HebCrit: A New Dimension of Critical Race Theory

**Abstract**

I believe that it is essential to identify a new facet of Critical Race Theory that specifically addresses the needs of the Jewish people. Often overlooked and ignored in multicultural, diversity, and ethnic studies, Jews continue to face specific concerns and obstacles in the both the United States and around the world. In this article, I outline the foundational structure of this new critical theory that investigates issues affecting Jewish people in American society. HebCrit (pronounced “heeb”) is rooted in Critical Race Theory, History, Social Psychology, Education, and Jewish Studies. This new theoretical framework provides a way to address the complicated positionality that many American Jews navigate on a daily basis.

Keywords: Critical Race Theory, HebCrit, antisemitism, Jewish Americans

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When my younger son was five years old, and we were living in a predominantly Evangelical Christian community in northeast Alabama, he told me that he felt bad about himself for being Jewish. Up to this point in his young life, we had never discussed issues of self-esteem and ethnoreligious pride. Noah’s early exposure to his Jewish faith was limited to a preschool version of religious school, “family services,” and High Holiday celebrations at home. Since the nearest synagogue was over 60 miles away, making services was a rare occurrence.

For my wife and I living as “Delta Jews” in the deep South in the U.S., (Cohen Ferris, 2004), it is a daily challenge confronting Christian privilege. Here, we see “Jesus Saves” billboards on the roadways, hear local radio deejays say prayers for “a day full of blessings,” and the invocation of Jesus’ name during an introductory prayer at the annual university faculty/staff convocation. For some, Christian privilege can often feel smothering and ever-prescient, but I avoided approaching the issue with my young son. I simply wanted him to be a happy child in kindergarten, but when I had heard that there were going to be Christmas activities for two straight weeks at his elementary school, culminating in a visit from Santa Claus, I was concerned. In the past, while living in New Mexico, my wife had visited my children’s classes to speak briefly about Hanukkah so my children would feel represented in school. Here in Alabama, we were informed by Noah’s school principal that my wife would not be able to visit his classroom and talk about Hanukkah - reason being that she did not want parent visitors in the classroom. This was simply unacceptable, so I contacted the Assistant Superintendent of the school district to argue my case for the opportunity to educate Noah’s classmates about his family’s culture and traditions for this minor holiday. I eventually produced a Supreme Court decision that stated that while public schools are able to celebrate Christmas, they cannot favor one religion over another; therefore, by denying my son the right to discuss Hanukkah, the district was in violation of the law. Finally, as a concession, the Assistant Superintendent allowed Noah’s teacher to read two provided books about Hanukkah and distribute dreidels[[1]](#footnote-1) to his classmates.

I can only wish that was the only bout of intolerance that my family and I have encountered in just the past few years living in the south. For example, my wife was accosted at a car dealership for her “Coexist” bumper sticker and how she does not believe in Jesus as her lord and savior, an anonymous person called me a “kike” via an academic website, and on my first night of class teaching a course in diversity and multiculturalism, after mentioning that I was Jewish, a student in the front of the class yelled out excitedly that meeting a Jewish person was on her “bucket list.” It is nothing new for me to play the role of the Jewish token (Altman, Inman, Fine, Ritter, & Howard, 2010) as well as the cultural outsider, but this had only worsened since my move to the deep south.

I tell these stories because Jewish Americans[[2]](#footnote-2) are overlooked, not only as a minority group, but as a group needing discussion in the university classroom (Rubin, 2017). Jewish people are also often unexplored in educational research in the United States. From exhaustive research over the past five years, I have found very few articles addressing Jews and multiculturalism in the U.S. Quite simply, Jews are often left out of university diversity and multicultural classroom discussions (MacDonald-Dennis, 2006; Rubin, 2013; Schlosser, Ali, Ackerman, & Dewey, 2009), especially in regard to the topic of antisemitism, or Jewish oppression (MacDonald-Dennis, 2006). The lack of focus on Jews and antisemitism is evident in several ways, such as the lack of available research pertaining to Jews and the multicultural classroom, the difficulty of getting Jewish-themed pieces accepted into multicultural journals (see Rubin, 2018), and the absence of Jews and antisemitism in major diversity and multicultural literature texts used at the university level (Kremer, 2001; Rubin, 2018). Schlosser (2006) has asserted that it “is likely that Jewish issues have been previously ignored because being Jewish is largely an invisible minority status” (p. 425). For better or worse, Jews are also considered to be a “model minority” (Freedman, 2005), so they appear successful economically and educationally and stay out of trouble (Maddux, Galinsky, Cuddy, & Polifroni, 2008).

