

Threads of Identity

**LGBTQ+ Jews of Color
in the Fabric
of Jewish Life**

Keshet
קשת

For LGBTQ+
equality in
Jewish life

Analysis and report prepared by
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Dear reader,

As Keshet's Jews of Color Program Manager, I have heard a consistent message from LGBTQ+ Jews of Color: We experience a significant lack of awareness, representation, and understanding of our unique experiences and challenges within the broader Jewish community, particularly from those who do not share our identities or lived experiences.

During my earliest days at Keshet, I was deeply inspired by the Jews of Color Initiative's (JoCI's) insightful 2021 study, "Beyond the Count," which beautifully illuminated the experiences of Jews of Color like never before. However, I noticed that there was still much to learn about the specific experiences of LGBTQ+ Jews of Color. Recognizing this gap, Keshet launched a survey—the first of its kind—designed to capture the unique experiences of LGBTQ+ Jews of Color in Jewish spaces.

Despite the scarcity of representation, literature, and research on the experiences of LGBTQ+ Jews of Color within the Jewish community, the need to foster a sense of belonging and establish systems of support is not a new one—it's a historic one. Like all Jews, LGBTQ+ Jews of Color deserve not just to survive, but to thrive. This can only occur through authentic consideration, supportive community, and access to the resources we need to flourish.

I hope this work contributes to and inspires the emerging field committed to understanding, improving, and representing the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ Jews of Color, highlighting the diversity found within the Jewish community. May our findings catalyze change and invite our community to more fully embrace, understand, and engage with our experiences and challenges.

For LGBTQ+ Jews of Color, this report is a love letter to us all. We deserve to be seen, loved, and supported in our authenticity, created *B'tzelem Elohim*—in God's image. Whether joyful or challenging, our experiences deserve to be heard, documented, and shared. Like individual threads in a tapestry, each piece of our stories is distinct and purposeful, coming together to create a vibrant and inseparable whole. As you read through the responses, I hope you find solidarity and reassurance, knowing you are not alone and that your story matters.

L'Shalom,

Sage Cassell-Rosenberg
Keshet Jews of Color Program Manager

Executive Summary [top](#)

Threads of Identity contains the findings of Keshet’s groundbreaking survey exploring the experiences of LGBTQ+ Jews of Color in Jewish spaces. It highlights the intersectionality of their identities—race, gender, sexuality, and religion—and how this creates both pride and significant challenges within the community. The findings reveal a complex emotional landscape where a lack of support, representation, and biases from fellow Jewish community members often lead to feelings of isolation, exclusion, and the need to compartmentalize aspects of their identity. Despite these obstacles, LGBTQ+ Jews of Color remain committed to embracing all of who they are, calling for Jewish spaces to reflect the true diversity of the community, and to be more inclusive of their unique needs.

For this report, LGBTQ+ Jews of Color refers to those who identify as both part of the LGBTQ+ community and as Jews of Color.



Key Findings



83%

of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their **sense of belonging in the Jewish community has been negatively impacted** by situations related to their sexual orientation, gender expression, race, or ethnicity.



89%

of respondents have **encountered microaggressions or stigmatizing perceptions** in Jewish spaces, with 50% reporting that these incidents occur frequently or very frequently.



81%

of respondents report **struggling to find other LGBTQ+ Jews of Color** or spaces where they can connect with them, while 91% prioritize fostering these connections.



86%

of respondents **disagreed or strongly disagreed that there are sufficient support systems or resources** for LGBTQ+ Jews of Color to turn to.



88%

of respondents reported a **lack of representation and understanding** of LGBTQ+ Jews of Color in the Jewish community.



77%

of respondents **feel burdened** by the need to explain aspects of their sexual orientation, gender expression, race, or ethnicity.



Themes



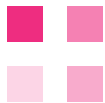
The Complexity of Intersectionality

Defining “Intersectionality,” a key component to understanding the intersecting identities of LGBTQ+ Jews of Color.



Layered Consciousness

Moving beyond a binary framework, LGBTQ+ Jews of Color develop heightened self-awareness and nuanced perceptions within Jewish spaces due to the complex intersections of their identities.



Compartmentalization

Acknowledging and addressing the way LGBTQ+ Jews of Color routinely have to make certain parts of their identity “smaller” to navigate certain social settings.



Cognitive Dissonance

Describing the inner turmoil many LGBTQ+ Jews of Color experience as they reflect on the affirming, as well as discriminatory experiences they have in Jewish communal settings.



Feelings of Isolation

Naming the perpetual “otherness” that many LGBTQ+ Jews of Color experience in Jewish settings, especially when lacking resources or peers who share one or more of their identities.



