

Commentary

Antisemitism, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: A Complex Nexus

Phillip Ashley Wackym*^{ID} and Ksenia Ariella Aaron^{ID}

Department of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery (P.A.W.), Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, New Brunswick, New Jersey, USA; Head & Neck Institute (K.A.A.), Cleveland Clinic, Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Abstract

Antisemitism, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) are interconnected elements of a multifaceted societal landscape. The term “antisemitism” refers to prejudice, discrimination, and hatred directed towards Jewish individuals, while “diversity” highlights the importance of recognizing and embracing differences among people. “Equity” aims to rectify systemic imbalances and ensure everyone has access to the same opportunities, regardless of their background, and “inclusion” underscores the necessity of creating environments where all individuals are welcomed, respected, and valued.

Historical examples demonstrate how antisemitism has denied Jewish individuals not only equity but also basic human rights and dignity. The horrors of the Holocaust are a stark reminder of the extreme consequences of hatred and prejudice.

In this Commentary, we will explore the complex nexus between antisemitism and DEI. We will examine how antisemitism has historically affected Jewish communities, analyze its contemporary manifestations, and discuss the significance of addressing antisemitism within the broader context of DEI.

keywords: Antisemitism; Diversity; Equity; Inclusion

Key Points

1. There is currently a global rise in antisemitism, including within our medical communities.
2. There is an intersection of antisemitism, diversity, equity and inclusion.

***Corresponding author:** Phillip Ashley Wackym, Department of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery (P.A.W.), Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, New Brunswick, New Jersey, USA; Head & Neck Institute (K.A.A.), Cleveland Clinic, Cleveland, Ohio, USA, E-mail: ashley.wackym@rutgers.edu

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3. Diversity, equity and inclusion can be used as a tool to combat antisemitism.

Historical Antisemitism

Antisemitism has a long and dark history. Jewish people have been subjected to discrimination, violence, and persecution. Intense periods of antisemitism have occurred periodically over centuries. Most notable recent events of the 19th and 20th century included Russian pogroms, the calamitous ethnic cleansing of Jews from various European and Arab countries, and the Holocaust during which six million Jews were systematically murdered.

Contemporary Manifestations of Antisemitism

While significant progress has been made in addressing antisemitism, it persists in various forms [1,2]. Some contemporary manifestations include conspiracy theories, Holocaust denial, online harassment, and vandalism of Jewish institutions perpetuating stereotypes and hatred.

Most recently, the horrific Hamas’ attack on Israel, on October 7, 2023, was the deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust, with initial estimates of the number of Jews killed reaching 1,300, along with over 3,300 injured, and more than 200 kidnaped. The remarkable rise in antisemitic expression after this event has been troubling, with the first week after the attack seeing a 1,353% rise in antisemitic incidents in London, along with similar disturbing numbers across other European cities and the United States (Figure 1) [3-5]. The Community Security Trust, which monitors anti-Jewish abuse and attacks and provides security for United Kingdom Jewish communities, recorded 4,103 antisemitic incidents in the United Kingdom in 2023, the highest total in a calendar year reported to the organization. Two-thirds of the 2023 incidents occurred after 7 October (2,699, compared with 392 over the same time period in 2022) - an increase of 589% [6].

Another concerning trend was a recent study exploring the “antisemitic double standard of medical organizations [7]. They found that 71% of medical associations and 45% of medical schools issued statements on the war in Ukraine, condemning Russia; while, only 11% and 3% of them respectively issued any statements about the recent attack on Israel.

Antisemitism does not exist in isolation but is often intertwined with other forms of discrimination and hatred. Intersectionality plays a role, as Jewish individuals can also belong to other marginalized groups, such as LGBTQ+ or people of color. This intersectionality can result in compounded discrimination, making it more critical to address antisemitism as part of broader efforts to foster DEI.

The Intersection of Antisemitism, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

DEI was summarized as focusing on “creating environments where people from all backgrounds are valued, have equal opportunities to thrive and can contribute their unique perspectives [8].