Altman, et. al (2010) have posited that “Jewish oppression and multiculturalism do not fit into currently established analyses of racism and economic oppression (i.e., underrepresented minorities, people of color)” (p. 163). I believe that this is certainly the case. There are several theories as to why Jews and antisemitism are often overlooked in university multicultural classroom discussions: 1) Jews are perceived to be White; therefore, they are able to benefit from White privilege (Blumenfeld, 2006; Fox, 2018; Greenberg, 2015; MacDonald-Dennis, 2006; Maizels, 2011; Singer, 2008); 2) they are believed to be a successful model minority (Freedman, 2005; Gilman, 2003; Maddux, et. al, 2008); 3) they are seen as being accomplished in politics, finance, sciences, and the arts (Alba, 2006; Gilman, 2003; Hollinger, 2004; King & Weiner, 2007; Langman, 1995; MacDonald-Dennis, 2006); 4) they are perceived to be members of a religious group but not a cultural group (Langman, 1995); and 5) because of the negative perception of Zionism and the tension between Israelis and Palestinians (Rubin, 2018).

**HebCrit and Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged out of a legal movement in the 1970s called critical legal studies (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1999). These studies critiqued the intersection of race and the law, how the law affects individuals and groups in particular cultural and social contexts (Ladson-Billings, 1998), and how litigation from the civil rights movement failed to achieve significant racial improvement in society (Liu, 2009). Similar to critical legal studies, critical race theory seeks to both eliminate and transform unfair and unjust laws (Bell & Edmonds, 1993). The shift from CRT in law to CRT in education is primarily attributed to the work of Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995) (Cabrera, 2018). The CRT movement is described as “a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 3).

There are several basic tenets of CRT. According to Delgado and Stefancic, (2017), they are as follows: 1) racism in society is ordinary and unacknowledged, 2) “interest convergence,” or the idea that racism supports and advances the interests of White people, 3) “social construction,” or the belief that the notion of race is socially invented, manipulated, and changes over time, and 4) the importance of “storytelling” and hearing unique voices of color. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) asserted that issues of race in U.S. schools was under-theorized and that racial inequities still existed in both schools and society, especially in regard to Black students.

CRT has been described as a theoretical framework that is based in radical activism (Rollock & Gillborn, 2011) and is committed to social justice (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). Its purpose is to investigate and challenge the prevalence of racial inequality in society (Rollock & Gillborn, 2011) as well as other forms of subordination based on class, gender, and sexual orientation (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). CRT has been adapted and modified since its inception in order to address racism in society and schools. Sleeter (2017) posits that, “CRT offers conceptual tools for interrogating how race and racism have been institutionalized and are maintained” (p. 157), and by doing so, helps break down racism and prejudice in society.

The use of CRT in education scholarship has grown significantly since its inception over two decades ago (Dixson & Anderson, 2018), and it has since become a major concept all around the world (Rollock & Gillborn, 2011). Over that time, CRT has expanded to include several theoretical offshoots, such as Latina/Latino critical race theory (LatCrit) (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001), Tribal critical race theory (TribalCrit) (Brayboy, 2005), and Asian critical race theory (AsianCrit) (Chang, 1993). The purpose of this article is to outline a new Jewish critical race framework called HebCrit.

