

DEVELOPING CULTURALLY GROUNDED SUPPORT FOR
PARENTS: A PARADIGM FOR ENHANCING LGBTQ+
ACCEPTANCE IN JEWISH FAMILIES

by

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A THESIS

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Familial acceptance is a significant protective factor for LGBTQ+ youth. Affirming support networks can buffer against suicidality, anxiety, and depression, which are prevalent among this demographic. Literature suggests that tapping into families' strengths and values is a vital component of promoting understanding and acceptance of diverse gender identities and sexualities. Although religion is an integral organizing principle in the lives of many families, religion and LGBTQ+ identity are often framed as fundamentally incompatible. Particularly little attention has been paid to how minoritized ethnoreligious values may lend themselves to faith-based familial acceptance interventions. This thesis posits that the Jewish tradition of rigorous questioning and theological debate is compatible with an openness to malleable notions of gender and sexuality. Through a survey of Jewish parents, this project characterizes status quo parent utilization of Jewish sources of social and parenting support and current degree of accepting attitudes and behaviors. The present study evaluates Jewish parents' degree of endorsement of LGBTQ+-affirming religious texts. Recommendations for a culturally specific paradigm for promoting parental acceptance using LGBTQ+-affirming Jewish texts are discussed.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

LGBTQ+ youth are growing up in a world in which their identities and basic humanity are often the subject of contestation and attacks. The biopsychosocial toll of stigma and discrimination experienced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, non-binary, gender expansive, two-spirit, queer, and questioning youth, and other members of the community constitutes a public health crisis (Barbee et al., 2022; Livingston, 2022; Meneses & Grimm, 2012). Although the LGBTQ+ experience is all too often framed strictly from a deficit perspective, queerness is also replete with opportunities for connection, community, care, and joy. In order to ensure all LGBTQ+ youth have the opportunity to thrive, immediate interventions are needed to safeguard the civil liberties of members of marginalized gender and sexual identity groups, as well as to enhance social understanding and acceptance.

Social rejection, especially by family, has myriad adverse effects on the wellbeing of LGBTQ+ youth. Familial rejection is also associated with elevated levels of depression, anxiety suicidality, substance use disorders, and risky sexual behavior (Ryan et al., 2010; Ryan et al., 2023). Conversely, familial acceptance is a significant protective factor against many of the same mental health outcomes that are exacerbated by rejection, including suicidality, depression, and substance use (Ryan et al., 2010). Despite ample evidence underscoring the benefits of familial acceptance and the detriments of rejection, there is a paucity of existing interventions at the family-system level (Newcomb et al., 2019; Parker et al., 2018).

Within this limited body of support programs and research studies, few attend to the intersection of religion and familial acceptance. Even fewer are attuned to the unique experiences and needs of members of minoritized ethnoreligions, including Judaism. Jews make up just 2.4% of the adult U.S. population and are often overlooked in human services and social work cultural

competency literature (Hodge & Bodie, 2021; Pew Research Center, 2021). While prior content analyses have broadly assessed social work literature about religion as a generic category (Hardy, 2013, Hodge et al., 2021; Tompkins et al., 2006), authors in a 2021 content analysis of nine foremost social work “discourse shaping periodicals” did not identify any literature seeking to prepare clinicians to work with Jewish individuals and communities (Hodge & Boddie, 2021, p.1). As of the most recent content analysis of American Psychological Association-accredited psychology doctoral programs, only 8% of program curricula discussed Jews as a distinct cultural group (Priester et al., 2008).

The scarcity of literature and clinician education attending to both family acceptance and Jewish identity converges, resulting in a lack of knowledge about best practices for supporting Jewish parents of LGBTQ+ youth. Google Scholar searches for “Jewish family acceptance of LGBTQ+ youth” and “Programs for Jewish parents of LGBTQ+ youth” yield sparse results, none of which appear to be evidence-based studies of affirming parenting programming that provide outcome data. Because there is no readily available outcome data about the efficacy of the few existing affirming Jewish parenting programs, nor an assessment of the perceived acceptability or desirability of such programming among parents, this study sets out to assess the need for parental support and establish parents’ level of interest in LGBTQ+ affirming parenting resources and programming by answering the questions:

1. What sources of information and social support are Jewish parents currently utilizing?
2. To what extent do Jewish parents exhibit LGBTQ+ affirming and rejecting parenting behaviors in the status quo?

