



Contemporary Jewish identities and experiences of racism: what can we learn from 'big data'?

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Thankyou for the invitation to speak here today.

INTRODUCTION

I want to grapple with the dilemmas of classification of people. This has, no doubt, through self definition or ascribed identities, occurred throughout the history of human societies, including in terms of race, ethnicity, beliefs. But the possibilities and, I would say, the power of classification and categorisation take on new forms in this age when we are awash with information, and I am particularly thinking about data of various kinds that count, categorise, identify individuals and groups.

I want to intervene in this longstanding debate in this modern context of data profusion by reflecting on a project I have been leading for the last three years. This is the Evidence for Equality National Survey, EVENS. This is a new National Survey undertaken by the Centre on the Dynamics of Ethnicity and funded in 2020 by UK Research and Innovation to document the lives of ethnic and religious minorities in Britain during the Covid-19 pandemic.

I want to use EVENS to think about Jewish ethnic identity and classification, and Jewish experiences of racism.

I realise that this is a particularly difficult time to broach this topic and I express my thoughts to all who are affected by the current conflict in Gaza. I proceed in the spirit of academic endeavor and the pursuit of peace and equality.

So, I am going to tell you about the EVENS project, not from the statistical side (though that is also worth a conversation) but from the political side: why we collected the data and how we grappled with questions of classification. I will then take you on a tour of some of the insights from these data about how Jewish people articulate their Jewishness and the prevalence of experiences of harassment and unfair treatment.

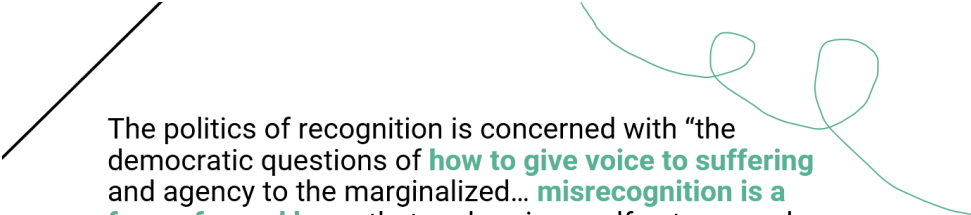
I am going to argue that great care needs to be taken in the production and use of big data about who is represented and how; and I'll argue too that there remains a place for robust survey research. Nowhere in all the information around us can we find out what I will present using the new data from the Evidence for Equality National Survey. I will demonstrate how Jewish people are not well identified in standard measures of ethnicity and I suggest that this is a problem because we risk missing or misrepresenting Jewish experiences, including of racism.

BACKGROUND: CATEGORIES AND RACISM

The EVENS project, we could say, was a pursuit of recognition.


The politics of recognition is concerned with “the democratic questions of **how to give voice to suffering** and agency to the marginalized... **misrecognition is a form of moral harm** that undermines self-esteem and the capacity for full personhood, but which also motivates the struggle for justice “ (Davies 2021: 85-86)

“the politics of recognition, as it faces democratic societies today... is endemic to liberal democracies because they are **committed in principle to equal representation of all.**” (Gutmann 1994: 3)

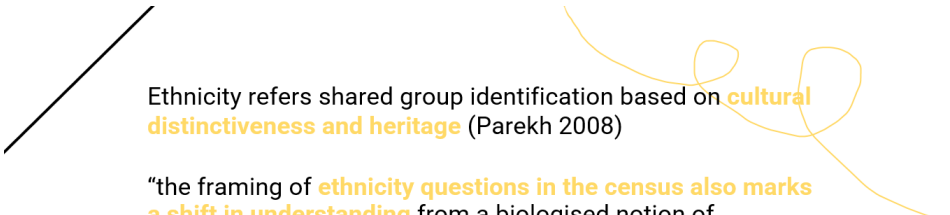


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Within the centre with which I work – CoDE – we deal predominantly in ideas of ethnicity. We can define this as something more than race and that incorporates religion – if we follow Bikhu Parekh, we can think of ethnicity as group identity based on culture and heritage.



Ethnicity refers shared group identification based on **cultural distinctiveness and heritage** (Parekh 2008)

“the framing of **ethnicity questions in the census also marks a shift in understanding** from a biologised notion of ‘descent’ in 1991, to ‘cultural background’ in 2001, to a simple ‘ethnic group or background’ personal identification in 2011” (Byrne et al 2020: 6-7)


“The debate [about ethnic categorisation] continues precisely because **the categories are not objective but social in their purpose.** Perhaps the clearest indication of the social nature of racial categories is that no set has remained unchanged for long.” (Simpson 2004: 663)



The official statistical measurement of ethnicity, in the UK and elsewhere, is relatively recent, beginning in 1991. But ethnic categorisation is situational, dependent on the time and place and purpose of measurement. Byrne reminds us that “the framing of ethnicity questions in the census also marks a shift in understanding from a biologised notion of ‘descent’ in 1991, to ‘cultural background’ in 2001, to a simple ‘ethnic group or background’ personal identification in 2011” and this was retained


for the most recent censuses. The key point here, as Simpson remarks, is that “the categories are not objective but social in their purpose”

And the purpose of our work within CoDE, which has been working for a decade, is to identify ethnic inequalities, their drivers and potential solutions and at the heart of this is a concern with racism.




“racial and **ethnic inequality, discrimination and racism remain entrenched features** of ‘the social life of the nation’ across all areas – from education to employment, housing to health, criminal justice and policing to politics, the arts, media and sport – and across all minority groups.”

