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Reported schooling experiences of adolescent Jews attending non-Jewish secondary schools in England

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Abstract

This paper explores the reported schooling experiences of 28 adolescents attending non-Jewish English secondary schools who self-identified as Jews. Their reported school peer-interactions suggest Jews attending non-Jewish schools may face several challenges from members of non-Jewish peer groups, including anti-Semitism. Their reported experiences of classroom worlds, on the other hand, suggest that curricula and pedagogical methods could be perceived to exacerbate these challenges. These findings are discussed in relation to two on-going educational debates: the provision of state-funded faith schools, and the debate about the nature and purpose of the curriculum subject Religious Education in non-faith schools.

Key words: Jewish identity; identity negotiation; secondary schooling; anti-Semitism; faith schools; religious education

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Introduction

I'm the only Jew in my whole school. And that is actually really surprising because in my school there are about 800 boys there and so far I've yet to find someone who is another Jew.

Seth, male, Year 8, Independent Boys' School (Anglican) [Reform Synagogue, group interview]

Jewish adolescents are more likely to attend a faith school of their own religious tradition than members of any other religious group in England (Purdam et al. 2007). As Seth's example above illustrates, adolescents self-identifying as Jewish attending non-Jewish secondary schools in England are in the minority (the total Jewish population of England comprises approximately 0.5 per cent of the total population (Office of National Statistics 2012)). The last thirty years has seen an expansion of Jewish schools in England. According to Miller (2001), more than half of all Jewish children attended Jewish schools in 2001, in comparison with one fifth in 1975. This statistic demonstrates, Miller agues, the concern of Jewish parents about sending their children to non-Jewish schools. A further corollary is, of course, that Jewish adolescents who do not attend Jewish schools are less likely to have peers who identify as Jewish in their school cohort in comparison with other religious groups.

Since the late 1990s, there has been an increase in the popularity and political support for state-funded schools of a religious character (Grace 2001; Chadwick 2001; Miller 2001; Jackson 2003; DCSF 2007; Walford 2010). Miller (2001) sees the growth in Jewish schools driven by fears of assimilation, the desire of Jewish families to counteract the harmful influences of wider society on their children by attending schools based on Jewish values and ethos, and to receive a higher quality of general education in comparison to other available state-funded schools. However, the existence and increase of faith schools, including Jewish schools, and their receipt of state funds, has drawn criticism and scholarly interest. A landmark legal case in the United Kingdom Supreme Court ruled that a Jewish school was

racially discriminatory because of its admissions criteria based on the Orthodox stipulation of matrilineal Jewish decent (McCrudden 2011). The British Humanist Association runs a campaign against state-funded faith schools (BHA 2012), while educationists remain divided upon the legitimacy of their existence (Jackson 2003; Gardener Cairns & Lawton 2005; King 2010; Cooling 2010). One key criticism is that by segregating schools on religious lines, society becomes less cohesive and tolerant (Halstead & McLaughlin 2005) – when 'common schools' could provide for the needs of students of all religious backgrounds (Pring 2008). For religious minorities, however, of which Jewish communities are perhaps the most historic and established in England, the continued persistence of prejudice, hostility and anti-Semitism is also one good reason for separate schooling.

The creation of a tolerant and cohesive society has become a priority for educational policy – particularly in the new millennium following the events of September 11th 2001 and their aftermath (Moulin 2012). One interesting development is how the discrete curriculum subject, Religious Education – which is mandatory in all English state-funded schools (HM Government 1988) – has evolved from non-denominational Christian instruction to a subject primarily concerned with promoting cohesion and tolerance in a multi-faith, but also increasingly de-Christianised, society (Copley 2008). The continued legal necessity, and the aims and purposes of Religious Education and its future, have thus also been the subject of public and academic discussion (for example, see White 2004; Grimmitt 2010; Chater & Erricker 2013).

The perspectives and experiences of adolescents belonging to religious minorities have been largely ignored in the debates about faith schooling, the nature and purpose of Religious Education, and their associated academic research literatures (Streib 2001; Moulin 2011; Visser-Vogel et al. 2012; Thanissaro 2012). By exploring the reported experiences of adolescents who self-identify as Jewish who attend non-Jewish secondary schools, the aim of

this present paper is to contribute to the on-going debates about religion and schooling by offering an interpretation of students' perspectives and experiences for consideration.

Anti-Semitism, religious prejudice and discrimination in English secondary schools

Little in-depth research has been undertaken in England focusing on the experiences of Jewish secondary school students attending non-Jewish schools. Empirical research has often focused on Jewish schools (e.g. Scholefield 2004), or on the perspectives of students of more than one religion (e.g. Ipgrave & McKenna 2008). There is evidence that minorities from all religious traditions can be victims of prejudice and discrimination within the English education system (Weller et al. 2001). Religious prejudice can be defined as unfavourable sentiment, attitudes or judgements made about someone because of their religion. For Jews, this is can be referred to as anti-Semitism, but this is not necessarily connected with religion, but also ethnicity and nationality (Runnymede Trust 1994). Religious discrimination on the other hand, takes place when an individual is treated unfairly because of their religion or belief, or in the case of 'institutional religionism', when an organisation fails to provide for, or protect, the reasonable needs of a religious group (Weller 2008, 188). This can be referred to as 'religious disadvantage' when the established church has privileges over other religions (Weller et al. 2001, 8). In a study of religious discrimination in England and Wales, Weller et al. (2001) found that schools are a cause for concern among communities of all religious traditions. They were reported to discriminate and treat religious students unfairly, or not provide for their religious needs, while the behaviour of secondary school students was also considered a problem. One small-scale study also found that anti-Semitic name-calling, prejudice and harassment from school peers, or fear of it, was a concern for adolescent Jews attending non-Jewish secondary schools (Moulin 2011).