3. Among Jewish parents, what is the perceived benefit of integrating Jewish values into parenting interventions regarding LGBTQ+ identity?

These questions help to establish whether Jewish-focused programming would be beneficial for parents by identifying the current degree of accepting and rejecting behaviors that could be intervened upon, as well as the accessibility and desirability of affirming resources.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The State of LGBTQ+ Youth Wellbeing

Minority Stress

LGBTQ+ youth are rendered vulnerable by continued sociopolitical marginalization. Minority stress theory is a leading framework used to conceptualize the additive impact of existing at the intersection of multiple marginalities on individuals' well-being. The minority stress perspective suggests that LGBTQ+ youth experience additional stress, beyond that associated with life cycle events and environmental stressors. This stress is related to the targeting, stigmatization, and victimization of their minoritized gender or sexual identity group (Meyer, 2003). LGBTQ+ Minority Stress Experiences (MSEs) are unique to those who hold minoritized gender and sexual identities and are acute and chronic in nature. These stressors manifest both distally and proximally.

Distal stressors are those that exist independently of the given subject's perceptions, such as structural, institutional, and ideological realities. Discriminatory policies and attitudes are distal factors that bear on the daily lives of LGBTQ+ youth, as are microaggressions and bullying (Ferbežar et al., 2024). Proximal stressors involve an individual's responses to these external factors, which shape internal reality. "Proximal, subjective appraisal" can be understood "as a manifestation of distal, objective environmental conditions." (Meyer, 2003, p. 5). Because stressors are mediated by perception, beliefs, and coping skills, the way individuals integrate and internalize distal social realities and messages varies. However, proximal stress often manifests through cognitive and behavioral functions, such as expecting and preparing for rejection,

attempting to conceal one's identity, and internalizing homonegative, cisnormative attitudes (Meyer, 2003).

MSEs are tied to depressogenic effects and other deleterious mental health outcomes (Fulginiti et al., 2020; Meyer, 2003). MSEs, such as repeated interpersonal and structural social rejection, may result in a thwarted sense of belonging, which is a risk factor for suicidality. LGBTQ+ youth face disproportionate rates of suicidality, depression, and anxiety (Green et al., 2021). Parental support—or lack thereof—may mediate mental health outcomes among this vulnerable demographic.