Challenging Norms and Expectations

Calling on the community to resist defaulting to stereotypes about who looks and acts Jewish, reaffirming that there are many expressions of Judaism.



The Burden of Educating

Highlighting the emotional, intellectual, and physical cost of LGBTQ+ Jews of Color being called on to educate others on their or their community’s experiences.



Resilience

Regrounding the conversation by highlighting the unwavering commitment of LGBTQ+ Jews of Color to embrace their Jewish identity and participate in Jewish life despite facing discrimination and marginalization.



Recommendations for Supporting LGBTQ+ Jews of Color

Based on respondents' insights, the following recommendations offer concrete steps for supporting and empowering LGBTQ+ Jews of Color in a truly impactful way:



Deepen Awareness

CHALLENGE YOUR ASSUMPTIONS

Engage in self-reflection to identify any biases or assumptions you may hold about Jewish identity and the intersecting identities of LGBTQ+ Jews of Color. Acknowledge how these biases shape your perceptions and interactions, and commit to actively challenging them to enhance your self-awareness and minimize harm.

MANAGE CURIOSITY

LGBTQ+ Jews of Color should never be treated as curiosities or questioned about their identities in ways others are not. Curiosity is natural, but it must never come at the expense of someone's dignity; everyone deserves to belong fully without being reduced to "otherness."

EDUCATE YOURSELF AND OTHERS

LGBTQ+ Jews of Color often bear the burden of educating others about their identities. By taking the initiative to educate yourself and others, you help shift this responsibility, reducing their emotional labor and fostering deeper understanding.



Be an Ally

LEARN TO BE AN ALLY

Don't assume you know how to be an ally to someone else. Allyship is a continuous learning process, and there's no one-size-fits-all approach. Take the time to listen, learn, and tailor your support to the specific needs of LGBTQ+ Jews of Color on a case-by-case basis.

DECENTER YOURSELF

Allyship means shifting the focus away from your ego and needs. The goal isn't validation but genuinely understanding how to support LGBTQ+ Jews of Color. This begins with asking how you can best be there for them and, most importantly, listening to their needs without imposing your own.

CREATE SPACE TO LISTEN

Begin by checking in with LGBTQ+ Jews of Color to ask if there is anything specific that would be helpful to them before offering advice or solutions. Allow them to share their experiences freely, without interruption, and listen attentively, holding back your perspective, assumptions, or solutions unless explicitly invited.



Take Action

SUPPORT DIVERSITY INITIATIVES

Donate to and encourage funding for spaces that provide support, resources, and/or education benefiting LGBTQ+ Jews of Color. Spread the word about leaders, events, and initiatives that amplify the representation of LGBTQ+ Jews of Color.

BE AN ACTIVE WITNESS

When witnessing discrimination or harm against an LGBTQ+ Jew of Color, take in the details and remember what happened. Name the harm you saw to validate their experience and ensure it is recognized. This shifts the burden from the person experiencing harm to the community, making it easier to hold the appropriate parties accountable.

SEE SOMETHING, DO SOMETHING

If you witness discrimination or harm, take immediate action. Whether by intervening at the moment or offering support afterward, standing up ensures those impacted feel seen, heard, and supported.

Research Design

At the beginning of 2024, Keshet designed and released an anonymous survey of LGBTQ+ Jews of Color. The survey was available between February 18, 2024, and September 22, 2024. This survey used a convenience/snowball sampling approach, which involved a combination of targeted outreach and person-to-person sharing. The survey was distributed through Keshet's digital and in-person communications, featured on the Keshet website, shared by organizational partners and leaders, and re-shared by community members to further amplify Keshet's reach and impact.

The survey consisted of 7 Likert-style and three open-ended narrative questions asking about the types of experiences and emotions respondents have had as LGBTQ+ Jews of Color navigating Jewish communal life. Questions were inspired and informed by the "Count Me In" survey, launched in 2021 as part of research commissioned by the JoCI.

The survey received 107 total attempts. After removing incomplete responses and ineligible respondents, 98 usable entries remained.* These data are represented in the present report. Due to question-level missing data (respondent skips), the sample size for demographic questions is 90. The quantitative analysis included descriptive statistics for all demographic and substantively relevant items. The qualitative analysis used an emergent thematic coding approach to identify trends in respondents' attitudes and experiences.

Though the small sample size, approach to data collection, and data analysis methods limit the generalizability of these findings, the substantive message authentically reflects the perspectives of the survey respondents and speaks to well-established patterns of experiences among marginalized people of many backgrounds.

*9 respondents were excluded from analysis: 8 who were LGBTQ+ but White, non-Hispanic, and one who was non-White but not LGBTQ+, based on self-reported demographic identities.