(Byrne et al 2020: 10)



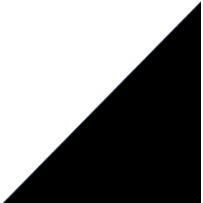
Because, it’s evident that “racial and ethnic inequality, discrimination and racism remain entrenched features of the social life of the nation across all areas and across all minority groups” (Byrne et al 2020: 10).

There is now a huge amount of evidence on the stark and persistent ethnic inequalities in Britain.



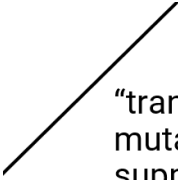
“hostility which uses **skin colour and physical appearance** as markers of supposed difference does not represent the whole picture. There is also hostility using markers connected with **culture, language and religion.**”

(Commission on the Future of Multi Ethnic Britain 2000:4)



The concept of racism that I employ is a broad one that – as has long been asserted – recognises that hostility can be connected with culture, language and religion as well as skin colour and physical appearance.


But what, quantitatively, can we know about this? Quantitative data are all around us, being recorded and beamed to databases as we speak. There are marvellous opportunities in administrative data and mobile data and commercial data and in linking data – what is generally thought of as big data. Yet in all of this, we have an issue of representation. Davies (2021: 86) argues that there has been “a historic transformation of the public sphere” through what he calls platform data and platform capitalism.



“transformations in the public sphere have led to a mutation in how recognition is demanded and supplied.... In order that the data they collect can be as rich and extensive as possible, platforms—especially social media—need to be spaces where people engage in something like a struggle for recognition. This represents **a historic transformation of the public sphere**. The spaces where esteem and merit are distributed have been privatized, the better to be analysed for business and financial insight.”

‘a new politics of reputation’

(Davies 2021: 86, 92)



For Davies, the big data around us and the systems they support should be treated with caution. For him they engage not so much in a politics of recognition as a politics of reputation.

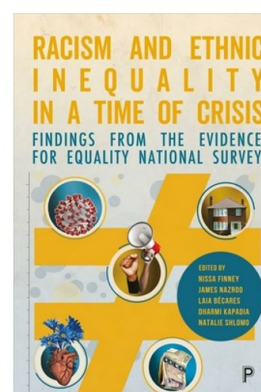
ABOUT EVENS – IN PURSUIT OF RECOGNITION

Our motivation for the EVENS Survey was exactly this problem: the big data around us can't reliably tell us about detailed minority groups or about experiences of racism. It was our contention that the academy and political debate needed something else.



“Britain is not close to being a racially just society...our aspiration is that evidence on ethnic inequalities, generated by the innovative EVENS Survey, coupled with informed critical analysis... can provide the **framework to support the transformation** of institutions, broader policy and society”

(Finney et al 2023: 210)



We aspired to to creat new evidence and critrial analysis to support the transformation of instutitions, policy and society towards greater equality.

You might think, can't you scrape all the messages about racism from social media platforms and analyse that? Yes, we can. And what a wealth of information that would be! But the core issue is that we would not know who was being represented and – importantly – who was not. And this matters because we know that the characterisctcs and likely the experiences of those who post about racism on social media are different from the characteristics of those who don't. So, we would be presenting a biased and partial picture and would not have means to account for that bias.

There are other surveys in the UK that consider minorities and racism, notably *Understanding Society* and, of course, the census. There are international surveys too, such as the European Social Survey and the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights surveys. But these surveys give data for broad ethnic groups or have limited information on experiences of racism and questions that are designed specifically for understanding minority experiences. And the census is marvellous – I use the census

extensively especially for my work that is concerned with differences between places, and spatial inequalities – but the census is necessarily limited in the type and breadth of information it collects.

In EVENS we aimed for a robust representation of ethnic and religious groups. EVENS is an example – one of the first worldwide – of the application of new non probability survey methodology. I am not going to elaborate on that but suffice to say that we employed innovative methods with an interdisciplinary team of leading experts and Partners.

At the heart of the method, and the quest for better representation, was an open invitation to participate to all those who consider themselves to be an ethnic or religious minority.



EVENS is the largest survey of its kind to document the lives of ethnic and religious minorities in Britain and we are indebted to our Partners, including the Institute for Jewish Policy Research, for collaboration to recruit participants.

E V E N S
EVIDENCE FOR EQUALITY
NATIONAL SURVEY

jpr /
Institute for
Jewish Policy Research

**The Evidence
for Equality National
Survey (EVENS)**

is the **largest national survey of its kind** dedicated to learning more about the concerns and needs of all ethnic and religious minorities. That's why we're encouraging **Jewish people** across the country to take part.

DE
IPIOS
UK ICA
Economic and Social Research Council

Fill in the survey: bit.ly/evensurvey
Freephone: 0800 129 6800
#evensurvey

This is an example of our marketing to Jewish communities, which also included paid for distribution via established community electronic mailing lists and promotion in The Jewish Chronicle.

“Judaism is defined differently by Jews across Europe. In Western and Southern Europe it is commonly understood as **both religion and ancestry**.... Ancestry clearly dominates over religion in Northern and Eastern Europe. Government agencies and private survey companies need to bear this in mind when determining how to gather data about Jews on administrative forms or survey questionnaires.”

(Dellapergola & Staetsky, 2022: 7)

In the survey we consider Jewish identity as both ethnicity and religion, aligning with the approach advocated by Dellapergola and Staetsky in their recent report on Jewish identities that highlights the importance of both religion and ancestry.