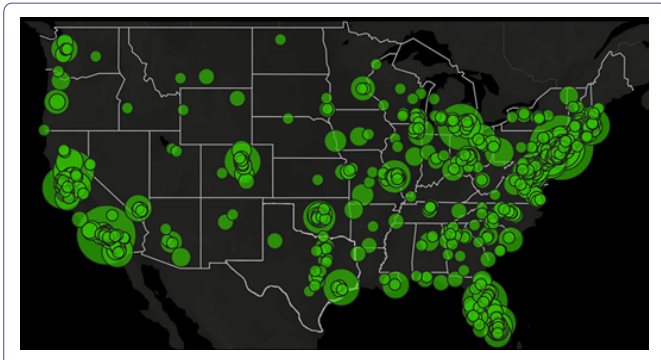


Figure 1: The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) tracks antisemitic events and in a way responsive to queries, tabulates the details of each incident, and uses the data to create H.E.A.T. (Hate, Extremism, Antisemitism, Terrorism) maps to graphically illustrate the magnitude of incidents, as well as geographic distributions of such events.

Note: The 2023 H.E.A.T. map of incidents in the United States is shown based upon data imported from their website (<https://www.adl.org/resources/tools-to-track-hate>). Bubbles are sized based on the number of incidents. In 2022, the ADL tabulated 3,697 antisemitic incidents throughout the United States. This was a 36% increase from the 2,717 incidents tabulated in 2021 and was the highest number on record since the ADL began tracking antisemitic incidents in 1979. 5 Published with permission, copyright © P.A. Wackym, MD.

However, there has been a recent divergence in the true mission of DEI [9-11]. Dr. Stanley Goldfarb, former associate dean at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, recently said [9]. After DEI took hold at Penn, anti-Semitic fervor on campus intensified. At first glance, DEI seems to have little connection to the Jewish people or the Jewish state. I also came to see that subscribing to DEI almost inevitably resulted in attacking Jews. At the heart of DEI is a simple binary: the world is divided between oppressors and the oppressed. Proponents of DEI cast white people as oppressors and black people as the oppressed. While they apply this frame primarily to America, they often apply it to Israel, too.” Additionally, a court case was filed in 2021 against Stanford University’s Counseling & Psychological Services DEI division, where anti-Semitism was excluded from the DEI [10]. The DEI committee supported this decision, saying that “Jews, unlike other minority group[s], possess privilege and power, Jews and victims of Jew-hatred do not merit or necessitate the attention of the DEI committee. As appalling as this was, this rhetoric did not stop there, and in late 2023 several top ivy league university presidents were questioned by the House Education Committee on combating rise in antisemitism on campus. When asked “if calling for death of Jews violated their university’s rules of bullying and harassment,” the response by the presidents were that “It depended on the context [12]. It is no wonder that in 2021, the Heritage Foundation reviewed and categorized the Twitter feeds of nearly 750 DEI officials at 65 United States universities and found that 96 percent of their tweets about Israel were critical of the country or antisemitic.¹² Since the House hearing calls to end and cancel DEI have erupted, and as Elon Musk has recently famously tweeted that “DEI must DIE [13]. But should it? A lot of positive strides have been made in DEI efforts since it has slowly intertwined within medicine. DEI plays a crucial role in medicine both on the patient and healthcare provider front. It has been at the forefront of addressing health disparities and supporting health equity advocacy through research and community engagement. DEI efforts further have promoted cultural competency training for healthcare professionals both within the work environment as well

as when caring for patients. As well as championed workforce diversity by initiatives to recruit and support underrepresented minority. However, when it came to antisemitism DEI has failed in properly serving and protecting all minorities and vulnerable individuals. As physicians, we must be proactive in eliminating antisemitism using our DEI efforts and at large both for our patients and our colleagues (Table 1).