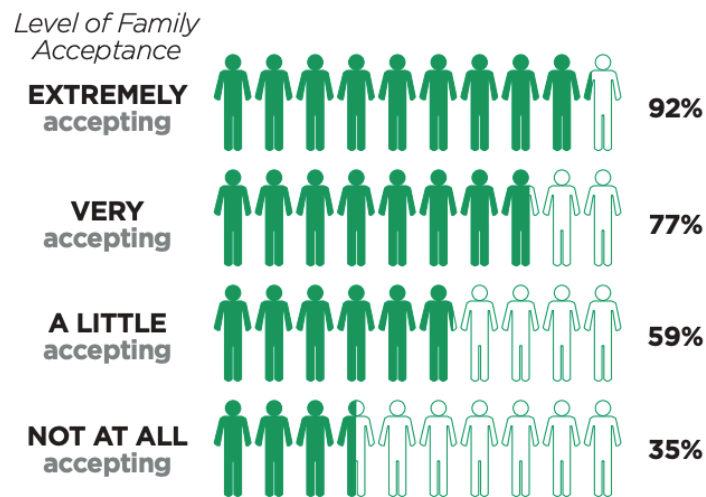
Familial Support as a Protective Factor

Familial acceptance can be understood as the expression of attitudes, behaviors, comments, and initiation of interactions and conversations, which convey that a person's gender or sexuality is seen, welcomed, and appreciated by members of the family system (Ryan et al., 2010). Familial acceptance increases overall well-being and comprehensive health status (Ryan, 2014). For instance, youth who reported moderate and high levels of family acceptance indicated fewer suicidal thoughts (over the past 6 months) and fewer (lifetime) attempts (Ryan et al., 2010). The mitigative effect of affirming family systems was especially pronounced in a 2016 study of transgender youth, which found that trans children whose families accepted their gender identity exhibited developmentally normative rates of depression and did not differ from the control group of cisgender peers (Olson et al., 2016). This is a remarkable finding, as trans children are diagnosed with depressive disorders at 4 to 7 the rate of cis children (Becerra-Culqui et al., 2018).

Family acceptance is essential not only to children's safety and survival; it also plays a vital role in ensuring that LGBTQ+ children feel optimistic about their futures and can envision

full, healthy lives for themselves. The vast majority of youth who perceive that their families are “very” or “extremely” accepting of their LGBTQ+ identity believe they will lead happy lives as adults (77 and 92%, respectively) (Ryan & Rees, 2012). In contrast, just 35% of youth whose families are not at all accepting share this outlook (Ryan & Rees, 2012). Youth with higher levels of family acceptance are also more likely to indicate that they would like to be parents someday, suggesting that acceptance enhances children’s sense of possibility and agency (Ryan & Rees, 2012). 90% of youth whose families were not at all accepting foreclosed the possibility of having families of their own one day (Ryan & Rees, 2012).

Youth Believe They Can Be A Happy LGBT Adult



Ryan, Family Acceptance Project, 2009

Figure 1: Youth Expectations of Future Happiness by Level of Acceptance

An illustration of the percentage of LGBTQ+ youth who agreed that they believe that they can live happy adult lives, organized by self-reported degree of family acceptance (Ryan & Rees, 2012).

Being raised by accepting caregivers doesn’t just inform how LGBTQ+ youth *feel* about the future; it influences their wellbeing for years to come. Familial acceptance during adolescence is associated with positive health outcomes during young adulthood, including high

self-esteem, high social support, and good general health status (Ryan et al., 2010). Acceptance during adolescence also buffers against negative physical and mental health outcomes during young adulthood, including suicidality, depression, and substance use disorders (Ryan et al., 2010). The enduring impact of affirming family attitudes, behaviors, and dialogues reifies familial acceptance as among the most noteworthy protective factors for LGBTQ+ youth.

A study entitled “The Intersection of Family Acceptance and Religion on the Mental Health of LGBTQ Youth” (2020) conceptualized familial acceptance as a spectrum. Queer youth were surveyed about how frequently they experienced accepting familial behaviors, such as family members indicating that they “Like you as you are in regards to being an LGBTQ person,” versus rejecting behaviors, like their parents making them “feel like [they] are bad” due to their queer identity (Miller et al., 2020, p. 33). These behaviors were averaged into a composite score that was ranked between 1 (very unaccepting) to 4 (very accepting). Youth were also surveyed regarding their depressive symptoms. A decisive inverse correlation emerged, with greater degrees of family acceptance corresponding with lower average depression scores (Miller et al., 2020). This association did not shift after adjusting for demographic factors, including religious identity.

A Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration report summarizing insights from The Family Acceptance Project (FAP) corroborates this finding, explaining that accepting and rejecting behaviors and attitudes can certainly coexist and may be understood as a continuum, rather than as two binary choices (Ryan 2014). Many parents move gradually across the spectrum that exists between these two poles or remain static in a liminal position (Ryan 2014). Parents may hold multiple complex and conflicting perspectives on their children’s identity, such as simultaneously wanting their child to know they are loved, but also navigating

culturally ingrained shame about their child’s identity or believing both that their child was made in the image of God *and* that it is a sin to be gay. Amidst these complexities, parents may engage in external behaviors that are distinct from their internal beliefs. FAP co-founder and psychologist Caitlin Ryan explains “Parents and caregivers who believe that homosexuality or gender non-conformity are wrong can still support their gay or transgender child by modifying or changing rejecting behaviors that increase their LGBT child’s risk, without accepting an identity they think is wrong” (Ryan 2014). Exhibiting respectful behaviors, such as thoughtful listening and shielding children from bigotry and vitriol, do mitigate some of the egregious risk factors queer youth are exposed to (Miller et al., 2020).