FREQUENTLY USED ACRONYMS:

POC - Person/People of Color

JOC - Jew(s) of Color

QJOC - Queer Jew of Color

BIPOC - Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

LGBTQ+ - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and more...



Respondents

In some cases, demographic identities may total more than 100% because respondents could self-describe aspects of their race, gender, sexuality, and Jewish identity. To honor the full fabric of this community and those individualized responses, we are highlighting some of the most represented identities.

Location

20 states, plus Washington, DC and 4 international locations

MOST REPRESENTED STATES:

California (19%)

New York (14%)

Massachusetts (11%)

Age

RESPONDENTS WERE PREDOMINANTLY OLDER GEN Z AND MILLENNIALS:

- More than 33% ages 25-34

- More than 50% ages 25-44

Race

- More than a third (36%) identified as "mixed race or multi-racial"

- 19% identify as White and one or more other race

MOST SELECTED TERMS (NON-EXCLUSIVE):

Latinx/Hispanic (31%)

Black (28%)

African American (27%)

Asian (17%)

Gender

MOST SELECTED TERMS (NON-EXCLUSIVE):

Queer (32%)

Cis woman (24%)

Nonbinary (21%)

Trans man (19%)

Gender nonconforming (16%)

Sexuality

MOST SELECTED TERMS (NON-EXCLUSIVE):

Queer (56%)

Gay (22%)

Lesbian (22%)

Bisexual (20%)

Pansexual (20%)

Jewish Identity

- 18% are "Just Jewish"

- More than a third (38%) are Jews by Choice

MOST SELECTED TERMS (NON-EXCLUSIVE):

Reform (33%)

Conservative (26%)

Reconstructionist (17%)

Exploration of Themes [top](#)

In the following pages we shift from demographic data to an exploration of the conceptual trends that emerged from the responses of LGBTQ+ Jews of Color, identifying key patterns in their experiences as they navigate Jewish spaces.




The Complexity of Intersectionality



Feelings of Isolation



Layered Consciousness



Challenging Norms and Expectations



Compartmentalization



The Burden of Educating



Cognitive Dissonance



Resilience

The Complexity of Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a term and concept introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw that is used to describe the way that different facets of identity operate together to inform our experiences of marginalization and oppression. **The concept of intersectionality teaches us that each part of who we are—our race, gender, sexuality, religion, socioeconomic class, and other identities—shapes our experiences in distinct yet interconnected ways as we navigate our lives, influencing our behaviors, social interactions, and engagement with institutions and government.**

Like a tapestry woven from many threads, these intersecting identities form the intricate fabric of each individual. Embracing this multifacetedness allows us to take a more nuanced view of ourselves and those around us, helping us see both commonalities and differences. Acknowledging these variations better enables us to appreciate the unique perspectives of others and understand how race, gender, sexuality, and other identities may intersect to create complex experiences of both connection and marginalization.

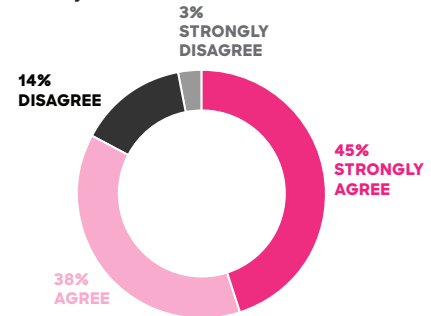
For all Jews in America, holding a marginalized identity is an inherent part of their experience. However, for LGBTQ+ Jews of Color, intersectionality highlights the particular ways in which being LGBTQ+, a Person of Color, and Jewish can be a source of pride while also presenting unique forms of discrimination.

The vast majority of respondents, more than 80%, shared that they have had experiences in Jewish communal settings related to “one or many” of their identities that challenged their sense of belonging in those spaces. Respondents wrote of both immense pride and challenges faced when maneuvering Jewish spaces at the intersection of these identities, often performing a delicate balancing act in the face of racism, homophobia, and transphobia.

One described their experiences in Jewish spaces as “exhausting but also an opportunity to build bridges,” adding that LGBTQ+ Jews of Color in Jewish spaces need “support and affirming spaces. We also need allies through our straight/cis Jews of Color.”

Directly addressing the intersectional experiences of LGBTQ+ Jews of Color allows the Jewish community to both challenge cultural biases and stereotypes of Jewish identity and expand the community’s understanding of itself.

“Because of one or many of my identities, I have encountered situations that negatively impacted my sense of belonging within the Jewish community related to my sexual orientation, gender expression, race, or ethnicity.”



“We are 100% authentic holders of all our identities and will never accept being made to choose—overtly or subtly.”