HebCrit develops from CRT and has similarities in the fight against racism and injustice in U.S. society. The name HebCrit comes from the term “hebe,” which is an antiquated ethnic slur aimed at Jewish people. It is hereby reclaimed and positioned as a point of critical strength. While CRT has been a very important framework in education studies, it does not go far enough in identifying and addressing the specific needs of the Jewish peoples. It does not adequately address Jewish persecution in the form of antisemitism, where Jews fit in the field of racial studies, and the complicated positionality of Jewish people in U.S. society. The HebCrit framework has five major assertions:

1) Jews continue to be discriminated against and persecuted

2) Jews are a racialized group

3) Jews, and their perception as White, creates invisibility and tension

4) Jews’ political and economic power is hyperbolic

5) Jewish personal stories have value

**Jews Defined**

The Jewish people are comprised of three major groups: the Ashkenazim, the Sephardim, and the Mizrahim. Sephardic Jews are those whose descendants were expelled from the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal) in 1492 during the Spanish Inquisition, while Mizrahi Jews originate from the Middle East and North Africa (JVL, 2019). When discussing Jewish people in this piece, I am referring to Ashkenazi Jews. Ashkenazi Jews come from Central and Eastern Europe, are the most populous of the Jewish groups in North America (Solomin, 2019), and have a light skin tone. Therefore, Schlosser (2006) posited that, “The Ashkenazim are…quite often, the face of American Jewry” (p. 426).

**Jews as a Persecuted Group**

According to Marable (1992), racism is defined as a “system of ignorance, exploitation, and power to oppress African Americans, Latinos, Asians, Pacific Americans, and American Indians and other people on the basis of ethnicity, culture, mannerisms, and color” (p. 5, as cited in Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 24). Jews have a long history of discrimination and persecution in the U.S. For example, due to segregationist beliefs in major cities across the U.S. during the first half of the 20th century, there were often restrictive covenants barring the rental or sale of homes to both people of Jewish descent and people of color (Jones-Correa, 2001; Silva, 2009). There is also documentation of economic discrimination against Jews at this time, whereby employers would often not hire Jews, so they were forced to open their own businesses. There was even a quota system in many office buildings as to how many Jews, if at all, could rent office space (Weber, 1991). It has also been reported that Jews, during the early 1900s, were often ostracized in their local communities by being turned away from joining country clubs and civic groups (Dinnerstein, 1994).

In the United States today, racism against Jews, in the form of antisemitism, continues to thrive and flourish. In the most current Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) hate crime study, Jewish people continued to be the largest group of religious hate-crime victims in the U.S. at 56.9 percent (FBI, 2019). According to the Southern Poverty Law Center (2020), there are currently 940 racist hate groups operating in the U.S., and it has been documented that most, if not all, of these hate groups are virulently antisemitic (SPLC, 2020).

Antisemitism has only gotten worse in the U.S. since the election of President Donald Trump. Research has shown that, “Trump has emboldened racists to express their hateful rhetoric out in the open” (Crandall, Miller, and White II, 2018). It has been found that the Parkland (FL) school shooting in spring 2018 was at least partly driven by Jewish hatred (Cohen, 2018). Antisemitic incidents of assault, vandalism, and harassment jumped 57% in 2017, which is the largest jump on record (Astor, 2018). In addition, for the first time in at least a decade, antisemitic incidents were reported across all 50 states (Astor, 2018). Antisemitic incidents in U.S. schools and universities has also increased significantly. Data show that there was a “59% increase in antisemitic attacks at colleges in 2017 over the previous year and a 107% increase in kindergarten through grade 12 in schools” (Wilner, 2017). White Nationalist activity on college campuses also increased 250 percent in 2017 (Astor, 2018).

