily, I anticipate strong positive correlations between the strength of students' Jewish identity and both the extent to which they perceive anti-Semitism to exist and the degree to which they are upset by its perceived existence.

The term "anti-Semitism" was coined by Wilhelm Marr around 1873 (Langmuir, 1990). The meaning of the word varies with the political and historical context to which it is applied. Before the Enlightenment, anti-Semites ostracized Jews as "Christ-killers" (Soifer, 1991). In the 19th century, racist ideology fostered the belief that Jews were genetically inferior to all other groups (Langmuir, 1990). This anti-Semitic conviction culminated in the Holocaust.

In 20th-century America, anti-Semitism seems to involve "the harboring of negative beliefs or stereotypes about Jews" (Quinley & Glock, 1979, p. 190). Scholars concur that it incorporates a range of configurations from latent attitudes to overt discriminatory behaviors. Gerber (1986) offers one definition, abbreviated as follows:

> Anti-Semitism involves at least one of these factors:
> 1. the belief that Jews are different and alien, not only in terms of religion, but also physiologically and—more importantly—psychologically;
> 2. the tendency to think of Jews in terms of negative imagery and beliefs;
> 3. the fear and dislike of Jews based on their presumed alienness and the belief that their negative traits are a product of malevolence (rather than a response to past

victimization) towards others, especially non-Jews;

4. the willingness to speak negatively about Jews and discriminate against Jews (denying them social and/or legal rights afforded to non-Jews) on the basis of their presumed alienness and malevolence (Gerber, 1986, p. 3).

A myriad of studies (e.g., Selznick & Steinberg, 1969) have investigated the phenomenon. Most used surveys intended to estimate the prevalence of anti-Semitic attitudes. Others, such as the descriptive research commissioned by the Anti-Defamation League, have focused on discriminatory behaviors. In summarizing the findings, Soifer has stated, "Perhaps one of the most disturbing aspects of these incidents is the increase in anti-Semitism on college campuses" (Soifer, 1991, p. 160).

Studies of anti-Semitism on college campuses have probed the attitudes of non-Jewish students. In 1949, for example, the Roper organization interviewed 2,000 students in 50 colleges throughout the country. Survey questionnaires, mainly consisting of fixed-alternative questions, attempted to decipher respondents' values. One item, for example, found that 10% of participants claimed a preference for not having Jews move into their neighborhoods. The researchers concluded, "Most college students either now have democratic attitudes, or else are ashamed to confess that they do not have them" (cited in Forster, 1950, p. 156).

In a similar experiment, UC Berkeley's Survey Research Center conducted a five-year study on anti-Semitism (Selznick & Steinberg, 1969). The researchers interviewed 2,000 individuals nationwide who were selected via quota sampling. Subjects were asked to respond to fixed-alternative questions, such as "Do you think that on the average Jews have more money than most people, less money, or about the same?" The experimenters compared responses of those who were college educated to those who were not. They concluded that anti-Semitism is "generally low" among the college educated—with 15% scoring "high" or "extreme" on an Index of Anti-Semitic Beliefs, compared to 36% of high-school graduates (Selznick & Steinberg, 1969).

However, the urge to appear politically correct might govern the responses of non-Jews. In fact, ADL's 1992 "Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents" suggests that the number of anti-Semitic accounts on American college campuses is ever increasing (ADL, 1993). Moreover, this number might underestimate the prevalence of anti-Semitism on campus since the ADL only documents instances when alleged victims volunteer information.

Second, it is unclear how anti-Semitism manifests itself on campus, assuming it exists at this setting. The ADL audit only accounts for overt expressions of hostility, such as vandalism and harassment comprising anti-Jewish messages. It professes, though, that "Jewish students bear the brunt of highly organized anti-Zionist campaigns" (ADL, 1993, p. 8). Others equate anti-Zionist activity with anti-Semitism. Volkman argues that "anti-Zionism, which is to say anti-Semitism, is directed against Jews rather than the political entity that is known as Israel" (Volkman, 1982, pp. 245-246). Similarly, the director of the UC Berkeley Hillel Foundation, contends that issues about Israel provide a "thin veneer for anti-Semitism" on campus (Shapiro, personal communication, November 2, 1993).