E V E N S

EVIDENCE FOR EQUALITY
NATIONAL SURVEY

| Ethnic group | Sample size |
|--|---------------|
| Asian: Any other Asian background | 673 |
| Asian: Bangladeshi | 406 |
| Asian: Chinese | 664 |
| Asian: Indian | 1,288 |
| Asian: Pakistani | 866 |
| Black: African | 1,049 |
| Black: Any other Black/African/Caribbean background | 180 |
| Black: Caribbean | 566 |
| Jewish | 674 |
| Mixed: Any other mixed/multiple background | 378 |
| Mixed: White and Asian | 525 |
| Mixed: White and Black African | 159 |
| Mixed: White and Black Caribbean | 355 |
| Other: Any other ethnic group | 270 |
| Other: Arab | 152 |
| White: Any other White background | 698 |
| White: Eastern European | 363 |
| White: English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British | 4,513 |
| White: Gypsy/Traveller | 251 |
| White: Irish | 118 |
| White: Roma | 73 |
| Total | 14,221 |

| Religious group | Sample size | Region | Sample size |
|--------------------|---------------|----------------------|---------------|
| Buddhist | 285 | East Midlands | 875 |
| Christian | 5,080 | East of England | 1,262 |
| Hindu | 631 | London | 3,576 |
| Jewish | 674 | North East | 367 |
| Muslim | 1,976 | North West | 1,415 |
| No religion | 4,782 | Scotland | 1,170 |
| Sikh | 248 | South East | 1,574 |
| Any other religion | 67 | South West | 843 |
| Prefer not to say | 478 | Wales | 902 |
| Total | 14,221 | West Midlands | 1,324 |
| | | Yorkshire and Humber | 913 |
| | | Total | 14,221 |

*All analyses use
weighted EVENS data*

Altogether we recruited 14,200 people to take part in the survey. Among these are 674 Jewish people.

You will see that Jewish is included here as an ethnic group and a religious group. This, and the inclusion of Eastern European, diverges from the standard statistical office approach to ethnic group classification.

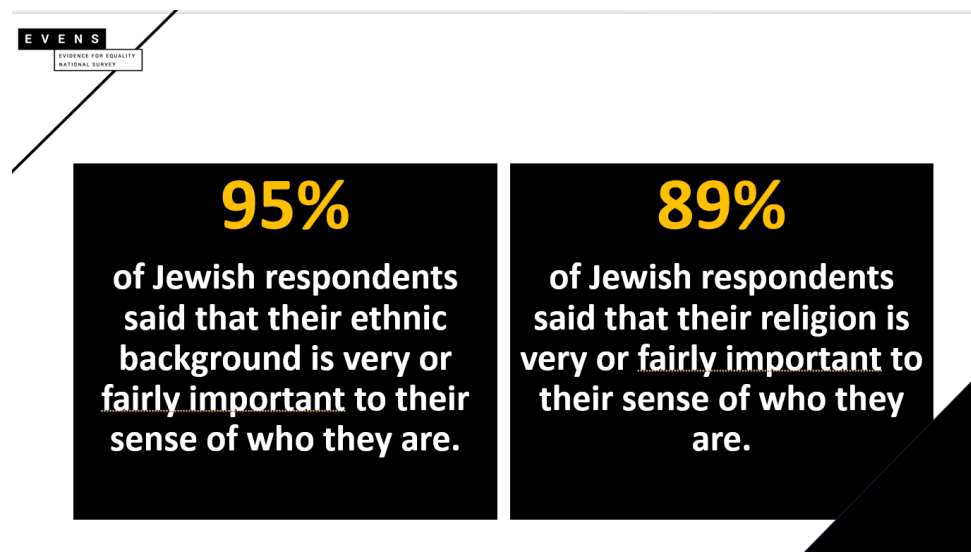
So, let us turn now to some findings from the survey.

ORIGINAL FINDINGS

JEWISH ARTICULATIONS OF ETHNICITY

First let us turn to questions of ethnic and religious identity. I am going to consider:

- How important is ethnic and religious identity to Jewish people in Britain?
- Are standard ethnic categories capturing how Jewish people want to articulate their ethnicity?



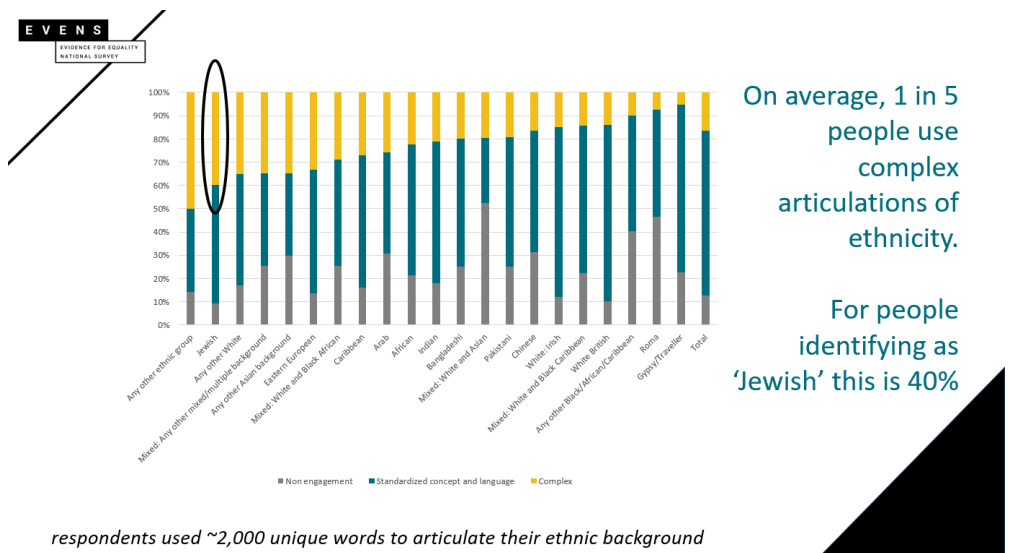
It's clear that ethnic and religious identity matter to Jewish people. 95% of Jewish respondents said that their ethnic background is very or fairly important to their sense of who they are. 89% of Jewish respondents said that their religion is very or fairly important to their sense of who they are.