“We will always feel connected to all or both sides of our identity and it’s not about simply feeling totally at ease in Jewish spaces. We will always be both/and. We can’t check parts of our identity at the door in order to engage with the Jewish part.”





“Will I be judged for the way I talk, believe, and express myself? Are they laughing behind my back because of my gender identity?”

“I feel a strange mix of belonging and rejection, of knowing that as a Jew I am accepted, and as a JOC I may be assumed to be Israeli (because of how I present) or get questions. But as an LGBT Jew, I hesitate. Depending on the space, I usually feel the need to take a ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ approach, only rarely being my full self for fear of people pushing me away (even if only partially).”

“I tread lightly when I enter Jewish spaces. I’m conscious that my actions (talk, hand gestures, dress) will be judged. I’ve made wonderful friends at shul and other spaces I frequent, but I still feel different. It is a fact that I’m a Person of Color, did not grow up Jewish or live in the affluent neighborhood where my synagogue is located.”

Layered Consciousness

Diving even deeper into intersectionality, JoCI’s findings in “Beyond the Count” explored the “double consciousness” experienced by Jews of Color in Jewish spaces. Double consciousness, a term coined by W.E.B. Du Bois, originally described the mental process of Black men navigating racism in America via “looking at one’s self through the eyes of the [White] other.” In “Beyond the Count”, this concept of **double consciousness is utilized to explain the heightened awareness respondents possessed about how others might see them, particularly the racialized assumptions and stereotypes they might hold.**



Yet many LGBTQ+ Jews of Color described that entering Jewish spaces while holding more than just one marginalized identity intensified this self-awareness, layering additional lenses of consciousness through which they viewed themselves. This demonstrates that the experiences of LGBTQ+ Jews of Color go beyond what double consciousness accounts for.

As one respondent stated:

“Sometimes the apprehension is associated with feeling highly visible based on one or more identity traits—from race to size to queerness to self-expression through clothing, hair, and other body modification.” Adding, “These are the things I am thinking about as I’m feeling a steady anticipation, not inherently negative, but also not positive.” This statement demonstrates how LGBTQ+ Jews of Color navigate Jewish spaces with multiple layers of self-awareness.

Building upon W.E.B. Du Bois’s double consciousness, Triple Consciousness Theory (TCT), a concept introduced by Black feminists, was originally proposed to encapsulate the unique experiences of Black women navigating America, experiencing both racism and sexism due to their intersecting identities. TCT can also be utilized to understand the heightened self-awareness LGBTQ+ Jews of Color experience as they navigate Jewish spaces, where the intersection of multiple marginalized identities adds layers of complexity to how they see themselves and engage with others.



Compartmentalization

For many LGBTQ+ Jews of Color, the layered consciousness due to their intersecting identities brings on a **persistent fear of being seen as “too different”** for their Jewish communities to understand and fully embrace. **This dynamic leads many to compartmentalize—the process of mentally separating different aspects of the self to manage the tension between conflicting or difficult parts of one’s identity and experiences.** Respondents expressed deep concerns about exclusion, rejection, and even safety as they faced the intersection of racism, homophobia, and transphobia. This enduring anxiety about being misunderstood, harmed, and/or rejected led many to adjust their presentation or behavior in Jewish spaces as a way of maintaining both physical and psychological safety.

Illustrating this, one respondent shared:

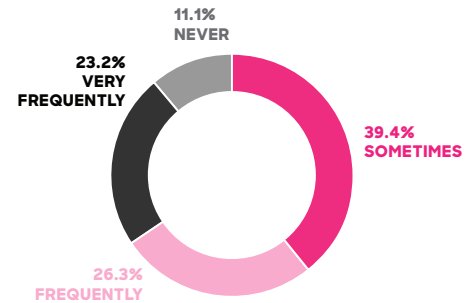
“Walking into Jewish spaces, I usually feel a sense of peace, joy and excitement to be connecting with other Jews. However, I also usually feel a sense of trepidation and anxiousness, wondering if someone I don’t know will see me and question why I am there or even if they might consider me to be dangerous.” They added that, in the face of this fear, they “wear a kippah daily, especially when going into Jewish spaces, so I am more likely to be read as Jewish and read to belong there.”

“I usually feel awkward since I’m the only Black person there. Additionally, I am stealth, so my LGBTQ+ identity doesn’t play much of a role (nor would I want it to). I feel awkward though because I can sometimes sense people staring at me, and I don’t know whether it’s because I am new or because I am Black.”