Religious prejudice is often regarded as being influenced by cultural stereotypes. Western popular and literary culture has been noted for its anti-Semitic stereotypes of Jews

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(Felsenstein 1995). Geopolitical circumstances and events in recent years have also been shown to exacerbate new negative stereotypes in the media (Parfitt & Egorova 2004). For example, whereas the greater proportion of 299 reported incidents of anti-Semitism in 2012 were associated with far right extremist ideologies, a significant proportion of these incidents were associated with political motivation against Israel and correlated with events in the Middle East, such as the Israeli invasion of Gaza (CST 2012).

Evidence shows that adolescent Jews can be the victims of anti-Semitic prejudice at the hands of their school peers. There were 30 anti-Semitic incidents in schools reported to an independent Jewish community organisation in the first half of 2012 (CST 2012). This is a long-standing phenomenon. In a small-scale interview study of primary and secondary school children's attitudes to Jewish identity, Short and Carrington (1992) found that older children in the study (from age ten and upwards) had knowledge of anti-Semitic stereotypes concerned with meanness and wealth. For example, one participant described how at his secondary school if someone were to pick up money off the floor they would be called a Jew. However, one child interviewed who self-identified as Jewish reported no incidences of negative stereotyping.

Methods

A mixture of unstructured single, pair and group interviews conducted in Jewish community centres and places of worship were chosen as a suitable method for exploring the perspectives of adolescent participants (Lewis 1992; Kvale & Brinkman 2009; Rubin & Rubin 2012), and for adolescent members of religious minorities in particular (Chaudhury & Miller 2008; Peek & Fothergill 2009). Interviews were conducted outside of schools as an earlier study suggested that some adolescent Jews did not feel safe publically acknowledging their Jewish identity in non-Jewish schools (Moulin 2011). Interviewing participants outside of school ensured their anonymity in this regard, although it did present other methodological

challenges: interview data generated in places of worship may be influenced by common narratives encouraged by religious communities (Peek 2005), and attendees of community groups may attend more than one school. In order to mitigate these issues, further interviews were conducted to explore and confirm participants' perspectives and concerns. All interviews were conducted with the informed consent of participants and their parents in accordance with ethical guidelines (BERA 2011). The names of people, places and organisations have been changed in this paper to ensure anonymity and confidentiality (BERA 2011).

Interviews were conducted at three sites with a total of 38 adolescents who self-identified as Jews and who took part in Jewish community activities: a national Jewish youth event, 'Countrywide Jewish Youth Club', and a Cheder (supplementary Jewish school) in a Liberal and Reform Synagogue. At the national Jewish youth event the majority of participants self-identified as Orthodox with varying degrees of religiosity – although it is unlikely that adolescents from strict Orthodox families attended this event. While some participants had family in Israel, all of those interviewed identified themselves as English and were not recent migrants to England. The Liberal and Reform Synagogue Cheder were selected for denominational affiliation and in geographical areas so as to access participants who attended non-Jewish schools. Ten of the total 38 participants interviewed attended Jewish schools. Their contributions to group and pair discussions are not considered in the analysis presented below, although their points of view encouraged greater discussion in some of the group interviews conducted with the purposive sample of 28 Jews who attended non-Jewish schools (Lewis 1992; Miles & Huberman 1994; Patton 1990; Fontana & Frey 2000).

Eight interviews were conducted at the Countrywide Jewish Youth Club with a total of 17 participants. These comprised of two group interviews of 27 minutes, three interviews

with three participants between 70 and 36 minutes, one pair interview of 42 minutes, and two individual interviews of 30 and 46 minutes respectively. Of the ten participants who attended non-Jewish schools, eight attended state-funded schools (including one voluntary-aided Anglican school), and two attended independent schools. Interviews took place in the Reform and Liberal Synagogues during Cheder classes on a Sunday. The participants of the Reform Synagogue Cheder can be split into two pools: a group of ten Year 8 students aged either 12 or 13 attending a Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah preparation course, and another group of five older Cheder attendees who were studying for a Jewish Studies qualification. Six interviews were conducted: one hour-long group interview as part of the Cheder class for Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah preparation, three pair or triple interviews with members of this group conducted at a later date (18 to 25 minutes), and a pair (32 minutes) and triple (14 minutes) interview conducted with older participants. All participants attended independent schools, some of these being single-sex and four having Anglican foundations. Participants regularly attended the Synagogue along with one or more of their parents and self-identified as Reform Jews. One hour-long group interview was conducted at the Liberal synagogue Cheder with a total of six participants. These participants were regular attendees and strongly identified with Liberal Judaism. Three attended non-Jewish community Schools and are included in the analysis given below; three attended a mainstream Orthodox Jewish school and are not included in the purposive sample of this study. Further interviews were not conducted at this site because of the saturation of themes in this interview, when compared with interviews conducted at the other sites.