White Nationalist and Neo-Nazi fervor was on full display during the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia in August 2017. Emboldened and invigorated by Trump’s racist brand of leadership (Roberts, 2017), White Nationalists chanted phrases such as “Jews will not replace us” and “blood and soil” (Rosenberg, 2017) while marching through the streets with tiki torches. Horribly, then came the worst mass killing of Jewish people in U.S. history - the shooting of worshippers at Saturday service at a Pittsburgh synagogue in October 2018. Then, in April 2019, exactly six months to the day of the Pittsburgh attack, came the shooting in a San Diego synagogue, killing two and wounding two others. It has been asserted that Trump, in his passive, indirect condemnation of White Nationalists, has provided racists unspoken support (Abramsky, 2018; Ioffe, 2018). Trump rallies are filled with antisemitic code-words, such as “globalist” and “cosmopolitan,” which do nothing but add fuel to antisemitic fervor (Abramsky, 2018). It must be noted that Antisemitism does not just come from right-wing groups; it continues to be a growing concern on the left (Thiessen, 2019). According to Hirsh (2018), “Today’s antisemitism is difficult to recognize because it does not come dressed in a Nazi uniform and it does not openly proclaim its hatred or fear of Jews” (p. 5). Antisemitic beliefs often emerge through the democratic criticism of Israel, which then transforms into antisemitism (Hirsh, 2018). Caro (2015) asserts that, “Anti-Semitism appears related largely, though not exclusively, with the Israeli Palestinian conflict, showing that much of the anti-Semitic incidents recorded in the last decade and a half are linked to the Palestinian cause” (p. 304). People who view themselves as progressives are frequently critical of Zionism and supporters of the boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel, often called the “new antisemitism” (Cravatts, 2011). Antisemitism can come in many forms, both aggressive and peaceful, and from all facets of the political spectrum.

Rising antisemitism is not just occurring in the U.S. It has been asserted that large Jewish communities in Europe are also experiencing a mainstreaming and normalization of antisemitism not seen since World War II, and this has led to many Jewish people living with a sense of fear and distress (Noack, 2018). According to Walt (2019):

Anti-Semitism is flourishing worldwide…The numbers speak plainly in country after country. For each of the past three years, the U.K. has reported the highest number of anti-Semitic incidents ever recorded. In France, with the world’s third biggest Jewish population, government records showed a 74% spike in anti-Semitic acts between 2017 and 2018. And in Germany, anti-Semitic incidents rose more than 19% last year. (p. 2)

In addition, the number of reported antisemitic incidents in Australia has continued to increase since records began to be published in the late 1980s (Gross & Rutland, 2014). In the United Kingdom, a record number of antisemitic incidents was recorded between January 2019 and June 2019; this is a 10% increase from the same period last year, which was also a record high (Sherwood, 2019). Overall, a recent global survey estimates that at least one out of every four adults around the world (26 percent) hold antisemitic attitudes (Tausch, 2014), which is incredibly troubling and concerning.

As it stands, CRT does not adequately address Jewish persecution in both U.S society and around the world and how it affects the individual. Therefore, there is a need for HebCrit and bringing Jewish animus to the forefront of critical race research.

**Jews and the Question of Race**

One of the apparent reasons for the lack of application of CRT for Jewish people is the question of race. According to Greenberg (2015), “American Jews have always navigated uneasily between religion and ethnicity, race and color. They have never existed comfortably within America’s binaries” (p. 45). The question of Jews being a distinct race has been debated around the world for centuries. According to Levine-Rasky (2008):

In Europe, Jews were historically classified as racially distinct, even abject. Even before the rise of the ‘race’ concept…Their racialization in Europe escalated. Jews’ allegedly unethical business practices. Jewish colour, hair, nose, feet, speech, hand gestures and facial expression combined to reveal a class of people essentially different from the European norm. (p. 55)

The scientific racial study of Jews first occurred during the eighteenth century, and it was unclear as to which race they belonged; some scientists saw Jews as being White while others saw them as Black or possibly White with “Black features” (Efron, 2013). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Jews were often considered to be a separate race (Fox, 2018; Kaplan, 2003) with a distinct physiognomy (Blumenfeld, 2006b; Fox, 2018). While this paper will not go deeply into the study of “race science” (Efron, 2013), it is important to understand that there has been a great deal of research on the Jewish peoples and their malleable position on the racial spectrum.

In recent years, there has been much debate as to whether there is a biological component to being Jewish. While some scientists believe that there is evidence that there is a biological foundation for Jewishness, there are others who wholeheartedly disagree. Kahn (2013) has asserted that:

a certain number of people who currently identify themselves as Jews have certain genetic variants that indicate a high likelihood that they are descended from populations that likely inhabited the Levant some 2,000 years ago. These variants are not necessarily exclusive to people who identify as Jews, nor are they present in all people who currently identify themselves as Jews. Even Jews who do have these variants likely have ancestors from other parts of the globe. Nonetheless, it is not unreasonable to assert that, based on current genetic testing technologies and theories of genetic variation, there is a high likelihood that many contemporary Jews have at least one ancestral lineage that leads back to the Levant. (p. 923)

This debate will continue as genetic testing methods continue to expand over time, yet for now, a genetically identifiable Jewish race is still debated and contested.