Domain	Issues in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
Diversity	Diversity also means acknowledging the diversity of experiences within the Jewish community. Not all Jews share the same experiences, and some may face additional challenges due to their intersecting identities. Recognizing this diversity is a vital component of creating truly inclusive environments.
Equity	Issues that can relate to equity for Jewish communities is the application of affirmative action policies and legal protections against discrimination. While these policies are designed to address historical and systemic inequalities, they may inadvertently overlook the unique experiences and challenges faced by Jewish individuals.
Inclusion	To promote inclusion, it is essential to educate individuals about antisemitism and its consequences. Also, accommodation of Jewish religious practices and holidays in the workplace or educational settings would promote inclusion. Encouraging interfaith and intercultural interactions can also promote a more inclusive society.

Table 1: Issues Specific to Judaism within the Framework of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

Challenges and Solutions

Addressing antisemitism within the context of DEI presents several challenges. One is the perception of antisemitism as a distinct issue, separate from other forms of discrimination. We must educate people about the interconnectedness of different forms of hatred and prejudice. Recognizing implicit bias is an integral component of DEI and we must also consider antisemitism.

Diversity

Diversity encompasses the recognition of differences among individuals. In this context, acknowledging the Jewish community’s unique cultural, religious, and historical attributes is essential. Jewish people come from diverse backgrounds, with Ashkenazi, Sephardic, Mizrahi, Ethiopian and other distinct traditions. Embracing this diversity allows society to appreciate the richness and complexity of Jewish culture.

Equity

Equity focuses on eliminating systemic barriers and ensuring that all individuals have equal access to opportunities and resources. In the context of antisemitism, achieving equity means combating the discrimination and prejudice that Jewish individuals face.

Inclusion

Inclusion involves creating environments where all individuals feel welcome, respected, and valued. Combating antisemitism is crucial for fostering inclusion, as it ensures that Jewish individuals can participate fully in all aspects of society without fear of discrimination or persecution (Table 2).

Conclusion

With significant worldwide rise in antisemitism, it is imperative that we consistently advocate for all victims of unjustified bias and

Strategy	Implementation, Management and Opportunities
Education	Implement comprehensive education programs that cover the history of antisemitism, its contemporary manifestations, and the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion.
Legislation	Enact and enforce anti-discrimination laws that explicitly include protection against antisemitism.
Dialogue	Promote open and respectful conversations about antisemitism and its intersection with other forms of discrimination.
Intersectional Approach	Recognize the intersectionality of identities and experiences within the Jewish community and address the specific challenges faced by different subgroups.
Media Literacy	Encourage media literacy to help individuals critically evaluate information and recognize harmful stereotypes and conspiracies.
Collaboration and Allyship	Foster collaboration and allyship between specific communities, supporting each other's struggles and advocating for a more inclusive society.
Continuous Evaluation and Adaptation	It is essential for our specialty, including our senior societies, to continuously evaluate their diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts and adapt them to evolving circumstances. This also includes antisemitism. Regular data collection, analysis, and feedback help identify areas for improvement and ensure ongoing progress.

Table 2: Potential Solutions to Combat Antisemitism within the Framework of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

discrimination. Antisemitism and DEI are interconnected components of a complex social landscape. Recognizing and addressing antisemitism is not only a moral imperative but also a necessary step towards creating inclusive and equitable societies and medical environment. By understanding the historical and contemporary manifestations of antisemitism [1-7], recognizing diversity within the Jewish community, and advocating for equity and inclusion, we can work towards a world free from discrimination and prejudice for all individuals, regardless of their background. In doing so, we take a significant step towards realizing the principles of justice, equality, and respect for all.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors have no financial or other conflicts of interest.

Ethical Statement

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Authors' Contributions

Phillip Ashley Wackym, made a substantial contribution to the concept or design of the work, drafted the article and revised it critically for important intellectual content, approved the version to be published, and participated sufficiently in the work to take public responsibility for appropriate portions of the content.

Ksenia Ariella Aaron, made a substantial contribution to the concept or design of the work, drafted the article or revised it critically for important intellectual content, approved the version to be published, and participated sufficiently in the work to take public responsibility for appropriate portions of the content.

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