However, the results of the Miller study also suggest that even when accompanied by some affirming behaviors and discourses, baseline rejection of queer identity is associated with deleterious mental health outcomes for queer youth (Miller et al., 2020). Behavioral patterns, such as denouncing the LGBTQ+ community as a whole, but exhibiting kindness and warmth towards one’s own child, were less effective at minimizing depressogenic symptoms than unconditional affirmation (Miler et al., 2020). Miller and co-authors conclude that to maximize the well-being of queer youth, “all parents and caregivers of LGBTQ youth should be encouraged to support and accept their child just as they are, and to articulate their support to their child in clear, *unequivocal* language on a frequent basis” (2020). Children flourish to the fullest extent when they know that they are seen and wholly accepted, without any conditions or reservations (Miler et al., 2020).

With this foregrounding in mind, it is apparent that although any reduction in negative outcomes via an increase in affirming behaviors is a welcome improvement, and making a range of interventions, including those grounded in harm-reduction, is important. However, the most

significant protective outcomes are seen in families who adopt capacious, caveat-free paradigms for understanding their children's identities, and practitioners should aspire to work with families to maximize such behaviors. The present study is informed by this aspirational understanding.

Despite the protective nature of family acceptance, in a 2018 scoping study, Parker and co-authors concluded that there is a concerning lack of existing interventions, programs, and policies that promote familial support of LGBTQ+ youth. However, because the protective and mitigative effects of familial connection have a profound effect on child outcomes irrespective of children's gender or sexuality, family and human services researchers have invested ample time and resources into identifying the intervention components that most effectively elicit family unity, connection, and support. Myriad studies have reached a consensus that tapping into families' pre-existing strengths and values is a vital component of promoting connection and growth through various family systems stressors, from child behavioral challenges to trauma (DeFrain & Asay, 2014; Smith et al., 2022; Waters & Sun, 2016).

Ryan (2014) applies a strengths-based approach to family interventions. Most parents who exhibit behaviors and attitudes that are perceived by their children as rejecting believe they are helping their children thrive by guiding them to meet social and cultural expectations so that they will "fit in," and "have a good life" (Ryan, 2014, p. 5). Building beneficial working relationships with families requires acknowledging the values and desires that underlie these behaviors, while informing parents of the emotional toll of attempts to change or suppress a child's gender or sexuality. As Ryan explains,

Practitioners should aim to meet parents, families, and caregivers 'where they are,' to build an alliance to support their LGBT children, and to help them understand that family reactions that are experienced as rejection by their LGBT child contribute to serious health concerns and inhibit their child's development and wellbeing (2014, p.2).

Meeting parents “where they are” also includes “align[ing] our research findings, education and prevention messages, and family support approach with the parents’ and caregivers’ values about family, and the role of the family in their culture and religious practice” (Ryan, 2014, p.6).

Framing knowledge about the protective benefits of family acceptance within the familiar terms of a family’s cultural and religious value system is vital to delivering a relevant, meaningful message.

Ultimately, when interventionists operate with the foundational assumption that families love their children and want them to have full and happy lives and communicate this sentiment with reference to culturally meaningful principles, they are most capable of supporting the entire family system. This orientation undergirds the present analysis. How can Jewish values be understood as an immutable aspect of “where Jewish families are,” and thus interwoven with psychoeducation and parenting support to promote familial acceptance of LGBTQ+ youth?