In the United States today, Jews have begun to transcend the line between religion and race, yet there is a dearth of academic literature that discusses race and racism in regard to antisemitism (as well as Islamophobia) (Meer, 2013). Gonzalez-Sobrino and Goss (2019) have asserted that, “Racialization plays a central role in the creation and reproduction of racial meanings, and its inclusion enriches the study of race and ethnicity” (p. 505). Unfortunately, this lack of discussion of Jews and their racial positionality in U.S. society leads to an absence of critical conversations regarding Jews and antisemitism in the diversity and multicultural classroom. Scholars such as Nye (2018) have posited that race and religion should not be viewed as separate categories. They assert that since the identification of religion is often used as a racial identifier for groups such as Jews and Muslims, “it is misleading to see the category of religion as solely based on issues of belief and theology” (Nye, 2018, pp. 4-5).

There are an increasing number of academics who believe that Jews are now their own race. For example, Kaplan (2003) asserted that Jews are a sociocultural race - one with a shared history, descent, and appearance, and this creates a common cultural reality that forms an important part of a Jew’s self-image and social identity. Nye (2018) summarized the notion of racialization when he stated that:

In short, ‘race’ and racialization are not about skin colour and genetic classification. Such bodily attributes are a part of the discursive and ideological power of the concept and practice of race, of marking and organizing social differences on ideas of difference that rely on such embodied distinctions. In practice, though, race is also embodied in social institutions and practices— the processes of racial formations—that are manifest in physical and social experiences such as law codes, segregation in housing, education, criminal justice, and healthcare, and in the experiences of people who are classified to live within such structures of power. (p. 11)

While some may still argue that Jews are not a separate race, but rather a religious or some other classifiable group, this is highly debated.

Today, it is believed that race is socially constructed (Blumenfeld, 2006; Greenberg, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2018), and Jews are not considered to be a distinct race, but rather, lumped into the category of being White (Brodkin, 2000; Fox, 2018; Greenberg, 2015; Levine-Rasky, 2008; Rubin, 2017). Despite this perception, many Jewish people have difficulty considering themselves as White (Blumenfeld, 2006b; Greenberg, 2015). A reason for being seen as White is that Jews are often ignored because they are invisible amongst their White peers; that is, unless s/he wears religious identifiers (e.g., a Star of David) (Blumenfeld, 2006b; Schlosser, 2006).

It was not until after WWII that Jewish people began to gain access to many institutional privileges of being White in the U.S. They soon became one of the most economically upwardly mobile European ethnic immigrant groups (Brodkin, 2000). Jewish Americans were able to “pass” as White and integrate into U.S. society by assimilating their culture, language, dress, occupation, and physical appearance (e.g., hair and clothing styles) (Adams & Joshi, 2016; Gilman, 2003). They also sacrificed their close ties to their Jewish communities and practice as well as inter-group alliances (Levine-Rasky, 2008).

The question remains whether Jews are a race. Jews were seen as a separate race for centuries. Scientists are now debating whether there are genetic markers for a Jewish race. I believe that Kaplan (2003) answers the question best when he states that:

while Jews may not be a (bio-genetic) race, they are a (sociocultural) ‘race.’ Biology notwithstanding, the racial identity of Jews is a *cultural* reality, which forms an important part of their social identity and self-image. Like Whites, Blacks, Asians and other groups commonly designated as ‘races,’ Jews are popularly identified both by others and themselves as a group with a shared descent, history, and even appearance. (p. 81)

Due to the lived experiences of Jewish people in the U.S., I argue that Jews are a race and need to be studied as such in CRT.