Whatever its prevalence and form, anti-Semitism undoubtedly affects the psyche of its targets. One consequence of anti-Semitism is "internalized oppression." Soifer (1991) maintains that it is not uncommon for some Jews to internalize negative stereotypes and think of themselves as weak, pushy, and the like. Taller, UC Berkeley Hillel's assistant director, claims, "Anti-Semitism has left many of us with a great deal of self-blame and a constant fear and distrust of the world around us...all the results of the internalizing of anti-Semitism" (Taller, personal communication, September 24, 1993).

For college students, the persistence of

anti-Semitism on campus may feel "particularly troubling in a venue dedicated to the advancement of understanding" (ADL, 1993, p. 22). Subtle or overt instances of campus anti-Semitism "have contributed to a sense of unease and concern for Jewish students at many American institutions of higher learning" (ADL, 1993, p. 7). Mendelson, director of the Northern California Hillel Council, contends that anti-Semitism on campus can leave Jewish students "feeling isolated and marginal" (Mendelson, personal communication, November 4, 1993).

Are all Jewish students affected similarly by anti-Semitism on campus, if such exists? Shapiro maintains that "many Jews are taught to believe that it (anti-Semitism) doesn't exist anymore, so when they experience it—which is often—they don't know to name it as such" (Shapiro, personal communication, November 2, 1993). It seems logical to assume that the stronger one's Jewish identity, the greater one's awareness of, and sensitivity to, anti-Semitism. Although research in this area is lacking, the hypothesis is worth exploring because it can increase our understanding of the implications of anti-Semitism. With a better understanding of students' subjective experiences of anti-Semitism on campus, and the factors affecting these experiences, Jewish communal workers can serve this population more effectively. Ultimately, we can become better equipped to combat any anti-Semitism that may exist on campus and so preserve the integrity of Jewish students.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

There are an estimated 4,000 Jewish students at UC Berkeley. For reasons of ethics and feasibility, the sample consisted of students who had identified themselves as Jewish: each had completed a *Jewish Student Information Form* indicating an interest in Berkeley Hillel activities, which placed them on the 1993-94 Berkeley Hillel mailing list.

This subset of UC Berkeley's Jewish population consisted of 836 undergraduate and graduate-level Jewish students of both genders. Sixty-nine of these students were excluded either because they provided no phone number or I knew them personally. The final sample consisted of 767 names, 19% of the estimated Jewish student population at UC Berkeley.

Using the list of 767 names, I conducted telephone surveys. Approximately 65 students were contacted until 50 agreed to be surveyed. Of the 50 subjects, 29 were females and 21 were males. They had been undergraduate and/or graduate students of UC Berkeley for a mean of 2.58 years, with a range from 1 to 10 years (SD=2.0). Participants had a mean score of 3.98 (SD= 1.06) on a 1 to 5 scale rating the importance of Judaism to them, with higher numbers indicating higher levels of importance.

Measures

An interview questionnaire that I designed consisted of a series of open and closed-ended questions. The instrument was intended to elicit participants' subjective experiences, as determined by their self-reported thoughts and feelings, regarding anti-Semitism on campus. Specifically, the questions aimed to determine (1) whether or not Jewish students generally perceive anti-Semitism to exist at UC Berkeley; (2) the manifestation (location, perpetrator, and nature) of the anti-Semitism perceived on campus; (3) the degree of Jewish students' emotional reactions, if any, to the anti-Semitism perceived on campus; and (4) the strength of their Jewish identity.

First, subjects were asked three main alternative questions: (1) whether or not the subject him- or herself had an experience on campus that he or she considers anti-Semitic; (2) whether or not any friends or acquaintances of the subject had an experience on campus that the subject considers anti-Semitic; and (3) whether or not the subject otherwise perceived anti-Semitism on the UC Berkeley campus. Each succes-

sive main question was only asked if the participant answered "no" to the previous main question.