Religion and Familial Support

When considering the multisystemic factors that bear on the level of familial support queer youth receive, religion emerges as a particularly impactful force. Many LGBTQ youth “view religion as a barrier to support from parents” and primarily experience religion as an ideological weapon used to delegitimize their identities (Roe, 2017). Though views among religious individuals and congregations are by no means monolithic, evangelical Christians maintain a monopoly over political discourses on queer identity, resulting in macrosystemic narratives which often convey queerness as deceitful, sinful, predatory, and irreconcilable with tenants of a “principled” religious life (Modi et al., 2020; Platt, 2022). Ideological campaigns waged against LGBTQ+ rights are often couched in such language. Conservative Christian groups represent a multi-million-dollar lobby backing the ongoing barrage of anti-transgender

legislation sweeping across much of the United States (Contreras, 2023). When such macrosystemic narratives are echoed and reinforced within microsystems, the deleterious impacts of institutional and cultural queerphobia are compounded.

Members of minoritized religions, including Judaism, are exposed to these dominant cultural discourses and politics, as well as their own communities' ideologies. Judaism is an ethnoreligion, meaning that people may identify as Jewish due to a shared culture, ancestry, or history, because of their religious beliefs and practices, or, in many cases, due to a combination of these factors (Himmelfarb, 2009). Therefore, the degree to which religious, textually grounded perceptions of LGBTQ+ identity is salient in Jews' perceptions of queerness is bound to be highly varied. Further, Judaism is not a monolith and does not have an overarching governing entity that maintains a doctrine on LGBTQ+ rights. Rather, aspects of Judaism, including stances on LGBTQ+ identity, are conceptualized and practiced differently across denominations. While volumes can be—and have been—written on the intricacies of Jewish identity, Dr. Joshua Shanes, professor of Jewish Studies, succinctly describes the emergence of Jewish “movements” or “denominations” as distinct approaches to “negotiat[ing] the relationship between Jewishness and modernity” (Shanes, 2023).

Across all denominations, individual synagogues are autonomous. Unions and boards make statements that symbolize ideological norms and shifts in the movement, but they are not regulatory entities and do not oversee the actions of all congregations that belong to the movement they represent. The Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Renewal movements have all publicly committed to civil rights for LGBTQ+ people, and all support members of their rabbinate in officiating wedding ceremonies between LGBTQ+ couples.

Orthodoxy navigates the relationship with modernity by maintaining that the written and oral Torah are the word of God. Orthodoxy is often characterized by strict observance of *halakha* (Jewish Law) and the belief that Torah is the divine word. Thus, significant weight and reverence are allotted to passages of the Torah, like the much-debated discussion of male-male intercourse in Leviticus, which most interpret as express prohibitions of same-sex sexual or romantic relationships (Shanes, 2023). Orthodoxy is also marked by distinct, rigid gender roles, predicated on sex assigned at birth (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.). For instance, men and women pray on opposite sides of a *mechitza* (partition), and only men may receive the honor of leading prayer and reading Torah. Binary gender roles and strict emphasis on the heterosexual nuclear family may be among the reasons some LGBTQ+ Jews chose to disaffiliate from Orthodoxy (Vulakh et al., 2023).

In recent years, some leaders in the Orthodox community have publicly expressed their desire to affirm the right of LGBTQ+ people to exist free of harassment and violence, the most notable case being a 2010 “Statement of Principles on the Place of Jews with a Homosexual Orientation in Our Community,” signed by 150+ American and Israeli Orthodox Rabbis and educators. While the statement declares, “All human beings are created in the image of God and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect...Every Jew is obligated to fulfill the entire range of mitzvot between person and person in relation to persons who are homosexual or have feelings of same sex attraction,” (Maier, 2023; Oster, 2010) it still disavows queerness on the basis of halachic principles, stating,

Halakhah sees heterosexual marriage as the ideal model and sole legitimate outlet for human sexual expression. The sensitivity and understanding we properly express for human beings with other sexual orientations does not diminish our commitment to that principle (Oster, 2010).

