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OP-ED | **Antiracism, Social Justice, and Anti-semitism: Which of These Does Not Belong?**

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NIHIL DE NOBIS, SINE NOBIS, or “nothing about us without us,” is a standard that insists that the parties directly affected by policies participate in their development. It has been persuasively employed and is central in the contemporary mental health field regarding treatment development for specific conditions and groups. For example, the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) requires grant applicants to demonstrate how the affected community has specifically contributed to the development of the intervention research to ensure acceptance and that any potential blind spots and biases of the investigators are addressed in the crafting of the programs (see PCORI Strategic Plan, 2024). This standard has not historically been central regarding mental health conceptualization affecting Jews within ABCT or in mental health professionals broadly. For any conceptualization affecting Jews to be satisfactory, the minimum requirement is for Jewish identity to be recognized as a cultural and religious identification, a multifaceted construct representing a distinct group identity (i.e., Friedlander et al., 2010). However, to categorize Jews within a single racial identity would be inaccurate, as one cannot voluntarily join a race, but people can choose to become Jewish (Langman, 1999).

This article is thus aimed at educating practitioners and mental health policymakers regarding the best ways to address the needs of Jewish colleagues and clients. Globally, there are approximately 15.8 million Jewish people, with ~6.3 million people living in the United States (Jewish Agency Resilience in Action Report, 2024). Jewish people are a diverse group, with subgroups of different customs, cultures, languages, and nationalities who hail from many geographic locations and religious denominations (Langman, 1999). Jewish people are Indigenous to Israel, and through exile and transmigration by conquering regional kingdoms (e.g., Assyrians in 722 BCE¹, Babylonians in 586 BCE, and Romans in 70 CE), were dispersed throughout the eastern hemisphere, where they were alternately accepted and discriminated against in each geographical

¹Jewish historical scholars eschew timeline terms of “BC” and “AD,” which necessitate acceptance of a Christian sovereign deity, in favor of the terms “Before Common Era” (BCE) and “Common Era” (CE).

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location. Following these expulsions, Jewish communities date back to various ancient time periods in China, India, the Middle East, the Iberian Peninsula, Europe, and the former USSR (Berger, 1986; Langman, 1999). In Europe, Jews were not considered White, were treated as inferior and of other racial origins, and were dehumanized (Gilman, 1991). There are also somewhat isolated Jewish communities in other countries that are more than a millennium old, such as the Kaifeng Jews of China, the Bene Israel and Cochin Jews in India, and the Beta Israel of Ethiopia. While maintaining many practices of ancient Jewish religious life, they often have physical features similar to local non-Jewish populations, indicating that they accepted converts, intermarried, and adopted from other local peoples (Langman, 1999). As such, Jews from various cultural groups and ethnicities live at the intersection of multiple identities and face discrimination irrespective of their physical appearance, as we describe below.

In recent centuries, due to ongoing religious and political persecution, genocide, and ethnic cleansing, Jewish people fled to ostensibly safer havens of the Western hemisphere, as well as back to their ancestral homeland, since the declaration of the State of Israel in 1948 (Berger, 1986). Today, while there are many Jewish subcultures, two of the most prominent ones include Ashkenazi Jews, descendants of those living in Northern, Central, or Eastern Europe and the former USSR (Langman, 1995); and Sephardic Jews, descended from those living in Spain, Portugal, and those who fled the Inquisition to other Spanish-speaking countries, Arabic-speaking countries, or Israel (Angel, 1973).