As an exploratory study, this paper presents analyses of the interview data illustrated by salient examples of participants' reported experiences. The prevalence of commonly reported themes across three purposive research sites and multiple interviews suggests a degree of credibility to the examples given, which are intended to offer a 'vicarious presence'

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of the participants' voices for the reader (Miles & Huberman 1994, 279). They were selected by an iterative cycle of coding in conjunction with an emerging conceptual framework utilising theories developed by other researchers, notably the concept of identity negotiation and identity boundaries (Jacobson 1997; Gee 2000; Peek 2005) and the notion of classroom and peer worlds derived from the *Students Multiple World Framework* (Phelan et al. 1991) – as also successfully employed by Awokoya (2012) in a study of the reported schooling experiences of Nigerian American high-school students.

Conceptual Framework

The *Students Multiple Worlds Framework* posits that everyday adolescents move between different 'worlds' – the three principal worlds being that of family, the peer group, and school classrooms. As distinct social worlds these contexts make different demands on adolescents and rest upon different notions of accepted norms and values and thus have borders between them. Navigating these worlds and their borders can be challenging for adolescents where there is a discrepancy between 'norms, values, beliefs, expectations and actions' of family and peer worlds, and those of the classroom (Phelan et al. 1994, 418). Cultural difference may provide individual students with 'assets' that aid border transitions – depending upon which culture is considered superior in classroom worlds (Phelan et al. 1998, 11). The research aim of this study was to explore the experiences of Jewish adolescents of non-Jewish classroom and peer worlds, and consider the impact these experiences may have upon their self-identification as Jewish.

The analyses given below use the concepts of peer and classroom worlds as porous, linked, but demarcated aspects of school life: identity negotiations in 'peer worlds' are primarily conceived as reported experiences of peer interactions outside of the formal curriculum but in school; identity negotiations of 'classroom worlds' are the reported experiences of the formal provision of schooling, including curricula and pedagogy. In

conjunction with the idea of negotiating the social worlds of peers and classrooms, the concept of identity is used as 'an analytic lens' (Gee 2000). Actors in these worlds – peers and teachers in secondary schools – represent or recognise Jewish identity in particular ways and *ascribe* (Peek 2005) identities through systems of representation and recognition underwritten by institutional authority (Gee 2000). Following Gee, this can be in terms of character traits, ethnicity or affinities – such as their identification with Jewish religious beliefs and practices. These identities may be marked and recognised by symbolic boundaries (Jacobson 1997, following Barth 1969).

The interview data generated in this study are interpreted as identity negotiations and constructions. In the interviews, while recounting their experiences of schools, religious adolescents were also embarking on the task of constructing and negotiating their Jewish identities, either individually or collaboratively, in a process of sense-making and selective representation of their reported experiences. Interpreting identity negotiations among Jews attending secondary schools allows for a consideration of the impact of schooling upon identity construction by conceptualising identity construction as a negotiated and socially-located process (Berger 1967; Hall 1996; Gee 2000). Similar methodologies and conceptual frameworks have been employed by researchers interested in the schooling experiences of racial, ethnic, and national minorities, e.g. Kibria (2000); Stitikus & Mguyen (2007); Stewart (2008); Chen (2010); Archer, 2003; and, in particular Awokoya's (2012) study of the identity negotiations of Nigerian American adolescents, which provided inspiration for the conceptual framework employed in this paper.

Identity negotiations of non-Jewish school peer-worlds

Participants' reported experiences of peer-worlds often related to being a minority and were concerned with the boundaries of Jewish identity, such as celebrating Jewish festivals and rites of passage, food laws, believing in Judaic monotheism, association with the Jewish state,

and victimhood of the holocaust or anti-Semitism. These boundaries – and peers' reported understanding of them – often related to the identities ascribed to them.

Participants in non-Jewish schools often described themselves as the 'only Jew' in their peer group or school. For some, particularly the religiously practising, this could be an isolating and alienating experience.

> *I'm like the only Jew in the school – well, the only practising Jew in the school, although there may be others who don't do it [Judaism] and don't know they're Jews. But, yeah, it's weird because no-one understands anything.*
>
> **Jacob, male, Year 8, Orthodox, Foundation School [Countrywide Jewish Youth Club, pair interview]**

A corollary of being a minority was peers' reported curiosity in perceived exotic Judaic practices and beliefs. The boundaries of Jewish identity – the rites of passage, festivals and food laws of Judaism – were reported to be of intense interest to participants' non-Jewish peers. However, for some participants, peers' curiosity could become irksome. A good example of this is given by Lisa.

> **Lisa***: Yeah also at my school like other than the year above me, I'm the only Jewish girl in my year and they always ask me questions ... [peers] just ask me questions ask me ask me and it's really annoying*
>
> **Lisa, female, Year 8, Reform, Independent School (Anglican) [Reform Synagogue, group interview]**

This could be reported as a positive experience, as it was for Seth who explained his school peers' interest in his impending Bar Mitzvah. Episodes such as this support Phelan et al.'s (1998) supposition that sociocultural borders need not be an impediment at school, but an 'asset' if that culture is not considered inferior, as Judaism was not at Seth's independent school.