**Jews and the Tenuous “Space Between”**

American Jews often find themselves in a racial quandary - vacillating between being seen as White and as Jewish. There are Jews of color from ethnically and racially diverse backgrounds living in the U.S., including African Americans, Latinx, Asians, and mixed-race Jews (Rishon, 2015), yet the vast majority of Jews in the U.S. are perceived to be White due to their light skin tone. Weinbaum (1998) posits that, “Jews find that [they] occupy a liminal zone – [they] have consciousness of [themselves] as outsiders and experience being excluded by insiders” (p. 184). While it is true that Jews benefit from White privilege (Langman, 1995; Maizels, 2011), they have this insider/outsider status (Blumenfeld, 2006b) along the racial spectrum. According to Biale (1998), “as Jews became economically successful, they found themselves for the first time in modern history as doubly marginal: marginal to the majority culture, but also marginal among minorities” (p. 27). In other words, as Jews started to be accepted as White, they found themselves further separated from other minority groups in the U.S., even though they still were not fully accepted by White society (nor are they fully accepted today). Herein lies one of the great conundrums of Jewish positionality – despite vast evidence of past and present discrimination and hatred of Jewish peoples, skin tone has become a sole identifier of Jewish people. Singer (2008) reinforces this concern when she states:

How can a society so concerned with promoting multiculturalism still not see us as a minority? I may be white, but I live in two worlds, and neither one totally accepts nor understands the other… We remain a hidden minority amidst white privilege. (p. 51)

It is often believed that there is a Black/White binary in U.S. society (Chanbonpin, 2015; Goldstein, 2006; Greenberg, 2015; Perea, 1997; Rubin, 2019). In brief, the Black/White binary is a paradigm that explains that racial issues in the U.S. only focuses on two groups, Blacks and Whites, and that racial identities are understood through this binary (Perea, 1997). Lozano (2017) states that, “In higher education, it is the tendency to equate the terms ‘diversity’ and ‘inclusion’ with ‘black’ or ‘African American,’ which, for all intents and purposes, ignores other racial and ethnic groups” (p. 28). Since Jews are light-skinned, they are placed into the White category, yet this is somewhat erroneous. In the Black/White racial discourse, “Ethnic groups are now homogenized as either ‘peoples of color’ or ‘White’ (whether they so identify themselves or not)” (Biale, 1998, pp. 26-27). This is problematic for many Jewish people since they fall within this nebulous “space between” the Black/White binary (Rubin, 2019). It has been found that “many Ashkenazic Jewish people don’t identify as fully white because there are aspects of whiteness – for example, psychological freedom and freedom of movement – that they don’t completely enjoy” (DiAngelo, 2016, p. 104). Living within the Black/White binary creates a tension for many Jewish people, and it is important that critical race theorists begin to explore this tension. Psychologists have found that the tension can exhibit itself in negative ways.

According to Ladson-Billings (1998), “Members of minority groups internalize the stereotypic images that certain elements of society have constructed in order to maintain their power” (p. 14). For Jewish people, this can result in what is called internalized antisemitism. According to Rosenwasser (2002), internalized antisemitism (also called internalized oppression) is when Jews believe the disparaging stereotypes and messages that are believed to be true by those outside of the Jewish community. This can result in personal feelings of hatred, fear, inferiority, isolation, distrust, embarrassment, marginalization, shame, and depression (Rosenwasser, 2002; Schlosser, 2006). Internalized antisemitism can manifest itself in various ways, from showing disinterest in Jewish culture and heritage to denying one’s own Jewish identity (Langman, 2000). Schlosser (2006) has asserted that, “It could be argued that every American Jew goes through the process of learning (and hopefully unlearning) internalized antisemitism by being raised and/or living…[in] the United States” (428). I would dare to say that internalized antisemitism is a much greater problem in the Jewish community than anyone truly realizes. I have battled with this for decades, and I was unable to identify the feelings I had until I recently learned about internalized antisemitism. Liu (2009), has posited that. “A CRT framework provides a situational context for exploring the impact of race and ethnicity on students’ self-image and interactions with others” (p. 9). It is important that critical race theorists begin to address the under-researched area of internalized antisemitism and how it effects Jewish self-image.

These feelings of internalized antisemitism are also influenced by Christian normativity in the U.S. According to Blumenfeld & Jaekel (2012), “For members of minoritized groups and nonbelievers, [being other than mainline Christian] can result in low self-esteem, shame, depression, prejudiced attitudes toward members of their own religious community, and even conversion to the dominant religion” (p. 130). Therefore, due to internalized antisemitism, Jewish people are subject to feelings of shame and inferiority due to an unhealthy personal identity.