The Orthodox movement has publicly come as far as voicing non-unanimous tepid tolerance but does not recognize LGBTQ+ rights to free sexual and gender expression, ordination, or marriage.

Reform Judaism, the largest branch in America, emphasizes that Judaism is ever evolving and is shaped by its temporal context, though its ethical principles are transcendent. “Reform Judaism asks us to seek the holiness that is present throughout creation through reflection, critical study, and sacred acts so as to renew our living Covenant with God, the people Israel, humankind, and the earth.” (Union for Reform Judaism, 2015).

Reform Judaism has generally been open to LGBTQ+ people, formally beginning in 1966, when the Women of Reform Judaism (WRJ) passed a resolution calling for the decriminalization of homosexuality (Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, 2014). In 2000, The Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), the principal organization of Reform rabbis in the US and Canada, became the first organization of clergy to endorse its members in personally choosing whether to officiate same-gender ceremonies. The “Resolution on Same Gender Officiation” uses the terms “ceremony” and “officiation,” making clear that whether the union between two people is considered a “marriage” is up to the discretion and interpretation of each rabbi (The Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2000). Most recently, in 2015, CCAR passed a resolution condemning transphobia within both North American governments and Jewish spaces, and expressing commitment to the full acceptance and integration of trans people within the Reform movement, including “the right of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals to be referred to by the name, gender, and pronoun of preference in our congregations, camps, and schools regardless of physical presentation” (The Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2015).

The Conservative Movement responds to what it sees as Orthodox hyper-rigidity and a laissez-faire Reform attitude by maintaining some halakhic principles but adopting many of the Reform movement's more egalitarian values, such as its commitment to equal religious participation between men and women. The Rabbinical Assembly has passed multiple resolutions affirming its commitment to the civil rights of LGBTQ+ people, including a "Resolution Affirming the Rights of Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming People" (2016).

In the 1920s, Mordecai Kaplan, founder of the Reconstructionist movement, used the term "Reconstructionism" to denote the way that Judaism must be continuously reimagined and adapted to "renew its relevance and ensure its sustainability" (Reconstructing Judaism, 2024). Reconstructionism aspires to create Jewish life, community, and ritual in which "the past has a vote, not a veto," meaning that traditions are historically informed, but adapted to suit the unique context of each generation (Reconstructing Judaism, 2024). Therefore, Reconstructionism has often moved with the broader secular and interfaith cultural tide in its perspectives on LGBTQ+ rights, though it has continued to ground its rationale for such moves in Jewish values, such as *tzedek* (justice) (Federation of Reconstructionist Congregations and Havurot & Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association, 1992). In 1984, the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College became the first Jewish seminary to accept openly LGBTQ+ students and endorse the ordination of LGBTQ+ rabbis (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.). Although each denomination has room to grow towards complete and unequivocal inclusion and celebration of its LGBTQ+ members, Reconstructionism has often been at the forefront of pioneering Jewish LGBTQ+ inclusion.

These institutional perspectives constitute the variable—though increasingly affirming—backdrop against which LGBTQ+ Jewish youth and their families are navigating identity. While several of the major North American movements have expressed visions of equity and justice in

formal writings, the actual implementation of such principles is still lacking. For instance, gender inclusive language is missing from many Jewish spaces.

A *bar mitzvah* or *bat mitzvah* is the coming-of-age ceremony in which a Jewish teenager (usually a thirteen-year-old) steps before their congregation for the first time to read Torah, share a *drash* (a speech interpreting the passage of Torah they read from), and receive blessings from the rabbi and congregation. The focal point of most bar and bat mitzvahs is the moment the young person is called to the *bimah* (platform) for their first *Aliyah* (“ascent,” reading from the Torah). Traditionally, people are called for an *Aliyah* by their own name and the names of their parents, in the following way: “Please rise, [Hebrew name of the Torah reader], ben/bat (son/daughter) of [father’s name] and [mother’s name].” For example, Isaac, son of Abraham and Sarah, would be called with the phrase “Ya’amod, Yitzchak ben Avraham v’Sarah.”