> *What I love about my friends is that they know I'm Jewish and that it's a big part of who I am and they're really into it. Like one of my friends is really excited for the Bar Mitzvah and not just for the party but for the service as well ... they see it and they realise it is a big part of me and so they're just into it in a way. Its not just they're interested, it's like they're excited for it.*
>
> **Seth, male, Year 8, Reform, Independent Boys' School (Anglican) [Reform Synagogue, group interview]**

A theme common to participants who took time off school for Jewish festivals was that their peers' curiosity would be roused by their absence – festivals being an interesting part of Judaism, and a symbolic boundary. Explaining Judaism to peers in these circumstances could be an enjoyable experience for some participants.

> *Well in my school it does come up, so say if a I miss a day because of Yom Kippor or whatever, they want to know about it – They want to know about my religious beliefs because there are such different religions [among peers], it can be quite interesting.*

Tal, female, Year 10, Orthodox, Independent Girls' School [Countrywide Jewish Youth Club, group interview]

Some participants found the attention they received as unwanted, however. Jewish participants in non-Jewish schools reported that curiosity could take the form of staring at, or whispering about, them during lessons that touched upon, or were about Judaism. This could cause problems for participants who did not want to be singled out, or that did not feel they could answer their peers' questions accurately. These instances could also result in Jews constructing and negotiating their identities in reaction to their non-Jewish peer worlds, or realizing that they knew little about Judaism as it appeared in the school curriculum. Sara's experience serves as a good example of this: her ethnic identity was revealed in a lesson, which led to peers' questioning. This made her feel awkward because of her lack of religious knowledge. This episode also demonstrates the possible overlap between classroom and peer worlds and a causal relationship between identities underwritten in the curriculum and peer-group interactions.

> *... last year [Judaism] came up [in RE] 'Oh Sara is Jewish and she knows' and everyone turned around and looked at me and I went red. And someone [who] didn't know I was Jewish and came right up to me and said 'oh you're Jewish, I didn't realise so [is that] what do you do?' and I didn't know, or have information about it. ... And I was the only Jew there and everyone was asking me things and I didn't know.*

Sara, female, Year 9, Comprehensive School [Countrywide Jewish youth club, group interview]

In a comparable episode, for Seth, it was not until his peers questioned him about circumcision during a lesson on Brit Milah that they became aware of this distinctive aspect of Judaism and identity boundary.

Jack: *I mean, when we're learning about circumcision in [RE] and about how Abraham circumcised Isaac and quite a few girls were whispering to me, 'Are you circumcised?' And then they were 'OOOH'.*

Seth: *Boys were doing that to me too 'coz I go to an all boys' school and boys were asking me that too, but I learned things I didn't know [in an RE lesson]. You have it after 7 or 8 days, and I went home and asked my mum, 'Did I have that after 8 days?' and she said yes. You're doing actually traditional stuff [in RE]. But it does make eyes stare at you. It's quite odd.*

Jack, male, Year 8, Reform, Independent School; Seth, male, Year 8, Reform, Independent Boys' School (Anglican) [Reform Synagogue, pair interview]

While not all participants reported negative schooling experiences, anti-Semitic prejudice, abuse and stereotypes were integral to many participants' reported peer experiences of secondary school. The term 'Jew' was widely reported as being used in schools as a nick name, or insult, to mean something or someone substandard, or of poor quality or low class – a form of anti-Semitic racism (Runnymede Trust 1994). Most of these were ethnic slurs as opposed to religious prejudice, although one participant reported 'Rabbi' being used in a similar way, perhaps suggesting anti-Judaism as well as anti-Semitism.

I don't know where it started from, but they [peers] would end up using the insult 'you Jew' or if you do something stupid they say 'you rabbi', which in itself doesn't make sense. I don't know really, they're words that those people using them didn't really understand the meaning behind. That might be the reasons they use them. But I don't know.

Josephina, female, Year 12, Liberal, Sixth-Form College [Countywide Jewish Youth Club, individual interview]

The use of 'Jew' as an insult was reported as occasional to frequent in occurrence by participants, but it was not always reported as offensive. Participants could 'play-down' or not realise that their peers' comments or actions could be considered as anti-Semitic. Sara's report of the use of 'Jew' serves as a good example of this.

Interviewer: *OK. Some people say the word 'Jew' is used as an insult or joke? I wondered if this happens in your school?*

Sara: *Quite a lot. I don't think it is a bad thing to be Jewish , so the laugh is on them. But it is used as a slang word, like: 'oh shut-up, Jew!'... they sort of say it like its nothing. It's tossed around, just as an insult. It doesn't really make sense. It's a bit stupid. It's a bit like 'gay'. It is used so much now, it's become like another rude word which you call someone.*

Sara, female, Year 9, Jewish; Comprehensive School [Countywide Jewish Youth Club, group interview]

For others, incidents of name-calling or 'jokes' based on anti-Semitic stereotypes were recognised and reported as anti-Semitic and offensive. One participant described a game in his school when someone would roll a coin down their foot to see if a 'Jew would pick it up' – an incident bearing similarities to the anti-Semitic prejudice described by Short and Carrington (1992) and the historic stereotypes encountered by Jews as a long-standing minority in European societies (Felsenstein 1995). Eliza reported examples of anti-Semitic bullying in her school similar to the anti-Semitic episodes recorded by Jewish communities (CST 2012).