Many respondents also pointed to facing microaggressions and stigmatizing perceptions as a significant challenge, as shown in the chart on this page. Many wrote of how, in the face of anticipated or experienced harm, they consciously evaluated which parts of their identities might draw negative attention. These encounters led them to consider downplaying or even omitting certain aspects of themselves to avoid discomfort or rejection.

The constant process of compartmentalization was often described as an essential coping mechanism for balancing the complexities of their multiple identities. Additionally, this ongoing mental and emotional strain not only creates exhaustion, but deepens internal conflict as individuals feel they must constantly navigate spaces that may not fully accept them.

“I’ve experienced microaggressions or assumptions related to my identity as an LGBTQ+ Jew of Color within Jewish spaces.”





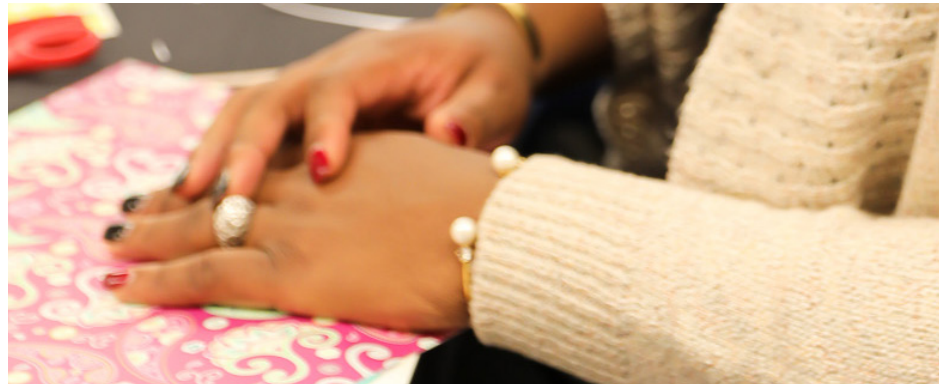
“I love being in my Jewish community, though there is always a moment of hesitation when meeting someone new about whether a microaggression is coming.”

“I feel a deep love for Judaism, for studying Torah, observing Shabbat; I brace myself for racist, pearl-clutching victimhood, cis-het commentary. I don’t feel any safer about police at the entrance, they’re just another thing to be afraid of, especially with me being an autistic JOC.”

“As an immigrant, it feels like I’m immigrating all over again—a place that is welcoming and warm, but I still stick out like a sore thumb.”

Cognitive Dissonance

Respondents frequently described entering Jewish spaces with a mix of emotions, such as a deep passion for Judaism and a longing for connection paired with apprehension and feelings of exclusion. **Many expressed a strong desire to engage with other Jews and Jewish spaces, yet they experienced a cognitive dissonance—the mental discomfort that occurs when holding conflicting feelings or beliefs—as they feared or faced being misunderstood or excluded while seeking to belong.** This emotional tug-of-war often diminished their sense of belonging, shaping and complicating their overall experiences in these spaces.



Capturing this tension, sharing both immense gratitude and intense caution, one respondent wrote:

“Being around other Jews gives me a powerful feeling of gratitude for this community, because I was denied it for a long time. I also feel anxiety—I’m scared that because I’m brown, because I’m walking in alone without family, I’ll be mistaken for a terrorist, or viewed as a threat. I feel embarrassed and afraid, both for other people and myself.”

Many respondents echoed these conflicting feelings of wanting to connect but fearing judgment. They expressed that their Jewish identity and their right to belong were often under scrutiny, leading to an enduring tension between feeling welcomed and feeling othered. The impact of this questioning undermines their sense of belonging and amplifies feelings of isolation within their own community, further complicating their emotional experiences in Jewish spaces.



Feelings of Isolation

Respondents shared that their emotional well-being was significantly impacted by the heightened anxiety and loneliness that came with being one of the few, or the only, LGBTQ+ Jews of Color in a given Jewish setting. **Nearly all respondents (91%) emphasized the importance of fostering connections with other LGBTQ+ Jews of Color, yet 81% reported difficulty finding both other LGBTQ+ Jews of Color and spaces where they could connect with them.**

Reflecting on this challenge, one respondent shared, “I do not relate to most of the people in the room. Few, if any, people are visibly BIPOC, and even fewer can be identified as queer. I feel shy because my experience is not commonly shared, and it’s difficult to find common ground to start a conversation.”

While respondents expressed varying degrees of belonging, many described being highly selective about which Jewish spaces they would engage with, often choosing familiar spaces or attending with people they knew to lessen feelings of anxiety. This selective engagement highlights the emotional strain of navigating spaces where one’s identity is often scrutinized or questioned.