“Nothing about us without us” includes the defining nature of prejudice against Jews and of antisemitism. It remains an understudied bias in the social science and mental health literature (Rosen et al., 2018). The term itself, antisemitism, at its most basic definition, is hostility directed toward Jews (Hodge & Boddie, 2021). Benevolent ivory tower groups who have sought to define antisemitism have themselves been guilty of ignoring the *nihil de nobis, sine nobis* standard, in that they seek to define and understand it with input neither from “empirical social sciences ... without considering enough—if at all—the perceptions of real-world Jews—those people who are directly and personally affected and offended by antisemitism” (Della Pergola, 2022). Early models posited that antisemitism be understood by its manifestations, such as religious, social, political, economic, psychological, sexual, or racial (Beck, 1982). Other analyses focus on its dimensions and contexts, such as governmental, popular, or intellectual (Feldman, 1986). Antisemitism, according to some, goes beyond mere hatred of the Jewish religion itself (Cohen, 1986), and has been described as bidirectional for opposing mutually exclusive reasons (Bliewicz, 2021) that lack empirical support. Antisemitism often increases or becomes more readily apparent during periods of high ingroup insecurity of personal / cultural identity and worth. Jews often maintain a strong cultural identity as an outgroup even as they integrate and acculturate into a larger culture (Goldstein, 2005; Langman, 1999). Of course, not all criticism of Jewish people or Israel and its policies is antisemitic. The litmus test that many have adopted for identifying antisemitism is the “Three D’s,” Demonization, Double Standards, and Delegitimization (Sharansky, 2004). Criticism can be considered antisemitic and demonizing when all-or-nothing thinking, overgeneralization, and maximization cognitive distortions are applied to Jews, Israelis, Israel, or its government, considering it completely evil, the cause for all problems in the Middle East, compared to Nazis

or other genocidal or fascist groups, or deserving of being harmed. Antisemitic double standards include singling out Jews and Israel with criticism while ignoring others with similar conduct. It involves holding Jews or Israel to different, higher, and at times unrealistic standards (cognitive distortions of shoulds and blame) compared to other peoples or nations.

To be clear, criticism of the Israeli government is always possible; indeed, just prior to the attacks of October 7, 2023, there were massive protests within Israel regarding the actions of the Netanyahu government (BBC, 2023), and no one would suggest that the residents of the country were also antisemitic. The issue is that criticism of the Israeli government often slides into criticism of the existence of Israel, which then crosses the line into antisemitism (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, 2016). Antisemitic delegitimization can involve denial of Jews' concerns about discrimination, parity in rights of religious freedoms, or Israel's right to exist; whereas all other people have that inalienable right. This is similar to cognitive distortions including all / nothing thinking, minimization or negating the positive, with implications of dehumanization. Some recent definitions of antisemitism include the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) non-legally-binding working definition of antisemitism (2016) and the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism (JDA; Van Leer Institute, 2020).

The IHRA defines antisemitism as the following:

Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities...Antisemitic acts are criminal when they are so defined by law (for example, denial of the Holocaust or distribution of antisemitic materials in some countries). Criminal acts are antisemitic when the targets of attacks, whether they are people or property—such as buildings, schools, places of worship and cemeteries—are selected because they are, or are perceived to be, Jewish or linked to Jews. Antisemitic discrimination is the denial to Jews of opportunities or services available to others and is illegal in many countries.

IHRA also provides 11 illustrative examples of contemporary antisemitism as well as non-antisemitic statements. These include items highlighting tropes that Jews have too much power, Holocaust denial or minimization, and delegitimization of Israel. The last item involves the encouragement of, facilitating, and justification of hurting or killing Jews in the context of an extremist religious or radical ideological view (Della Pergola, 2022).

The JDA defines antisemitism as “discrimination, prejudice, hostility or violence against Jews as Jews (or Jewish institutions as Jewish).” It was written due to the disagreements generated by the IHRA definition. It presents 15 guidelines to better understand antisemitism and its manifestations, such as overgeneralizations; stereotypes, conspiracy theories about power, control and wealth; dehumanization and demonization; placing blame for society's ills; and minimization of Jewish suffering and death (Van Leer Institute, 2020), such as the

Holocaust, racial cleansing, and October 7th.