> *For no reason they [peers] would bring up the word [Jew] – they would say to you 'because you're Jewish', but there was no reason for them to say that, or make comments that you are Jewish. It had nothing to do with the situation. One example: I lent a pen to my friend in year 7 and he lost the pen and it was an expensive pen so I got annoyed and he said 'you're so stingy. All the Jews are stingy'. Not really. But it was an expensive pen. If someone who wasn't Jewish had this pen lost they wouldn't say 'Yeah OK it doesn't matter.' It was an expensive pen. And other comments too. It happened a few times and it got quite serious ... It was so unnecessary to bring up these anti-Semitic comments.*

> **Eliza, female, Year 12, Orthodox, Comprehensive School [Countywide Jewish Youth Club, individual interview]**

Peers were reported to want to debate the political issue of Israel – a key affinity of modern Jewish identity (Sacks 1999). Several participants reported this kind of criticism came from Muslim peers. Judith's reported experience is typical in this respect.

> *There is a Muslim boy in my class and he asks me about my opinion all the time because he's got a really strong opinion about it [Israel] and I don't have one and he is – sort of – bemused by the fact that I would rather not start a big debate about Israel*

> **Judith, female, Reform, Year 11, Independent School [Reform Synagogue, pair interview]**

Some participants felt their adherence to Judaism was respected among non-Jews at school, but only when separated from the issue of Israel with whose violent actions they could be associated. Simon explained.

> *Whenever I tell my friends that I can't go out with them on a Friday because I am with my family, then that is fine with them. Umm... [But] when topics about more serious matters come up, so about Israel, then the respect question becomes a bit different because of what they have read in the newspapers about maybe what the Israeli army has done or equally what the Palestinian army has done and so it becomes a bit harder to respect Israel in that sense, and then they think then there's this guy in school who is Jewish so I'd assume he'd share the same views that a lot of these radical Israelis do and so that's I suppose when their respect might dwindle.*

Simon, male, Year 11, Orthodox, Comprehensive School [Countrywide Jewish Youth Club, group interview]

Participants sometimes perceived debates about Israel were accusatory. For example, Jack's Jewish identity had prompted an accusation that he was in some way culpable for Israel's invasion of Gaza in 2008 – a form of anti-Semitism according to some definitions (Iganski & Sweiry 2009, 34).

This is about two Years ago there was a war between Israel and Gaza and my friend was like my uncle is in Gaza and it's all your fault, and I thought that was really mean because I'm not actually doing anything.

Jack, male, Year 8, Reform, Independent School [Reform Synagogue, group interview]

Participants reported that the media was biased in its presentation of conflict in Palestine and this made life difficult for them at school. Jews also described the influence of films *Meet the Fockers* (Universal Studios 2004) and *Borat* (Twentieth Century Fox 2006) on their peers' perceptions of Jewish identity. Participants would often refer to the media and popular culture when explaining the behaviour and opinions of their peers. For example, Jacob described how one of his peers would 'quote' *Borat* at him, while Zvi who attended a different school, also had comparable experiences. Similar incidents relating to *Borat* have been found in other studies (Moulin 2011).

Interviewer: *You mentioned Borat [in a previous interview]. I've only mentioned it now because you mentioned it. Is this a common thing? ...*
Jacob: *Oh yes,... [but] It's hard to be offended by it because it was written by a Jew. There are crazy names referring to me.*
Interviewer: *Is it gone and past, because the film is quite old now?*
Jacob: *It doesn't really happen now.*
Zvi: *No, it happened more when it first came out. [Impersonating Borat] 'I like it, it's nice'.*
Jacob: *I think there's one person in school who still does it, but he's generally not very funny.*
Interviewer: *You say 'do it' – what does he do?*
Jacob: *He's quoting it*
Zvi: *Yeah, quoting it.*
Jacob: *And the chasing the Jew - the whole Jew-horn thing, - which I find kind of funny - with chasing the Jews; he shouts odd things at me from Borat, but no-one really finds it funny.*

Zvi, male, Year 8, Orthodox, Community School; Jacob male, Year 10, Orthodox, Foundation School [Countrywide Jewish Youth Club, pair interview]

In addition to negative peer experiences and anti-Semitism, participants also reported positive experiences of interactions with their peers and a favourable attitude to being in environments

with religious diversity. In these reported episodes, Jews could become aware of aspects of Judaism and also other religions. Participants often reported enjoying these kinds of peer interactions with those of other religions in plural schools. For example, Eliza described her peer group 'always' discussing religion; their religious differences being a common talking point.