We have here a reason to understand better experiences to do with ethnicity and religion.

As I've said, Jewish isn't a standard category in ethnicity data collection in Britain. But we are to study Jewish as a ethnicity in EVENS.

We asked people "How would you describe your ethnic background in your own words?"

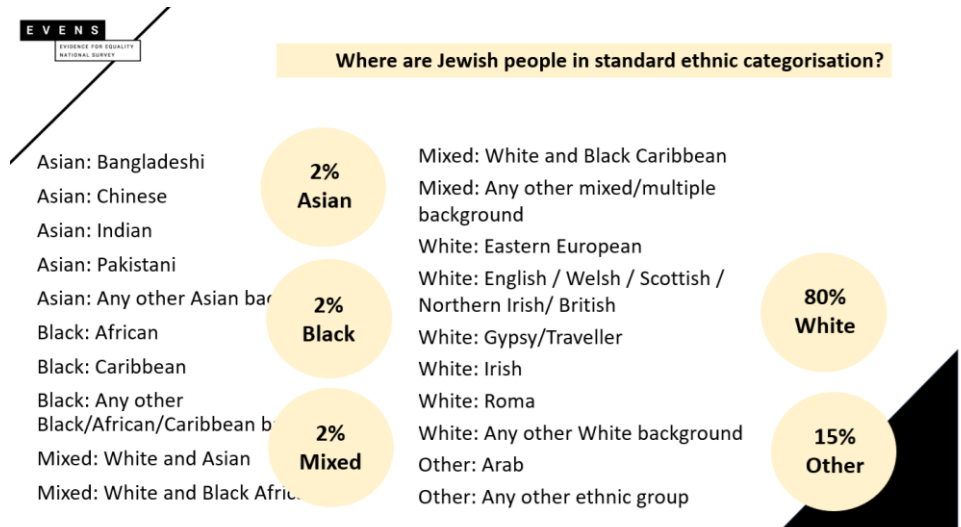
We have analysed the response from our 14,200 participants to identify the language and concepts that underpin articulations of ethnicity. We've grouped the articulation into those that use standard concepts and language which we define as those already captured in ethnic group classifications and complex articulations which express ideas and language not captured in current categories.



This chart (and we'll see lots of charts now!) gives a column for each ethnic group and each column is divided into the proportion of that group that used complex articulations of ethnicity – in yellow – and standard articulations of ethnicity – in green.

On average a fifth of people use complex articulations of ethnicity that are not captured by current classifications. For the Jewish respondents it was higher than this, at 40%.

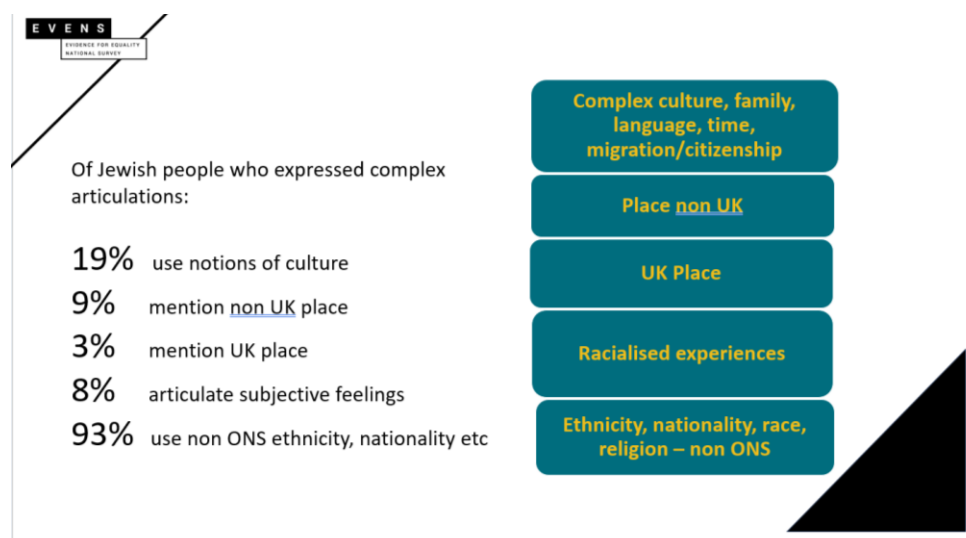
You may ask, for the 60% who articulate in ways captured by current standard categories, which categories do they choose?



These are the standard ethnic categories where Jewish isn't an option. In our data, 80% of Jewish people select a 'White' ethnic group, 15% selection an 'Other' ethnic group and there's around 2% each in Asian, Black or Mixed ethnic groups.