Antisemitism can be understood with similarity structural models (SSM), which are used to understand large sample size data sets across countries. Demographer and statistician Della Pergola (2018) uses a tripartite cognitive-behavioral-affective model to describe human experience and posits that most research has been conducted on the cognitive / intellectual and behavioral/experiential domains of Jewish experience, while the affective / emotional domain has been understudied. Based on large samples of Jews from European countries and, to a lesser extent, the United States, concludes that the Jewish public characterizes antisemitism as (a) involving physical violence and genocide of Jews, (b) marginalization of Jews from spheres of living, such as cultural, social, economic, and civil lives; and (c) lower quality of life on the personal level through higher levels of fear, anxiety, and frustration (Della Pergola 2022). It should be noted that these data do not differentiate among the Jewish ethnic subcultures, which may vary in terms of their cognitive, behavioral, and affective responses to antisemitism within and across each country in which they reside.

To these ends, Jews perceive four main antisemitic strategies, including (1) practical antisemitism, involving public physical action and aggression such as physical assault, vandalism of institutions, or desecration of holy sites such as synagogues or cemeteries; (2) Political antisemitism, including public political conversations, speeches, interests, and leadership stressors; (3) Populist antisemitism, which entails the general public's disparaging and denigratory speech and writing in public events, in social situations, and on the internet; and (4) Narrative antisemitism: "thoughtful and researched items in the printed and electronic press, in academia and at cultural events" (Della Pergola 2022). In daily life, antisemitism may include spiritual microaggressions such as endorsing stereotypes; assuming homogeneity; pathologizing, disparaging, and / or exoticizing spirituality; presupposing secularism; and denial of spiritual prejudice (Hodge, 2020). In addition, it can include dangerous criminal activity. While antisemitic crimes have a long history in the United States, the FBI has been tracking hate crimes against Jewish people since at least 1991, which consistently shows that year over year, anti-Jewish hate crimes are the most commonly committed anti-religious hate crime. The most recent year of available data is 2023, which showed that hate crimes against Jews accounted for 67.8% of religious-based hate crimes. The group with the second-highest rate of religious-based hate crimes were Muslims, who accounted for 8.7% of all religiously motivated crimes (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2023)². When testifying to the Senate, Christopher Wray, Director of the FBI, stated (Forbes Breaking News, 2023):

The reality is that the Jewish community is uniquely targeted by pretty much every terrorist organization across the spectrum. And when you look at a group that makes up 2.4 percent, roughly, of the American population, it should be jarring to everyone that that same population accounts for something like 60 percent of all religious-based hate crimes, and so they need our help...

[emphasis added by the present author]

“Nothing about us without us” needs to be repeated as often as possible in the current zeitgeist of mental health policy when it comes to Jews. As we noted recently, the increasingly dominant social justice model frames Jews as oppressors (McKay et al., 2024). The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) found that 74% of respondents ($n = 4,134$) somewhat endorsed using a reductionistic worldview of oppressed versus oppressors. The stronger the endorsement of this worldview, the higher the number of antisemitic tropes people believed. While 13.2% considered Jews oppressors, an additional 15.1% considered Jews both oppressors and oppressed (Anti-Defamation League, 2024). Scouring the literature, it is difficult to discern how this framing came to be, aside from a political bias that attempts to relitigate the formation of Israel in 1948 (discussed in Penslar & Shapira, 2003). So far as we can tell, this framing is an inversion of reality given the long history of oppression of Jews all over the world and, over the course of centuries, a form of discrimination that has been called “the oldest form of hatred” (Wistrich, 1991). This is problematic, as Judaica scholars have noted the imposition of defining characteristics on Jews is a specific form of anti-semitism. This is particularly apt in the current time, where Zionism and anti-Zionism have been described in ways that misrepresent the perspective and without the input of Jews—the specific group to whom it most clearly applies (Hirsh, 2021). It is further curious that Jews have been largely framed as oppressors; in addition to their aforementioned minority status, there is an extensive literature demonstrating that large proportions of US Jews were integral to the civil rights movement (Dinnerstein, 2002), and that according to the Pew Research Center large proportions of US Jews today affiliate with liberal movements that are more aligned with the broader social justice movement (Pew Research Center, 2021).