> *With my friends I am always asking them about religion. Always. With my friends I hang out with we often talk about religion. Most of my friends I hang out with are Muslims or Christians. I'm usually always asking them about their religion and their festivals like Ramadan. ... I don't mind it. It's good that I'm friends with Muslim people as well – [they] don't mind being friends with me. I like learning about their religion, and they like learning about mine. It's mutual.*

> **Eliza, female, Year 12, Orthodox, Comprehensive School [Countywide Jewish Youth Club, individual interview]**

Identity negotiations of classroom worlds

Participants interviewed at the three sites reported several common concerns regarding the secondary school curriculum, collective worship, and the general structure of non-Jewish schools. These concerns were often reported as challenges that presented adolescent Jews with critical junctures when they became aware of their Jewish identities, usually as distinct and at odds to the ethos and culture of their secondary schools and wider society. Often participants were critical of the impact of aspects of classroom worlds upon peer worlds – particularly the representation of Judaism and Jewish identity in the curriculum.

One theme of participants' reported experiences was missing school days due to the Jewish Holy Days clashing with the school calendar. Some participants took these days off, which was sometimes considered as a benefit of the discrepancy between the norms and values of their homes and those of their classroom worlds. Jack and Seth explained.

> **Interviewer***: OK. Given that I want to know what it's like to be a Jewish student at school is there anything I need to know or ask about?*
> **Seth***: Umm. Not really. You might not be able to do to school because it's a High Holy Day,*
> **Jack***: Awesome*
> **Seth***: And that's the best 'coz you can just go back to Jack's and mess about there, and you see the minibus, with all my school friends on that bus and you can go up to the window and say 'waayyyy'.... In the end you accept you're at a Christian school.*

Jack, male, Year 8, Reform, Independent Boys' School; Seth, male, Year 8, Reform, Independent Boys' School (Anglican) [Reform Cheder, pair interview]

Missing school could cause problems if something important was happening at school that day, however, Aaron stated.

Sometimes the holidays can be inconvenient so because being Jewish I would take a day off on Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur like most other Jews in the school whereas everybody else would stay in school. Like I missed some drama controlled assessment because I was away and the problem was catching up.

Aaron, male, Year 10, Orthodox, Voluntary Aided School (Anglican) [Countrywide Jewish Youth Club, group interview]

Many of the participants interviewed who attended non-Jewish schools did not keep to the strictest interpretation of Jewish dietary laws. Those who took dietary laws more seriously reported taking a packed lunch to school or only ate vegetarian food. However, in regard to keeping some basic rules, such as abstinence from pork, some participants were concerned about the lack of provision of food in their schools' canteen. Realising that kosher provision was not possible in mainstream schools contributed to participants' self-understanding of being a minority, and a sense of their school's institutional religionism (Weller et al. 2008). Take Ruth's example.

Because it's such a minority, they're not going to cater ... at my school I'm such a minority, like the only one, and if I ate meat and not a packed lunch. I doubt that the make another meal options especially for me, if it was more ... if it was more, like if Christianity had to keep kosher, it would all be kosher, it would, but for us its different...

Ruth, female, Year 8, Reform, Independent School [Reform cheder, triple interview]

Participants attending Church schools and Independent Schools with a Christian foundation or ethos, typically reported feeling uncomfortable in Christian collective worship. In these episodes nominal or unacknowledged adherence to Judaism came to the fore as participants felt that they should not participate, or they felt uncomfortable doing so. For example, Elizabeth complained about the compulsory nature of collective worship which she felt unpleasant in partaking, while Joseph also thought it was unfair to have Christian prayers in his non-religiously affiliated independent school.

Well, my school is a member of ... [an independent school Christian association] and they kind of make you go to church services and you don't get a choice, so it's not nice, and they always have a prayer after assemblies and we sing hymns in assemblies.

Elizabeth, female, Year 8, Reform, Independent School (Anglican) [Reform cheder, group interview]

There is a prayer every now and then that is said, which is quite a Christian prayer to be honest in some assemblies. It's a bit annoying how they put a prayer into a school that isn't meant to have a serious religious view or anything.

Joseph, male, Year 8, Reform, Independent Boys' School [Reform cheder, pair interview]

Christian assemblies could be potentially offensive for participants, although some participants felt that schools 'toned-down' (Lisa) the religious content to make them more palatable for a multicultural cohort (Race 2011; Banks 2014). For Josephina, assemblies made her feel 'cornered' and 'bombarded with all this Christian stuff' (Josephina). When asked for more detail, she described a special Easter assembly that she found particularly memorable and offensive because it emphasised the exclusivity of Christ for salvation.

At Easter they showed us a presentation where a man fell into a hole and all the people of different religions tried to get the man out of the hole. Nothing would work, and the man stayed there and just got worse and worse, and no other religion could help until Christianity came along, and the man just stayed there until Jesus threw himself down into the pit. And Jesus stayed down in the pit and the man got out.

Josephina, female, Year 12, Liberal, Sixth-form college [Countrywide Jewish Youth Group, individual interview]

Another time when participants reported being uncomfortable in non-Jewish schools of all types, was during holocaust education. Holocaust education was reported as another instance of Jewish identity being brought to the fore and ascribed to them. This could take place in History or Religious Education classes. A feature of this reported experience was being stared at, or receiving other forms of unwanted attention from peers. Alexander's experience serves as a good example of this.