Internalized antisemitism is also evident in the minimization of one’s personal experiences of antisemitism. In a study by MacDonald-Dennis (2006), he found that many of his Jewish study participants minimized the impact of antisemitism on their lives. In a recent research study of Jewish academics in the U.S., I also noticed this trend (Rubin, manuscript submitted for publication). Several participants mentioned their personal experiences with antisemitism (e.g., being called derogatory names, having pennies thrown at them) and then immediately minimized and dismissed the acts by describing them as the “typical stuff” and “the usual sort” of things that happen to Jews today. There is no name for this type of minimalization of feelings, and it needs to be researched more thoroughly. I believe that Schlosser (2003) said it best when he discovered that, “the ways in which I am privileged have also led to the neglect and denial of the part of me that experiences oppression” (p. 46).

Race for the Jewish peoples has never been solidified; they were once considered to be a separate race and now they are seen as being part of the dominant White culture. Although benefitting from White privilege, Jews also possess distinctive traits (e.g., traditions, belief system, physical characteristics), which separate them from the dominant ethnoreligious identities of their fellow citizens (Gilman, 2003). Greenberg (1998) stated that, “The experience of Jews as simultaneous insiders and outsiders, both victims of and members of a privileged class, can strengthen multicultural theory by reinforcing the multicultural commitment to hybridity and highlighting the complex, shifting, and voluntary nature of identity” (p. 82). By focusing on how Jewish people have navigated the tensions between their Whiteness and their Jewishness, the study of race will only become richer. Through use of an historical, anthropological, psychological, and sociological approach, CRT can better understand the complexities of Jewish identity and positionality, for it is much more complex than often believed by critical race theorists.

**Jews and the Issue of Power**

The notion of power and who has it is a major facet of CRT. Therefore, for groups such as Blacks, Latinos, Asians, and Indigenous Peoples, analyzing the relationship between race and power is essential for social change (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). According to Feingold (2017), “The fear that Jews have a special access to power is as old as Jewish history” (p. ix), and even though Jews have been a minority group for thousands of years (Schlosser, 2006), and have been stigmatized, marginalized, alienated, oppressed, and discriminated against for centuries (Alhadeff, 2014; DiAngelo, 2016; Hollinger, 2004; MacDonald-Dennis, 2006), Jews are now believed to have an inordinate amount of power and control in political and economic realms. A recent global survey by CNN shows that antisemitic stereotypes of perceived Jewish power are thriving in Europe. They found that more than 25% of Europeans polled feel that that Jews “have too much influence in business and finance. Nearly one in four said Jews have too much influence in conflict and wars across the world [and one] in five said they have too much influence in the media and politics” (Greene, 2018, p. 1). This continued belief in Jewish stereotypes and falsehoods is disturbing.

While it is true that Jews “are demographically overrepresented among the wealthiest, the most politically powerful, and the most intellectually accomplished of Americans” (Hollinger, 2004, p. 596), that does not translate to actual power. In truth, if Jews were so powerful, having membership in a secret cabal ruling the globe, they would have had the ability to prevent the Holocaust from ever occurring. They would also be able to extinguish anti-Jewish discrimination and hatred. Feingold (2017) asserts that, “Jewish power is revealed as a tenuous force unable by itself to control the events that impact on Jewish life” (p. 146).

**CRT and Jewish Invisibility**

History has shown that Jewish people were able to assimilate more easily into American society than other racial groups after World War II (Goldstein, 2006). Though assimilation might have been easier, that does not mean that it did not come without paying a high price. According to Goldstein (2006), “While American Jews were often buoyed by their ability to move freely in White America, their entry into that world resulted in alienation, communal breakdown, and psychic pain as surely as it produced the exhilaration of acceptance in non-Jewish society” (p. 6). Historically speaking, Jewish people apparently acculturated quite easily into U.S. society, yet they continue to pay the price for that success. Due to the Holocaust and a long history of oppression, many Jewish people suffered, and continue to suffer, from traumatic stress and anxiety, depression, as well as a determination to overachieve (Schlosser, 2006; Schlosser, et. al 2009).