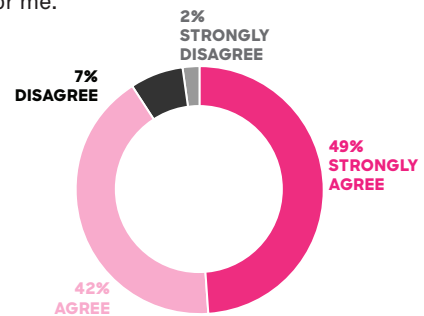
Despite this, many have come to accept that they may be the only LGBTQ+ Jew of Color in attendance. However, respondents noted that their anxiety was lower if they saw individuals who visibly shared at least one marginalized identity, such as LGBTQ+ people who are not Jews of Color or Jews of Color who do not identify as LGBTQ+.

In addition, 86% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that sufficient support systems and resources exist for LGBTQ+ Jews of Color to turn to. Even among those who wrote of primarily positive emotions in Jewish spaces, noticing a lack of individuals who shared any or all of their intersecting identities negatively impacted their sense of belonging. One respondent captured this statement:

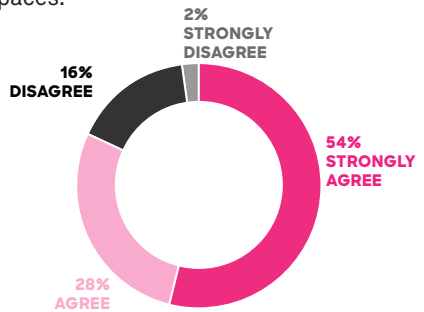
“When walking into Jewish spaces, I typically feel at home. That feeling often quickly disappears if I am the only JOC around because my defenses come up, and I am prepared to receive negative comments.”

This illustrates how the absence of visible diversity can shift a familiar environment into one that feels guarded or unwelcoming.

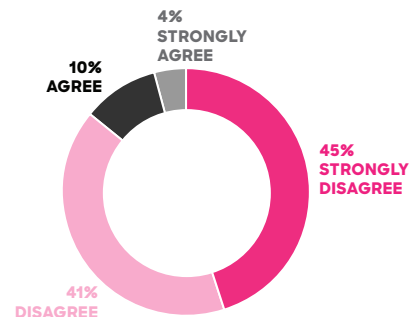
“Fostering connections and finding spaces with other LGBTQ+ Jews of Color is a priority for me.”



“I often struggle to find other LGBTQ+ Jews of Color or LGBTQ+ Jews of Color-specific spaces.”



“I feel that there are currently a sufficient amount of support systems and/or resources available for LGBTQ+ Jews of Color to turn to.”

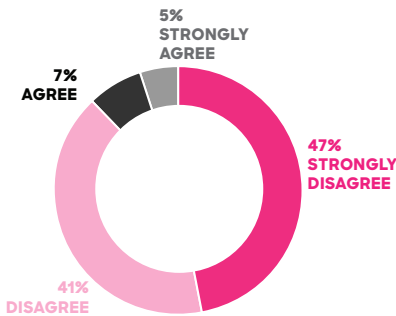


“I prefer to go where I’m known or been seen before. If I have to go somewhere new, I prefer not to go alone.”



Challenging Expectations and Norms

“I feel that there is a sufficient amount of visibility and representation of LGBTQ+ Jews of Color in the broader Jewish community.”



Nearly all respondents (88%) reported that there was a lack of representation and understanding of LGBTQ+ Jews of Color in the Jewish community. Amongst respondents, many shared a central wish for other Jews to know that LGBTQ+ Jews of Color exist and a hunger for any acknowledgment or representation of their existence and experiences in the Jewish community.

Respondents shared how their presence in Jewish spaces typically does not align with the mental image most people carry for what it means to “look or be Jewish.” Many described how often the presence of this bias led to lingering stares, questions about their background and conversion status, assumptions about their Jewish knowledge, or even questioning their reasons for being in Jewish communal settings. The data strongly suggest that whether or not these actions were intended to harm or exclude, their impact signaled a conditional and questionable state of belonging in these spaces.

“I often feel very hesitant and nervous. I know I don’t ‘look the part’ because I’m Black and usually hesitate when entering because I’m usually asked why I’m there. I’m there because I’m Jewish and trying to engage!”

“I have anxiety often coming into communal Jewish spaces. I am often seen as Other and that is how White Jews often engage me. I am often asked how I got there, if I am a convert, etc. It feels like I am expected to perform for my space rather than being allowed to simply exist in community.”

Respondents described feeling vulnerable to the biases and fears of those around them, with one writing:

“I usually feel like I have to prove my Jewishness, as I assume people who haven’t seen me before assume I am an outsider.”