Second, subjects responding "yes" to any main question were asked to describe the incident in terms of its perpetrator (e.g., student), location (e.g., university residence), and nature, e.g., stereotypical comment.

Third, subjects' emotional reactions to perceived anti-Semitism were determined by their answers to the question: "How do (or did) you feel about this experience?" It was also determined quantitatively, according to their responses to the question: "On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being 'not disturbing at all' and 5 being 'very disturbing,' how would you rate the experience?"

Fourth, the strength of subjects' Jewish identity was measured by a straightforward question: "On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being 'not very important' and 5 being 'very important,' how important is Judaism to you?" I thus calculated the relationships between the strength of subjects' Jewish identities and the likelihood of their perceiving anti-Semitism to exist, controlling for gender and number of years at UC Berkeley. I also calculated the relationships between the strength of subject's Jewish identities and the degree to which they are disturbed by perceived anti-Semitism, controlling for gender and number of years at UC Berkeley.

Procedures

After conducting a pilot test of the questionnaire on six UC Berkeley Jewish students who were on the Hillel roster, I revised it in accordance with their input. I then conducted telephone surveys during the first half of the spring semester of 1994. Systematic random sampling was used; I made phone calls at different times of the day and week, proceeding down the list in alphabetical order. Subjects were the first 50 who answered the phone and agreed to participate in the survey. In several cases, students agreed to participate if I would call them back at a more convenient time. I made efforts to contact all of these students again; in some cases, I was able to reconnect with the students and survey them.

RESULTS

Thirty-five subjects (70% of the sample) claimed to have perceived at least one negative occurrence on campus associated with Judaism—whether witnessing or experiencing it themselves or hearing about another's negative experience. Of these, 23 (66% of this subset and 46% of the total sample) considered the instances anti-Semitic. Three subjects felt unable to label their experiences either anti-Semitic or not anti-Semitic because they did not have enough information about the perpetrator. (For the sake of a conservative estimate, these subjects were coded as not having perceived anti-Semitism.) The most common location of the anti-Semitic experiences was the general campus grounds, with the most common perpetrators being UC Berkeley students and the most frequent form being stereotypical comments about Jews.

Examples of negative experiences experienced by the subjects themselves that they considered anti-Semitic—of which there were 13—are comments made by subjects' peers: "All Israelis are murderers" and "Jews are parasites in the Islamic world." One subject was called a "smarmy c---" for complaining to another student who posted flyers containing swastikas. Others were told stereotypical comments about Jews being cheap, having big noses, and being backstabbing. One relayed an incident in which a professor equated Judaism with a race/ethnicity in a manner that seemed to have anti-Semitic undertones.

Incidents experienced by the subjects' friends or acquaintances that the subjects considered anti-Semitic—of which there were four—include a comment, "Jews shouldn't be in Israel," and a message on the campus computer Internet alleging that "Jews control the media."

Examples of anti-Semitism otherwise perceived by six subjects include graffiti,

such as "Hitler was right" written on bathroom walls, and messages on the campus computer Internet denying facts about the Holocaust, stating "6 million people could not have been killed."

Examples of negative experiences the subjects had that they did not consider anti-Semitic—which total 12—are a speaker in a main plaza stating that "Syrian Jews deserve to die because they don't follow the true God," and stereotypical jokes by fellow students about Jews being cheap and rich. Four relayed incidents by professors or guest lecturers, such as a guest speaker giving a "pro-Palestinian" lecture and a professor telling an Orthodox student to drop the class because it required Saturday field trips.