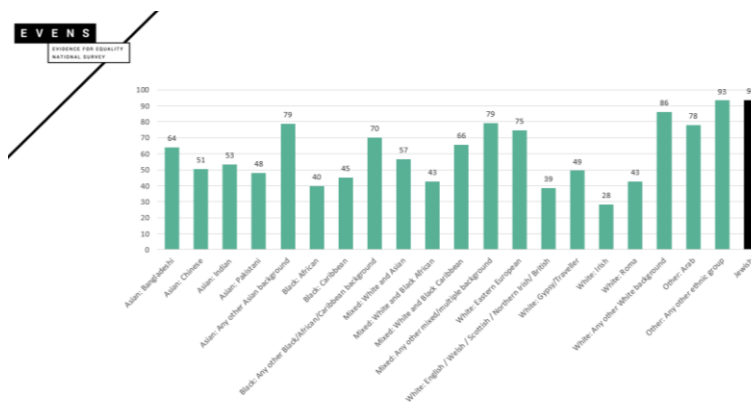
So, Jewish people are currently hidden in ethnic group categories, and a high proportion articulate their ethnicity in ways that are not captured by current categories.

We're able to decipher with these data the themes that characterise the complex articulations of ethnicity. We have distilled this to 5 categories: complex culture, place UK and non UK, racialised experience and concepts used in standard categorisations – race, nationality, religion – in ways that are not currently captured.



Of those Jewish people who use complex articulations of ethnicity, 93% described their ethnicity in terms of race, nationality or religion but in ways not currently captured in the categorisation, 12% incorporated a sense of place, 8% described racialised experience.

As we see in this chart, Jewish people – in the column at the far right - were more concerned than people in other ethnic groups to express their ethnicity in aspects of race or nationality not captured by standard categories.



% using articulations of nationality/race/religion not captured in standard ethnic group categories

Let's take a look at some examples of how Jewish people articulate their ethnicity.



Examples of articulations of ethnic identity

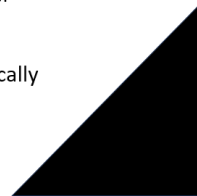
- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Jewish | White Jewish modern orthodox |
| Jewish white south african born | Jewish <u>non Orthodox</u> |
| White other <u>ewish</u> | Jewish by birth and culture. |
| White English <u>ewish</u> | Mixed English Irish Scottish & Jewish. |
| Jewish and white | Moroccan, Israeli , Anglo Irish , Jewish |
| Jewish - as an ethnic identity | Half White British, half Jewish |
| Ashkenazi British Jewish | Orthodox Jewish |
| Jewish Scottish White | Jewish European |
| British Jewish | |



Jewish: parents and myself born in Monmouthshire; grandparents immigrated from Russia beginning of last century.

I am Jewish: my maternal grandmother came to the UK from Poland in 1914, and my maternal paternal great-grandparents came to the UK from Lithuania in 1890. My paternal maternal great-grandfather was Jewish, born in Birmingham, and both his paternal grandparents came to the UK from Poland in about 1825. My paternal paternal line was not Jewish. Somewhere back on that line I think there were probably French people. Since my dear mother was Jewish, I am Jewish. I feel Jewish.

I tick the box 'white British' because that is where I most fit in but I am ethnically Jewish descend from Latvian immigrants



So, what have we learnt from this?

- For the vast majority of Jewish people, ethnic and religious identity are very important to their sense of who they are
- In standard ethnic group categorisation Jewish people are invisible, predominantly within White and Other categories
- When asked, Jewish people articulate their ethnicity in terms of Jewishness, culture and place

This is quite strong evidence to encourage official statistical agencies and producers of big data to reconsider the inclusion of Jewish as an ethnic category.

JEWISH EXPERIENCES OF RACISM

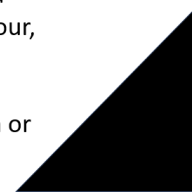
Let's take a moment to recap why categorisation matters: it makes groups visible. This includes in terms of recognising experiences of racism.

So let's turn now to the question what is the prevalence of experience of racism for Jewish people in Britain and how this compares with other ethnic and religious groups.



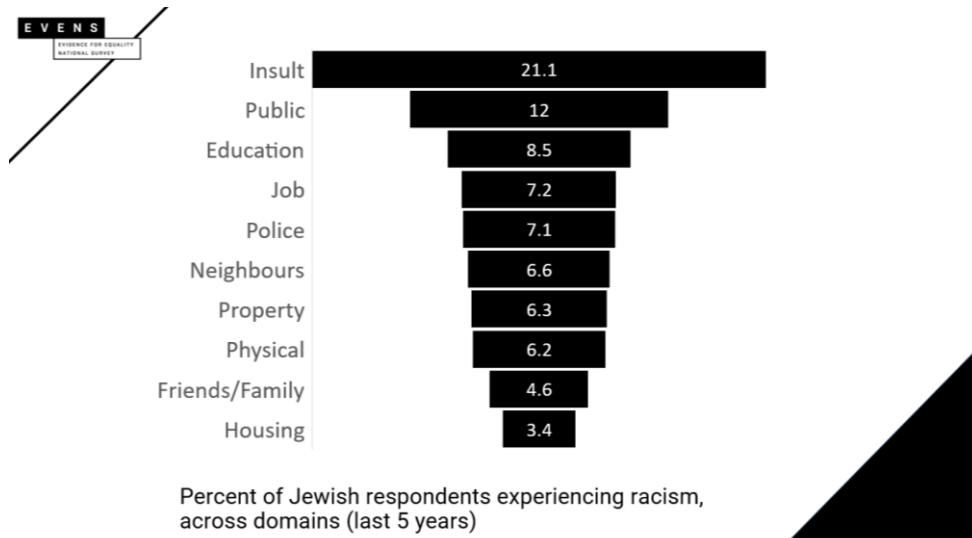
Racism questions in EVENS ask about experience and 'unfair treatment for reasons to do with ethnicity, race, colour or religion' in relation to:

- Insult
- Property Damage
- Physical attack
- Education
- In public
- By police
- Housing
- Neighbours
- Friends/family
- Last year
- Last 5 Years
- Last 10 years
- Over 10 years ago
- Do you worry about being harassed because of your ethnicity, race, colour, or religion?
- How did you respond to these experiences of racial discrimination or unfair treatment?