Experiences... um...I think as a Jewish student, yeah, the thing that crops up the most is the Holocaust especially when teaching about it in History, so the teacher will be talking about the discrimination against Jews from the Nazi' point of view ... and it's kind of awkward at times because everyone is looking at you and, you know, it is an exchange of glances really.

Alexander, male, Year 10, Reform, Independent Boys' School [Reform Cheder, triple interview]

Holocaust education could prompt reactions from peers, such as contrition and sympathy which could also be alienating and odd for some participants.

Whenever they talk about the Holocaust, everyone says 'sorry, sorry, sorry'. Anytime anyone mentions it, they look at me; they say 'I'm sorry', but I say that it didn't affect me particularly, so you should be saying it someone else. Lucky for me, none of my family were in the Holocaust, and this is really weird, because everyone asks me questions: 'did you know anybody?' and I wasn't even born then! So it's just really weird.

Ruth, female, Year 8, Reform, Independent School [Reform cheder, group interview]

Despite feeling uncomfortable, participants were pleased that Holocaust education took place and they typically considered knowledge of the holocaust as necessary for their peers to understand what it was like to be Jewish. Josephina's perspective is a good example of this. Holocaust education enabled others to understand a key aspect of Jewish identity.

I think it [Holocaust education] helped quite a few [peers] understand where some of my views came from ... People who have never understood anything like that or been through anything like that ... I'm quite glad that they do [Holocaust education]; it helps people understand and connect to how you're feeling, so it gets people on the same level.

Josephina, female, Year 12, Liberal, Sixth-form college [Countrywide Jewish Youth Club, individual interview]

Judaism did not feature in the Religious Education curriculum in some participants' schools: the Religious Education curriculum was given over to Christianity in some Christian-foundation schools, and principally Christianity and Islam in some schools not of a religious character. Some participants who attended community and comprehensive schools also reported Religious Education lessons as being devoid of recognisable religious content which reaffirmed the rareness of their religious practice in secular society. The secular values of Religious Education did not match those of religious nurture in their religious communities.

We have to do [Religious Education]. That's the thing, but half the time I don't actually know what we're doing. We're never talking about religion. I don't know what we're doing in that lesson to be honest; you see, I think, it's a bit of a waste of time.

Saphire, female, Year 10, Liberal, Community School [Liberal cheder, group interview]

Participants that attended schools with and without a Christian affiliation reported a perceived bias in the teaching of Religious Education that favoured a Christian interpretation. This

could also contribute to a sense of institutional religionism (Weller 2008). As described by Claire, for example.

> *Well, my [Religious Education] teacher she is always like, 'well I don't believe in a religion' but she's always siding with Christianity and she only...like if there's an opinion she'll say 'oh but Jesus would have said this' and 'Mark, Luke and John would have said this', and she's kind of leaning towards Christianity. Rather than taking inbetween sides.*

Claire, female, Independent Girls' School [Countrywide Jewish Youth Club, group interview]

When Judaism featured in the Religious Education curriculum, its perceived misrepresentation was one of participants' primary concerns, as found in other research (Jackson et al. 2010; Moulin 2011). Teaching materials were considered inaccurate, out of date and did not depict the normal lives of Jewish people. This misrecognition of participants' beliefs and practices was often considered problematic. It reinforced the dominance of Christianity and the ignorance of modern Judaism in society, particularly progressive Judaism.

> *The videos they show [of Judaism], they're all really ancient, and they're really ancient, so you [students] can't relate to them and ... so [for example] they're like invite people into your home at Rosh Hashanah and you're like that doesn't really happpen.*

Lisa, female, Year 8, Reform, Independent School (Anglican) [Reform Synagogue, group interview]

Religious Education lessons were also widely considered as biased towards Orthodoxy. Participants at the Reform and Liberal synagogue found this especially problematic. Jasper's experience serves as a good example of this.

> *In my school I think I am the only Jew in my whole school and its quite a big school as well so basically I've got friends that aren't Jewish and they go to the classes of Religious Education and RS and they [teachers] say I'm [Jews are] like Orthodox and stuff, and all these people come and ask me stereotypical stuff like 'Do you do this?' and 'Do you have two kitchens?' and 'Do keep kosher?' and... and I say 'no'.*

Jasper, male, Year 8, Reform, Independent Boys' School [Reform Synagogue, group interview]

While it may be expected that those attending Reform and Liberal Cheders would find the depiction of Judaism as Orthodox problematic, participants identifying as Orthodox also

complained that when Judaism appeared in the curriculum it was typically represented in its most 'religious' Orthodox form. This could also confuse their peers.

I know a lot about Judaism and sometimes what was written in the textbook wasn't really right. ...first of all the textbooks are quite old and they are written by a non-Jew ... One example is usually festivals, and the words they use to describe things...People in my school who are not Jewish have one image in their head who they think Jews are... they have this image in their head of really religious people and they have hats and beards.

Eliza, female, Year 12, Orthodox, Comprehensive School [Countrywide Jewish Youth Club, individual interview]

One concern was teachers' reported inability to pronounce words for Jewish festivals and other religious terminology correctly. This was not considered offensive, but it was perceived as frustrating or annoying. When faced with mispronunciations, participants were sometimes reluctant to correct teachers, while others would try to teach their teachers or explain to the rest of the class, as Rosanna explained.