Subjects generally reported the perceived anti-Semitism as "somewhat disturbing." As could be expected, the mean disturbance score of those relaying incidents that happened to themselves was highest, at 3.22 (n=13); followed by those relaying incidents that happened to people they knew, 3.0 (n=4); and then those relaying other forms of perceived anti-Semitism, 2.17 (n=6). When asked about their feelings regarding the perceived anti-Semitism, 14 expressed negative emotions, such as anger or anxiety, 3 did not express negative emotions, and 1 subject whose disturbance rating was a 5 declined to state his feelings. One subject claimed to have lost 3 to 4 months of work time because of being upset about an experience with a lab partner and longstanding friend who made stereotypical remarks about Jews. The subject stated, "For a long time, I really felt very badly, especially about being Jewish. Some part of me believed what my friend said."

Three subjects claimed their anti-Semitic experiences were ultimately positive. One subject who read Holocaust revisionist messages on the campus computer Internet stated, "It just makes my Judaism stronger." The other two relayed incidents whereby they felt enriched by educating a peer about Judaism and learning about the other's background as well.

A multiple regression analysis revealed no significant relationship—but one approaching significance—between subjects' scores on the Jewish identification scale and their likelihood of reporting perceived anti-Semitism on campus, (p=.105 and beta= .179), taking into account gender and the number of years the subjects had been students at UC Berkeley. The results lend support to the hypothesis that students more strongly identified as Jewish are more likely to perceive anti-Semitism on campus.

The analysis unmasked a significant positive relationship between the number of years subjects had been students at UC Berkeley and the likelihood of subjects having perceived anti-Semitism on campus (p=.043 and beta=.29), taking into account gender and Jewish identification.

A second multiple regression showed that, among those perceiving anti-Semitism on campus, subjects scoring higher on the scale of Jewish identification were significantly more likely to have higher scores on the disturbance scale (p=.045 and beta= .376), taking into account gender and number of years at UC Berkeley. The results support the hypothesis that students more strongly identified as Jewish are more likely to be emotionally upset by the anti-Semitism they perceive on campus.

DISCUSSION

The topic is complex, and many questions remain unanswered. First, how generalizable are the findings? My sample is not likely representative of UC Berkeley's general Jewish student population because the subjects identify themselves as Jewish more strongly—having submitted their names to Hillel—than the general Jewish student population. Within the sample, there was a high mean score (mean=3.98 and SD=1.06) on the 5-point measure of Jewish identification. The subjects may also be a particularly select group because they agreed to be surveyed, perhaps due to their strong feelings about Judaism or their strong reactions to their experiences on campus. Future re-

search should explore the relationship between students' Jewish identification and the extent to which they perceive anti-Semitism.

The "social desirability" bias, the tendency to respond in a way in which one portrays oneself in the most favorable light, might also have affected their responses. Subjects may have been inclined to report Judaism as being more important to them than it actually is, and my measure of Jewish identification does not account for behaviors that demonstrate Jewish commitment. Similarly, subjects might not have reported their true disturbance level for fear of being judged about it. It is also possible that subjects felt pressured to report anti-Semitic experiences when I asked them—up to three times—if they perceived anti-Semitism and/or negative incidents on campus.

Contrastingly, it is possible that the subjects actually perceived anti-Semitism to a greater degree than indicated by my study. First, although subjects perceiving anti-Semitism had perceived it an average of 2 (a "few times") on a 5-point frequency scale, I only coded their descriptions of one particular experience. Second, subjects may have resisted talking about the potentially emotional issue with a stranger over the phone. Because anti-Semitism may evoke anxiety, subjects might not have been conscious of their perceptions of it. One subject who did not report having perceived anti-Semitism on campus remarked that he felt students would be "in denial" of its existence for this reason. Another factor possibly influencing subjects' hesitancy to use the term "anti-Semitic" is internalized oppression, which would facilitate a tendency to excuse negative incidents targeting Jews. One subject whose friend was called a "dirty Jew" in the aftermath of the 1994 Hebron massacre did not consider the incident anti-Semitic: "I don't think it's a really big deal. Tensions were very high last week."

In addition, the concept of anti-Semitism is not amenable to quantitative analysis because of its imprecision. This is demonstrated by the fact that three subjects felt unable to label their experiences either anti-Semitic or not anti-Semitic. One subject remarked, "By asking 'yes' or 'no' questions, you're eliminating the whole gray area."