This quote underscores the central issue: the constant questioning of one’s identity preventing full acceptance and belonging. Ongoing scrutiny rooted in bias fosters exclusion and intensifies the isolation LGBTQ+ Jews of Color experience, making it difficult for many to embrace their Jewish identity and participate in Jewish life without doubt or hesitation. This calls for the broader Jewish community to reevaluate their understanding of Jewish identity in ways that embrace and more accurately reflect the diverse nature of its members.



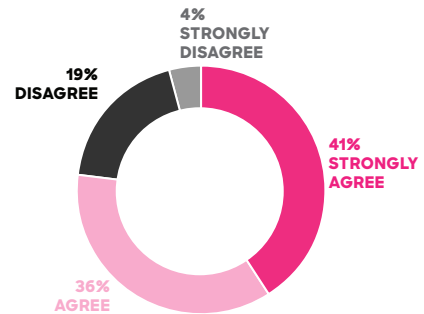
The Burden of Educating

The majority of respondents (77%) reported feeling burdened by the need to explain aspects of their sexual orientation, gender expression, race, or ethnicity. As a result, they often faced a dual challenge: confronting biases about any or all of their identities while also educating those around them. In seeking community, they were frequently positioned as advocates and educators tasked with helping others better understand their identities while simultaneously addressing and tackling their related biases. **This dual role often prevented them from fully engaging, spiritually or socially, in these spaces without harm or distraction.**

One respondent shared their frustration:

“I know that educating folks is so important, but you know what? I am kind of tired of always having to be ‘the one’—I wish folks were exposed and experienced enough that they could do some self-education so the burden does not always fall to the person perceived as ‘different.’”

“Because of one or many of my identities, I have felt burdened with explaining myself related to my sexual orientation, gender expression, race, or ethnicity.”



“We are Jews and yet are treated as curiosities. Do not ask for my story or even assume that I have one. Treat me like any other Jew.”

“I’m an educator by nature, but at times I feel burdened to take on the education of others...In this time of information technology, more people need to take the initiative to educate themselves.”



“Our intersecting identities make us resilient, and we aren’t going to change ourselves for access to resources.”

“We’re here, and we’re here to stay. A place must be made at the table for us because we are just as important as the ‘traditional’ faces and identities seen in Jewish spaces.”

“I wish that they knew that we can make spaces for ourselves. We don’t have to be satisfied or shrug and say ‘oh well.’ We can take the time and energy and turn it into community.”

Resilience

Within the stories of LGBTQ+ Jews of Color, respondents shared their dedication to both embracing their Jewish identity and participating in Jewish life despite the discrimination and marginalization they may face. Their resilience and determination are evident in their responses, fueled for many by a profound commitment to their faith and Jewish identity.

As one respondent reflected on their journey, their words demonstrated both a fierce spirit and steadfast dedication to their Judaism: **“This is home, where I live and work, and I’m here to make it a better place for everyone—even if I don’t feel as secure right now as I could.”**

However, this persistence does come with an emotional toll. One respondent shared: **“I usually realize I am the only—if one of few—People of Color at the synagogue or other Jewish space. My emotions are mixed. Sometimes, I am surprisingly full of pride and realize that I NEED to be there to disrupt the misconception that there aren’t Jews of Color. Other times, I am annoyed, tired, and resentful, wishing there were more folks who looked like me.”**

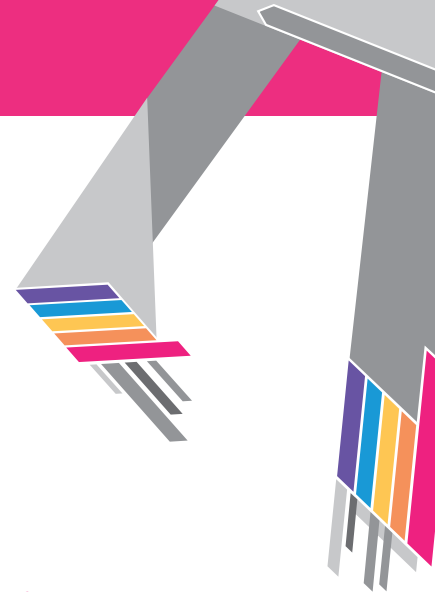


For some, this self-determination drives a desire to expand the norms of Jewish spaces, particularly in more traditional settings. They see their visibility as a beacon for others, embracing their identities with pride for those who cannot. One respondent shared their thoughts on the power of visibility: **“I think that visibility is the most important factor in improving Jewish environments for QJOC. Being proud and open about our identities helps to normalize it and show despite our differences, we are all Jewish and committed to Hashem and our communities.”** These stories embody the resilience that fuels their continued presence in spaces where they may still encounter adversity, proving that their identities and determination to exist fully in these spaces cannot be erased.