It has been posited that many Jews do not even feel comfortable allowing themselves to believe that they are members of a discriminated minority group (Rubin, 2013). Jews are told by society that they are White; as a result, they are quite different from other minority groups of color (Rubin, 2013). Deep-seeded beliefs such as these continue to be harmful to both Jews and non-Jews alike. A more critical analysis of Jews through a CRT framework has the potential to create true understanding and compassion. In reality, Jews are consistently marginalized and oppressed in the U.S. today (Blumenfeld, 2006a; Schlosser, 2003), and by not being discussed in the classroom, the Jewish perspective is discounted. A lack of Jewish presence can infer that “[Jewish people’s] existence is of no importance [which] exacerbates Jewish students’ invalidation of Jewish identity and anti-Semitism” (MacDonald-Dennis 2006, p. 276).

**HebCrit and Counternarratives**

CRT recognizes that one’s personal account (stories) is of great value in better understanding issues of racial subordination (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). In order for critical race theorists to better understand the lived experiences of Jewish people, there must be a greater embrasure of Jewish counter-stories. According to Solórzano and Yosso (2002):

the counter-story is defined as ‘a method of telling the stories’ of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society). The counter-story is also a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege. Counter-stories can shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform. (p. 32)

Unfortunately, there are few, if any, research studies that analyze the stories (or narratives) of Jews in the twenty-first century, especially as it relates to issues of antisemitism and internalized antisemitism. Personal stories of Jewish people, such as my opening to this article, have great value, for they have the potential to “recount an individual’s experiences with various forms of racism or sexism” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). This form of reflection is already quite popular in Black studies (Ladson-Billings, 1998) and Latinx studies (as *testimonios*)(Alarcón, Cruz, Jackson, Prieto, & Rodriguez-Arroyo, 2011), and they give great validity to the perspectives of people of color. There are very few such counter-stories for Jewish people, and they are necessary to give validation to the “space between” that many Jews find themselves. In order to legitimize the perspective of Jewish people in the U.S. and around the world, counter-stories can assist in giving validation to the lived experiences of Jews.

**Conclusion**

As it currently stands, CRT helps analyze and understand Jewish experiences in the U.S. For example, CRT helps explain how Jewish racial positionality in Whiteness is socially constructed and has changed over the past several centuries. That being the case, Jewish people have specific needs and concerns that are not addressed in critical race theories and frameworks. Due to misconceptions and suppositions, Jews are misplaced into a racial category of Whiteness without understanding the personal conflict involved in doing so. There is a need for a framework that assesses and confronts the overlooked concerns of the Jewish minority, and it is called HebCrit.

There is no doubt that CRT has been an invaluable tool in the field of education studies, yet it does not thoroughly address the specific needs of the Jewish people worldwide. HebCrit, in addition to CRT, has the potential to address increasing antisemitism, Jews true place in racial studies, and the complicated positionality of Jews along the racial spectrum. It also allows for a greater theoretical complexity to better handle White identity. Both Jews and non-Jews alike benefit from the opportunity to discuss antisemitism and break down any potential Jewish myths and stereotypes (MacDonald-Dennis, 2006) that can potentially lead to the harassment and discrimination of the Jewish peoples. According to Rosenblum (2007), “Every oppression is different, and every oppressed group deserves our time and commitment to learning what their specific experience is like, and how we can best support their struggle for liberation” (p. 7). Jewish absence in CRT negatively affects the Jewish people, for it is a constant push and pull between acceptance and oppression in which Jews navigate where they fit in society and how they still are in danger just for being Jewish. This is a very complex and difficult balance for Jewish people, and it is my hope that HebCrit can begin to explore issues important to the Jewish community and better connect Jews to other racial/ethnic/gender minority groups in the U.S. and around the world.

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1. Jewish spinning tops with a Hebrew letter on each side, used for game playing [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For the purpose of this article, Jews are identified as those who are perceived to be White due to their light skin tone. Often referred to as Ashkanazi Jews, they are of Eastern, Central, or Western European descent. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)