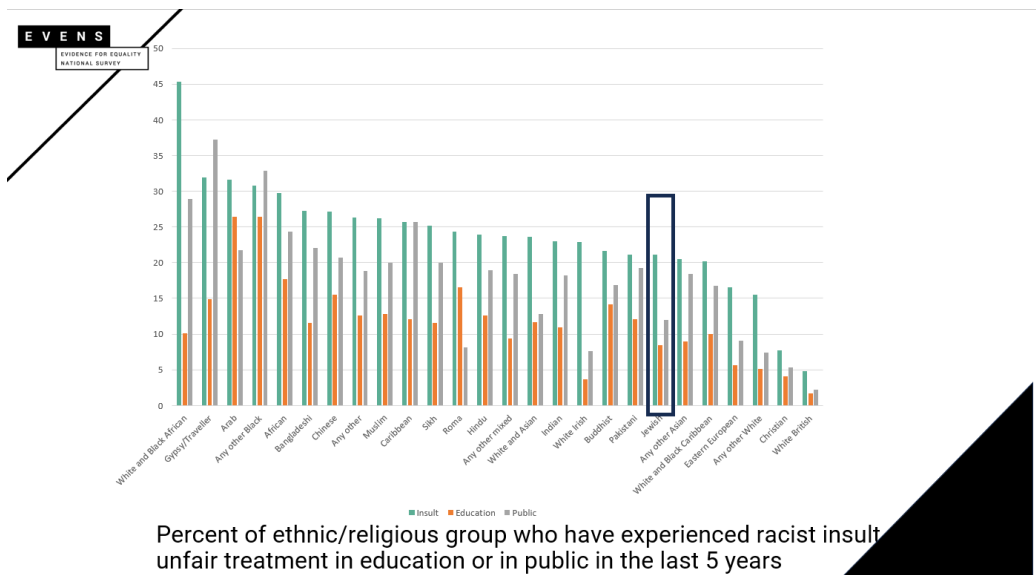


We have very rich information in EVENS about experiences of racism, across different aspects of life and different times of life and also information about worry about racism and responses to racism.

We asked about experiences and unfair treatment 'for reasons to do with ethnicity, race, colour or religion; across many domains and a number of time periods.

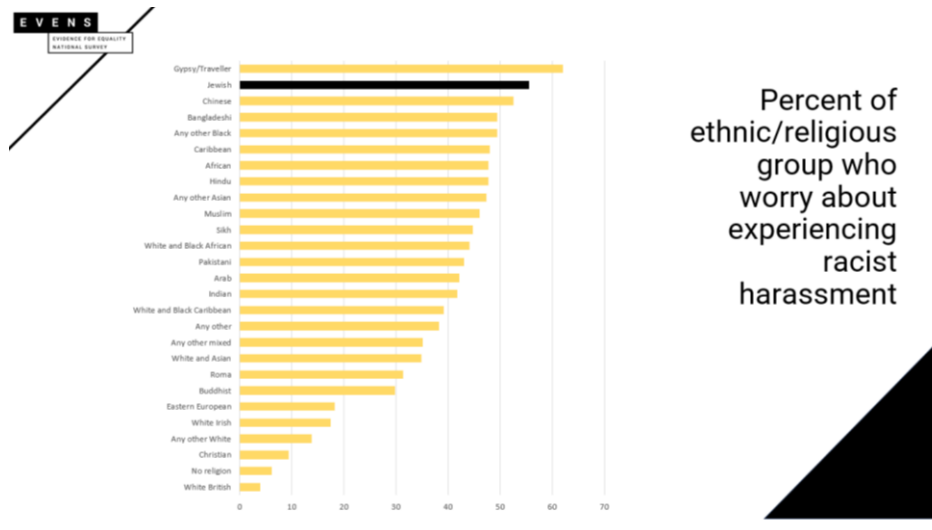


This chart shows the prevalence of types of racism for Jewish people in EVENS. For Jewish people in the survey the most common type of experience of racism was insult: one in five Jewish people has experienced racist insult in the last 5 years. Ten percent of people had also been treated unfairly in public and in education.



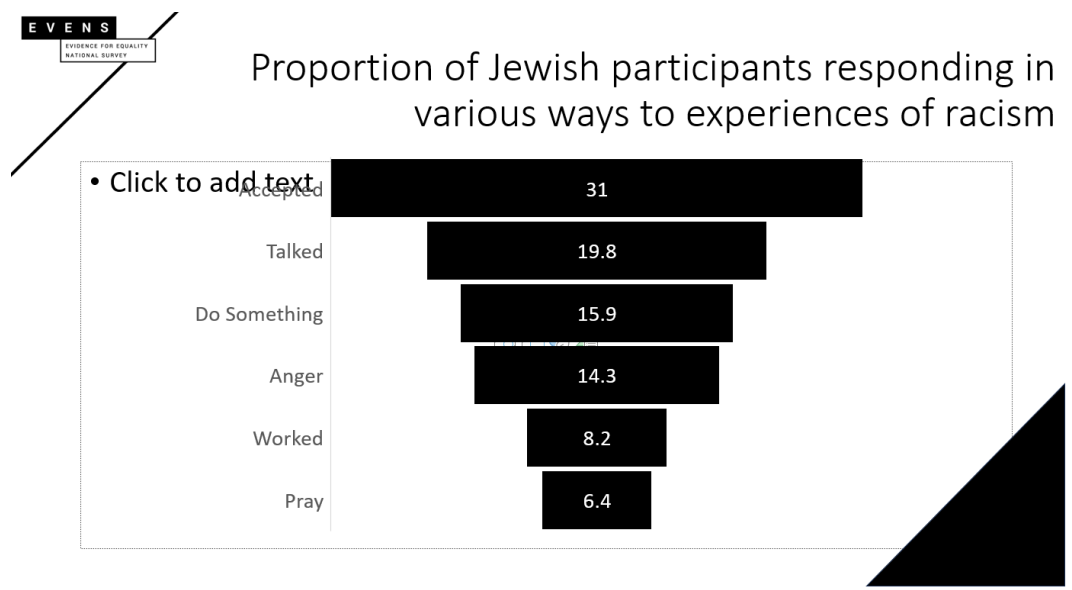
How does this compare to other ethnic and religious groups? This chart shows the percent of each ethnic or religious group that has experienced racist insult, unfair treatment in education and in public in the last 5 years. We see that the level of experiencing racist insult for Jewish people is around the same as for Pakistani,