The ambiguity of the phrase is further exemplified by the fact that some of the same or similar experiences—such as being told by peers that Jews are "cheap"—were considered anti-Semitic by some subjects and not by others. The negative experiences that subjects had that they did not consider anti-Semitic cannot be distinguished in any respect from those experiences that subjects considered anti-Semitic; in fact, in several cases, they seemed more potent. As Mendelson suggests, "Perhaps we need a new term" (personal communication, November 4, 1993). Or, more education on the concept of anti-Semitism and the applicability of the word is necessary.

Therefore, does a prevalence rate of 46% mean that UC Berkeley Jewish students generally perceive anti-Semitism to exist on campus? Considering my study's limitations and the fact that this number represents less than a simple majority of those surveyed, I cannot make this conclusion. Although the percentage might not exemplify the degree to which the general population of UC Berkeley Jewish students perceive anti-Semitism on campus, it does not invalidate the subjects' perceptions. The fact remains that 35 subjects (70% of the sample) experienced or otherwise perceived negative occurrences at UC Berkeley associated with Judaism, with 23 of these subjects (66% of this subset and 46% of the total sample) considering the occurrences anti-Semitic. At a university known for its intellect and liberal values, these rates seem high, implying that anti-Semitism does exist at UC Berkeley.

Regarding the form of anti-Semitism that is perceived on campus, the most widely recognized manifestation was stereotypes. It seemed more difficult for subjects to decipher the intent behind anti-Israel comments, which may provide a "thin veneer" for anti-Semitism on campus, as sug-

gested by Shapiro. Anti-Semitism seems to pervade the different settings of student life, occurring both on the campus and at university residences—the dorms, university co-op, and International house. As students have more informal interactions with their peers than with anyone else, it seems logical that the main perpetrators of perceived anti-Semitism are UC Berkeley students.

It is interesting that 1 of the 23 (4.3%) negative experiences considered anti-Semitic was perpetrated by a faculty member, whereas 4 of the 12 (33.3%) negative experiences not considered anti-Semitic were similarly perpetrated. The negative experiences not considered anti-Semitic include a seemingly "glaring" omission of Judaism by a professor lecturing on the history of major religions and a professor describing Jews in a manner seemingly "factually incorrect and motivated by personal animus." Thus, there seemed to be a reluctance to term incidents perpetrated by faculty "anti-Semitic." Perhaps faculty members are less likely to articulate anti-Jewish sentiment, or perhaps students feel anxious about applying the term "anti-Semitic" to educators or authority figures. This area is worthy of further exploration.

The statistical findings suggest that students who prioritize Judaism more highly are not more watchful of anti-Semitism, but do tend to be more upset by the anti-Semitism they perceive. Otherwise, upsetting incidents might increase the degree to which students prioritize Judaism. The fact that subjects who were at UC Berkeley for longer periods were significantly more likely to have perceived anti-Semitism on campus is probably explained by the fact that they have had more opportunities to perceive anti-Semitism. Three subjects who had been UC Berkeley students for longer than the sample's mean of 2.58 years relayed anti-Semitic incidents related to the Gulf War.

Most subjects did not claim to be very upset by the anti-Semitism they perceived on campus. The effects of internalized oppression might partly explain this reaction. Additionally, subjects may have perceived greater degrees of anti-Semitism elsewhere. One who rated the disturbance level a 1 ("not disturbing at all") stated, "I don't think it seems to be a major problem here."

Finally, there was a general consensus that perpetrators were more likely insensitive or uninformed rather than anti-Semites. These findings offer hope that greater education on Jews and anti-Semitism might deter anti-Semitic incidents. This education would do well to address stereotypes, Israel, the Holocaust, and other facets of the Jewish experience, religion, and culture. If we can better understand anti-Semitism and its implications, we can better understand other forms of oppression and would be better equipped to combat oppression or—at least—alleviate its effects. A training ground for tomorrow's leaders, the university is the setting where this process can, and must, be initiated.

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