“Nothing about us without us” is an inviolable mandate that begins at the most foundational level, demographic identity. In the United States, Jews are classified as White and / or have all the advantages associated with whiteness in the United States (discussed in Goldstein, 2005). While research suggests that proximity to whiteness confers a range of social benefits (i.e., Garay et al., 2023), it is also not necessarily how many Jews define themselves (Levine-Rasky, 2020), and is offset by the heterogeneity within Ashkenazi Jews who may be religiously observant and thus wear visible indicators of their ethnoreligious affiliation (i.e., yarmulkes). Indeed, there are also pernicious stereotypes that Jews have inordinate access to wealth and power (ADL, 2020). However, Jews are diverse, with numerous ethnicities and racial identities (Pew Research Center, 2021; Fritzhand, 2023). That Jews are viewed as primarily White is an availability heuristic (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973), as the majority of Jews in the United States are of European Ashkenazi descent (Pew, 2021). Further, historically, Jews have also been defined as non-White without their consent for the express purpose of discrimination (Sacks, 1994). Additionally, as a group, approximately 15% of US Jews are at or below the poverty line (Pew, 2021), which is substantially higher than poverty rates among White Americans, at approximately 7.7%, and is comparable to other minoritized groups (American Progress, 2022). Recent analyses point out that intersectionality conceptual-

² The authors firmly believe that neither Muslims nor Jews, nor any other group, should be held personally or individually accountable for any of their governments’ actions, and that we unequivocally condemn hate crimes against any group.

izations of Jews as predominantly White serve as an “accelerant for certain forms of antisemitic marginalization even as it ratifies a racialized hierarchy within the Jewish community.” (Schraub, 2019). Thus, calling all Jews “White” erases the experience of Jews of color, denies multicultural diversity among Jews, strips Jews of their ability to define their own identities and experiences, and ignores that the Jewish population is growing increasingly diverse (Pew, 2021).

“Nothing about us without us” richly applies when social justice programs insist that clinicians engage in self-reflection to check their biases and racism. At present, particularly in dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), the insistence that practitioners address their implicit racism appears noble. The International Society for the Improvement and Teaching of DBT (ISITDBT) emphasizes anti-racism. Their policies specifically regarding antiracism read as follows: **“Anti-racism challenges white supremacy and, when done well, dismantles structures that oppress all groups”** (ISITDBT Anti-racism Committee, 2024; bold in original). We must assume that the portion regarding oppression toward *all* groups was genuine. In actual practice, it appears that this does not apply to Jews. For example, at the most recent meeting of ISITDBT, held in conjunction with the annual meeting of ABCT, the antiracism speaker displayed slides that equated Zionism (a belief held among the majority of Jews; American Jewish Committee, 2024) with fascism and another slide that placed Zionism alongside misogynoir, genocidal tendencies, and rape culture when depicting the “colonizer mind” (Edmond, 2024). These slides echo Nazi propaganda portraying Jews as bent on global domination and as aggressors (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2021). It has been recognized and understood that Edmond (2024) was speaking from her own perspective, and the ISITDBT board issued a statement condemning the presentation. Another broader problem was that the slides were distributed to preregistered attendees the day before. Yet, aside from a single comment that called direct attention to the harmful content, the speaker nonetheless received an ovation for the talk³. It is particularly ironic that this antisemitic presentation was in a DBT conference considering the emphasis on validation of trauma in that clinical model (i.e., Harned, 2022). Actions such as the one by Edmond contribute to traumatic invalidation in Jewish colleagues and the public (Bar-Halpern & Wolfman, in press). In short, an intellectually and morally honest endorsement of antiracism demands that it applies to all minoritized groups.