Indian, Irish and Other Asian. Unfair treatment in education for Jewish is among the lowers across ethnic groups other than White groups.

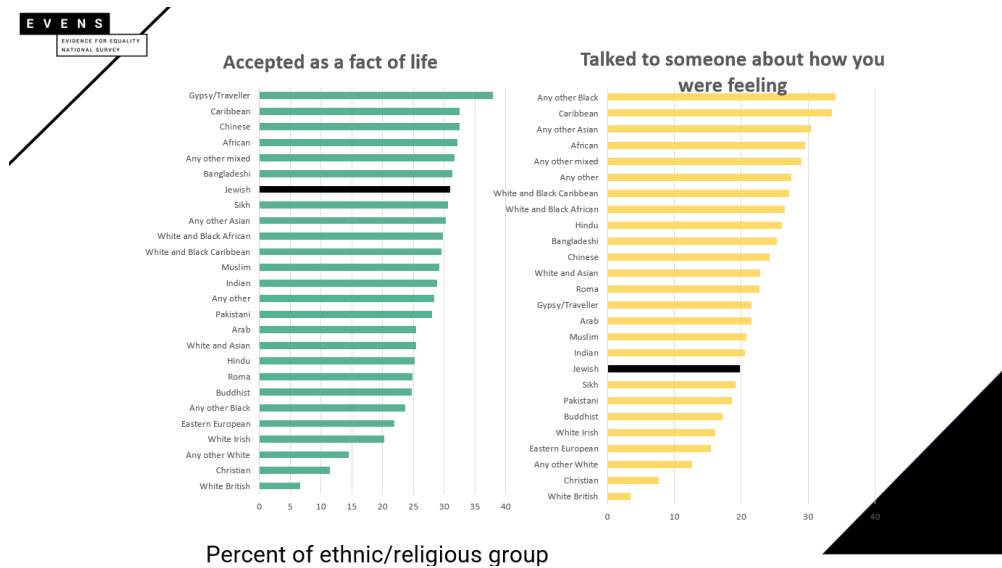


This is quite a striking result: it presents the proportion of each ethnic or religious group that worries about experiencing racist harassment. The Jewish figure of 56% ranks second only to Gypsy/Traveller participants: worrying about harassment is the experience for most Jewish people.

How do Jewish people respond to racist experiences, and how does this compare to other groups?

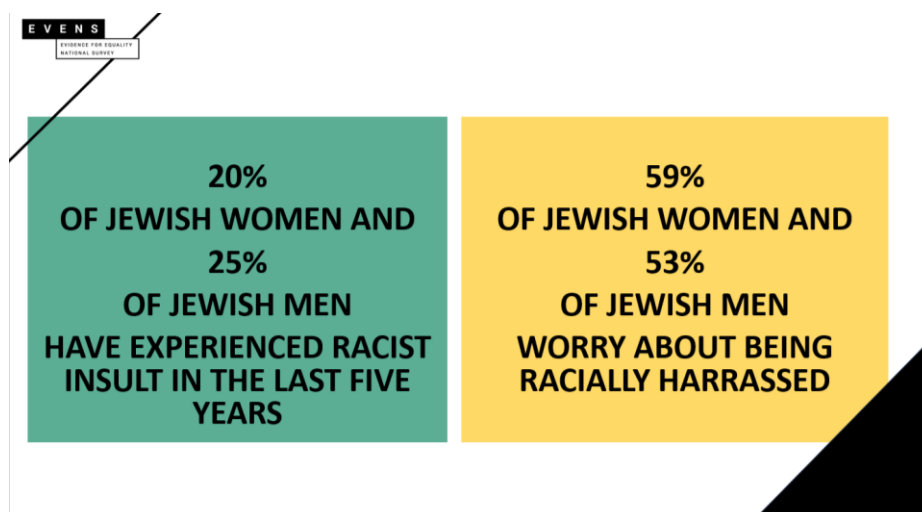


We see that a higher proportion of Jewish people than other groups accept racism as a fact of life; and a lower proportion that other groups talk to someone about how you were feeling.