In my school the teachers mispronounce it wrong - all the names of the festivals ... which can be quite annoying sometimes. It's quite picky but for Pesach they say 'Pesatch' but if you try to correct them they think they're always really right, which can be really annoying and you can't stand up and say you know more than them because they're a teacher, but they did get it wrong.

Rosanna, female, Year 8, Reform, Independent Girls' School [Reform cheder, pair interview]

Mispronunciation reaffirmed teachers' misrecognition and ignorance of Judaism, even though they reputedly taught about it. These findings are similar to those of Nesbitt's (1998) study of Hindu and Sikh children. Curriculum materials and textbooks in Religious Education were perceived as inaccurate, generalised and stereotyped by Hindu and Sikh students. Hindus and Sikhs also reported that teachers could mispronounce Indian words, or were perceived to be unable to present Hinduism and Sikhism in a way that religious students' peers could understand without recourse to ridicule.

Discussion

The findings of this small-scale, exploratory study are neither conclusive nor generalisable but they can be considered in relation to the on-going debates surrounding the role of religion in education in England, particularly over religious education and faith schools (Cooling,

2010). Participants reported school-peer worlds and classroom worlds as presenting significant challenges to their Jewish identities and affiliations which sometimes constituted perceived harm, or threat of harm. In this sense, the interview data support the arguments given for the popularity of Jewish schools (Miller 2001). The ascription of negative Jewish identities in peer worlds, some of which would be commonly accepted as obviously anti-Semitic, is concerning, as is the ascription of inaccurate identities through curriculum materials. There is also the question of religious disadvantage in independent and state-funded schools of a Christian character – that while Christian-affiliated schools may support or observe the (Christian) religion of some students, Jewish attendees are presented with theological and practical clashes to their religious culture which can exacerbate their minority status. Jews' religious disadvantage in Christian schools may lend credence to the criticism of faith schools on account of their being unfair in principle (Humanist Philosopher's Group 2001; Norman 2012), an important aspect of the data presented to consider is that non-faith school peer and classroom worlds also present religious prejudice and disadvantage. For example, Jews attending non-faith schools did not find these 'faith-neutral' but influenced in many ways by Christian cultural assumptions, such as the organisation of a school year around Christian holidays.

A salient finding of this study is that the curriculum subject Religious Education in non-faith schools was sometimes perceived to aggravate the challenges facing adolescent Jews in non-Jewish schools rather than ameliorate them. One commonly stated aim of Religious Education in non-faith schools has been that it can foster cultural integration, values of good citizenship, and community cohesion (e.g. Grimmitt 2010). While it should also be noted that participants reported positive attitudes towards religious diversity and enjoyed interacting with members of other religions, they were often critical of the representation of Jewish identity in the Religious Education curriculum. These findings

resonate with several other studies that have found members of religions are critical of Religious Education in the respect that it does not recognise the perspectives of minority religious groups, or represent religious traditions accurately or fairly (Ipgrave 1999; Weller et al. 2001; Head 2009; Jackson et al. 2010; Moulin 2011).

This consideration of a small purposive sample of Jewish adolescents' identity negotiations of non-Jewish school worlds does not demonstrate that a 'common school' (Pring 2008) open and welcoming to those of all religions is conceptually or practically impossible. But the interview data show how English secondary schools present distinct challenges for Jewish students. Addressing the concerns raised by the participants' in this study would include tackling issues in a common school already recognised by advocates of faiths schools, such as the provision of prayer spaces, kosher food, and arrangements for religious festivals (Miller 2001). Fulfilling the oft-stated and laudable aims of Religious Education to promote social cohesion and respect for members of religions in a multi-faith society, on the other hand, may require developing a Religious Education curriculum that represents (or refers to) Judaism and Jewish identities authentically without appearing to undermine or stereotype them – as also suggested by other researchers (e.g. Copley 2005; Barnes 2009; Strhan 2010; Lundie 2010).

Conclusion

The identity negotiations considered above show that non-Jewish secondary schools may present challenges for adolescents who identify as Jewish. Reported experiences of peer and classroom worlds illustrate aspects of religious prejudice, religious disadvantage and institutional religionism (Weller et al. 2008). Participants' perspectives of misrepresentative Jewish identities in the curricula of non-Jewish schools of a Christian and non-Christian character suggest classroom worlds can act as negative systems of representation, confirming critiques of classroom materials and concerns about the reification of religious traditions in

Religious Education lessons (e.g. Jackson 2004; Jackson et al. 2010; Moulin 2011). Striking examples of religious prejudice in peer-worlds, on the other hand, include traditional anti-Semitic stereotypes as found by Short and Carrington (1992), and blame for the occupation of Palestine by Israel – considered by some as the 'new' anti-Semitism (Iganski & Sweiry 2009). These findings are likely to be of concern to Jewish parents and the wider Jewish community in England. However, while some of these experiences were obviously distressing, and could be prejudicial and discriminatory, they also contributed to the self-understanding of participants' sense of Jewish identity as members of a unique minority – arguably one key aspect of modern Jewish identity (Webber 1997). In this sense, participants' identity negotiations show how Jewish identities may be constructed and maintained despite being schooled in non-Jewish contexts.

Acknowledgements

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