Recommendations for Supporting LGBTQ+ Jews of Color

The Threads of Identity report includes recommendations for the Jewish community to honor the full spectrum of its members by creating spaces where all Jews feel like they belong. By deepening its understanding of the experiences of LGBTQ+ Jews of Color, the Jewish community can better reflect its true diversity and take meaningful action toward fostering genuine inclusivity.



Deepen Awareness

Challenge Your Assumptions

Engage in self-reflection to identify any biases or assumptions you may hold about Jewish identity and the intersecting identities of LGBTQ+ Jews of Color. Acknowledge how these biases shape your perceptions and interactions, and commit to actively challenging them to enhance your self-awareness and minimize harm.

Manage Curiosity

LGBTQ+ Jews of Color should never be treated as curiosities or questioned about their identities in ways others are not. Curiosity is natural, but it must never come at the expense of someone's dignity; everyone deserves to belong fully without being reduced to "otherness."

Educate Yourself and Others

LGBTQ+ Jews of Color often bear the burden of educating others about their identities. By taking the initiative to educate yourself and others, you help shift this responsibility, reducing their emotional labor and fostering deeper understanding.

Be an Ally

Learn to Be an Ally

Don't assume you know how to be an ally to someone else. Allyship is a continuous learning process, and there's no one-size-fits-all approach. Take the time to listen, learn, and tailor your support to the specific needs of LGBTQ+ Jews of Color on a case-by-case basis.

Decenter Yourself

Allyship means shifting the focus away from your ego and needs. The goal isn't validation but a genuine understanding of how to support LGBTQ+ Jews of Color. This begins with asking how you can best be there for them and, most importantly, listening to their needs without imposing your own.

Create Space to Listen

Begin by checking in with LGBTQ+ Jews of Color to ask if there is anything specific that would be helpful to them before offering advice or solutions. Allow them to share their experiences freely, without interruption, and listen attentively, holding back your perspective, assumptions, or solutions unless explicitly invited.

Take Action

Support Diversity Initiatives

Donate to and encourage funding for spaces that provide support, resources, and/or education benefiting LGBTQ+ Jews of Color. Spread the word about leaders, events, and initiatives that amplify the representation of LGBTQ+ Jews of Color.

Be An Active Witness

When you witness discrimination or harm against an LGBTQ+ Jew of Color, be attentive. Name the details of what happened, validate the affected person's experience, and ensure that the harm does not go unrecognized. Being an active witness helps shift the burden off of the person experiencing harm and makes it easier for the appropriate parties to be held accountable.

See Something, Do Something

If you witness discrimination or harm, take immediate action. Whether by intervening at the moment or offering support afterward, standing up ensures those impacted feel seen, heard, and supported.

Concluding Thoughts

This report has explored the nuanced, intersectional experiences of LGBTQ+ Jews of Color, shedding light on how their identities—shaped by race, gender, sexuality, and religion—combine to create both pride and perseverance amidst the challenges they face within Jewish spaces. As they navigate these intersecting identities, LGBTQ+ Jews of Color demonstrate an unwavering commitment to embracing their Jewish identity despite the obstacles.

Our findings reveal the complex emotional and mental experiences of LGBTQ+ Jews of Color. The themes explored include heightened self-awareness driven by societal biases, the need to compartmentalize, and the isolation and anxiety caused by a lack of representation. We also examined how LGBTQ+ Jews of Color challenge traditional norms of Jewish identity while bearing the emotional toll of being both advocates and educators in their communities. Despite a deep passion for Judaism and a longing for connection, they face mixed emotions, holding both the desire for belonging with the pain of exclusion.

The rabbinic principle 'כל ישראל ערבים זה בזה' / 'all of Israel is responsible for one another' (Shavuot 39a) reminds us that every member of the Jewish community shares responsibility for the well-being of their fellow Jew. This principle of mutual accountability calls on the community to actively create spaces where all Jews, including LGBTQ+ Jews of Color, are welcomed, respected, and affirmed. This means the burdens and triumphs of one affect the whole, and it is only through collective care, mutual responsibility, and continued advocacy that the Jewish community can become a place where everyone, regardless of their identity, can thrive and fully embrace their Judaism.

At the heart of this work is a call for the broader Jewish community to reevaluate their understanding of Jewish identity in ways that embrace and more accurately reflect the diverse nature of its members. The findings contained in this report should be an invitation to community members to claim their responsibility for ensuring that Jewish spaces are ones where all Jews feel a sense of belonging, value, and empowerment and where the experiences of LGBTQ+ Jews of Color are not only acknowledged but celebrated.

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