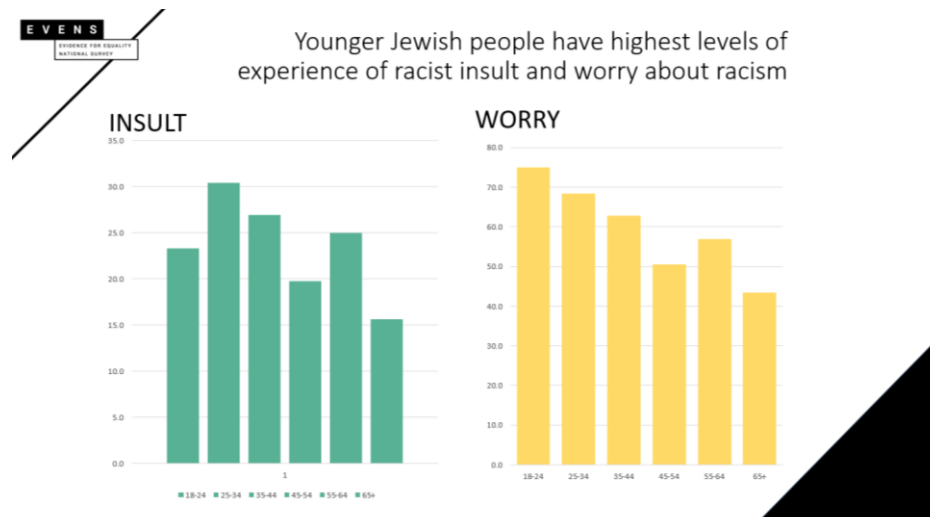
To summarise, around a fifth of Jewish people report a recent experience of racism. This is a lower prevalence than for most ethnic and religious groups. Jewish people also have relatively high levels of accepting racism without responding to it. However, Jewish people have, relatively, very high levels of worry about racism.

In my final presentation of analysis I want to understand a little more about how experiences of insult and worry about racism are patterned within the Jewish group. I will show this in relation to sex, age, synagogue attended and frequency of wearing ethnic clothes.

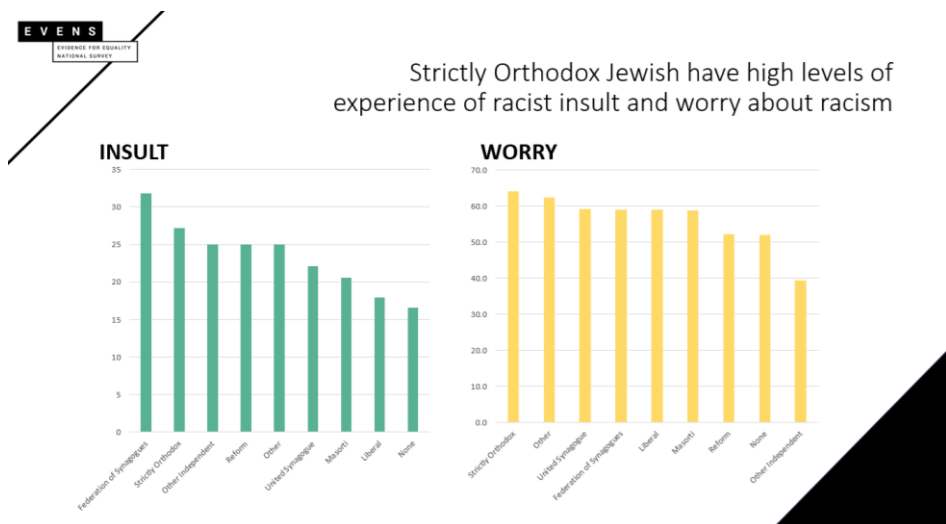


We see that:

- women have lower proportions of being insulted than men but higher rates of worrying about being racially harassed;



- younger Jewish people have higher proportions experiencing insult and being worried compared to older Jewish people;



- highest proportions of insult and worry are found for Strictly Orthodox Jews;



Higher proportions of Jewish people who always/frequently wear clothes connected to their ethnic identity experience racist insult and worry about racism



- highest proportions of insult and worry are found for those who always/frequently wear clothes connected to their ethnic identity.

CONCLUSION

The age of big data brings new opportunities and challenges for understanding inequalities.

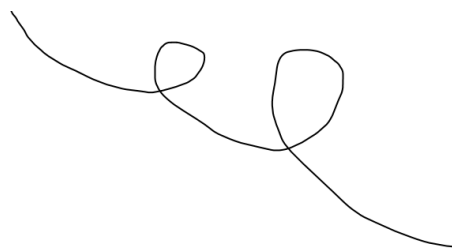
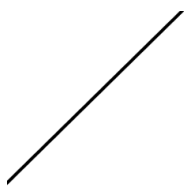
But on the question of recognition – in a political sense and motivated by social justice – big data, which Davies argues is driven by a politics of reputation, make it very complex to know who is being represented and who is not.

There remains a place for what might be called traditional critical quantitative social science including social surveys like EVENS.

Using EVENS, I have suggested that Jewish may be appropriate as an official ethnic category in Britain, on the basis of a mis-match between existing categories and Jewish self-articulation. We've seen levels of experience of racism for Jewish people that are comparable to other ethnic and religious groups; greater levels of acceptance of racist experience; and high levels of worry about harassment particularly for young Jewish people.

I recognise that who is included in surveys and how is a political decision – I do not argue that the data are apolitical or without orientation. But they do allow us to present findings with confidence that they can be used as representative of groups, and thus to robustly give voice to experiences that are marginalised.

If we don't continue to critically reflect on ethnic categorisation and make innovations in data that we collect, there is a danger that Jewish experiences of inequality and racism stay hidden.



Thankyou

Acknowledgement: the EVENS survey was funded by the UKRI (ESRC) via the Centre on the Dynamics of Ethnicity (Grant References ES/W000849/1 and ES/V013475/1)



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