“Nothing about us without us” is often honored by our colleagues when it comes to defining the full gamut of minoritized professionals, with the exception of Jews. As though on cue for the resubmission of this paper, we can say this specifically in reference to the recent paper by Williams, Faber, et al. (2025), who extensively criticized our prior article (McKay et al., 2024). In Williams, Faber, et al. (2025), the concerns raised center on perceived erroneous characterizations of the contemporary social justice movement in mental health as it relates to Jewish clients and colleagues. Rather than counter each criticism, we will focus only on the ones that are of primary relevance to this article. First, we have emphasized that the social justice movement, whether Liberation Psychology or the more focal Decolonial Psychology, casts Jews as oppressors and does

³ Full video and transcription of the presentation, and the slides, are available from the authors.

so without sufficient attention to historical and anthropological bases (discussed in Shapira, 2014). Each of these paradoxically does so in the spirit of healing but without regard for the immense harm they cause to Jews. Second, at no point in our prior piece was there any diminishment of the overarching goals of the social justice model as applied to any other minoritized group, only that the framework is currently overtly harmful to Jews due to the arbitrary and ahistorical framing. Third, our assertion that left-wing-oriented frameworks endorse retribution is grounded not only in the point raised to show it was not new, but it has also been repeatedly demonstrated as an automatic response to perceived moral transgressions (Carlsmith & Darley, 2008). Left-wing retributive impulses have also been discussed in legal arenas in specific reference to liberal policymakers (Metz, 2007). Fourth, the notion that some luminaries in psychology have called for abandoning the central pillars of Enlightenment was not made in error. A review of Sue et al. (2024) makes it absolutely clear that, in their view, the Enlightenment serves as a specific means to foster racism, and our contention has been that the opposite was the case (McKay & White, in press). Finally, we take seriously the last point made by Williams, Faber, et al. (2025) in their desire to avoid fomenting animosity. To that end, we request respect for how Jews are treated as individuals and not as homogenous groups (see above regarding the ethnic diversity of the Jewish people) that are subject to the whims of theoreticians and ideologues in our profession who would cast us in a harmful framework.

“Nothing about us without us” is a requirement that the profession recognizes the minority status of Jews and includes their voices whenever there are references to Zionism in the mental health field. The intimidation and deliberate exclusion of Jews, who represent only approximately 2.4% of the United States population (Pew, 2021), has been an unfortunate outcome of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) policies (Walker et al., 2025).

“Nothing about us without us” is, therefore, a demand to include Jews in how Jews are defined. This involves including Jews in defining constructs that directly affect them, such as Zionism. Their inclusion as a minoritized community is a baseline minimum expectation; it is imperative that antiracism approaches include them in addressing antisemitism and that mental health policies include the involvement of Jews as a highly diverse minority group. Failure to address this has specific harmful consequences for mental and physical health. Recent findings show that Jewish college students experienced significant depressive symptoms associated with the rise in antisemitism on college campuses following the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack on Israel (Morstead & DeLongis, 2025). Nationwide survey findings show that the self-reported health of Jews is comparable to other underrepresented groups due primarily to minority stress (Pearson & Geronimus, 2011). In short, identifying and eliminating antisemitism is a public health priority for both medical and mental wellbeing. The central aim of the social justice movement in the mental health professions, to provide equitable treatment for all, is laudable. However, the social justice movement, as it has manifested in psychology, is not something we endorse. Its advocating, endorsement, or silence of antisemitism is indicative of its flaws. If those who endorse this social justice movement in psychology want its core aim to be achieved, however, the movement must acknowledge its blind spots that result in overt and extremely hurtful antisemitism. “Nothing about us without

us” is the prevailing and essential position that every other minoritized group rightly demands. Nothing short of that will be acceptable among Jewish clinicians and clients. ABCT has core values of diversity, science, mentorship, accountability, and quality. We expect our fellow ABCT members and mental health practitioners, in general, to adhere to these values when engaging with colleagues and clients and to practice the behaviors that would flow from embracing those values. Survey data shows that approximately 89% of Americans support the existence of Israel and the right of Jews to a land and self-determination (Pew, 2024), a core principle of Zionism. Mental health professionals do best when recognizing the liberty of all people and understanding the perspective of the milieu in which they work. Standing against antisemitism is an essential part of that professional mandate, and according to the current ethical code, it is exactly something psychologists, *with or without us*, should advocate against.

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