According to the Committee on Jewish Law and standards,

To be called to the Torah by one’s name is a sacred encounter—not only with the flow of our history but with each other. Our names are announced in public for the room to hear and for the community as a whole to witness our answering the call. We bring all of ourselves, all of the facets of our identity, past and present, to that moment (The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, 2022).

Being called for an *Aliyah* connects a person to their family, ancestry, culture, and spirituality by recognizing a person in the context of those who came before them and inviting them to accept an honor in the presence of their community. But how might this ceremony look different if a non-binary child, or a child with two parents of the same gender is being recognized with an *Aliyah*? Even the term “b’nai mitzvah,” a gender-neutral adaptation of bar/bat mitzvah is not yet common parlance in many Jewish circles.

In the absence of Torah honors that are adapted to use non-gendered or gender inclusive language, what should be a celebratory moment in which a person is acknowledged and honored in their wholeness can easily become a moment of discomfort and misrecognition. The absence

of gender inclusive liturgy signals to trans and non-binary Jews that their gender identity is incompatible with culturally significant rites of passage. Although organizations like CJLS are engaged in valuable work to adapt Torah honors and other blessings, the case of gendered calls to the *bimah* presents one example of how, even within congregations whose leadership has publicly committed to embracing all members, LGBTQ+ Jews are still alienated all too often (The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, 2022).

Existing Religiously Grounded Interventions

In light of the fraught relationship between American religious institutions and queer identity, in recent years increasing effort has been directed toward developing resources that utilize families' religious value systems to promote acceptance and understanding of their queer children. The majority of these interventions are directed toward Christian families of varying denominations. The Family Acceptance Project (FAP) provides a directory of faith-based organizations and resources for LGBTQ+ youth and families. Of the 33 organizations listed, 23 are intended for members of Christian denominations (Faith-Based Resources, 2023). Just 3—Eshel, Jewish Queer Youth, and Keshet—serve Jewish individuals. Only Eshel and Keshet provide programming for parents and family members, with Eshel offering support specifically to Orthodox parents in the form of a warmline to call for individual support, parenting groups, and an annual retreat (Eshel, 2024; Keshet, 2024).

Eshel parenting groups include a weekly virtual drop-in option, a phone-in group, a Chaburah group (a primarily social community of Jewish parents), and a support group for parents of trans and non-binary youth. Eshel invites parents to reach out if they feel concerned for their child's safety in the community, are struggling to accept their child's LGBTQ+ identity, or are uncertain how to broach conversations with community leaders, such as Rabbis, about

their child's identity. The annual retreat is described as "100 Orthodox parents of LGBTQ children from around the country together for a Shabbat [Sabbath] of community, learning, and support" (Eshel, 2024). Keshet provides a library of "articles, rituals, and Torah commentaries for LGBTQ parents and families" (Keshet, 2024). The majority of the resources are geared toward parents who identify as LGBTQ+ themselves, with few sources tailored to cisgender heterosexual parents seeking to support their LGBTQ+ children (Keshet, 2024).

While programs like Eshel and Keshet indicate that the first seeds of much-needed familial support are being sown, their reach and engagement are still limited, and there have not been formal evaluations of the efficacy of such resources in reducing parental stigma and rejection and increasing children's experiences of acceptance and being understood.

Connecting to Judaism

Based on the above research, connecting to pre-existing religious family values and maximizing unequivocal support are key components of enabling protective factors for queer youth. At present, efforts to link queer survivance and familial support are disproportionately grounded in Christian values. Perspectives on queerness across the Jewish ethno-religion are diverse and varied, as in any culture, and many parents struggle to accept their children and reconcile their queer identities with Jewish teachings and cultural norms. It is vital to develop programs rooted in Jewish values that attend to the unique faith experiences and values of Jewish families.

The culture of questioning and rigorous theological debate that inhabits Judaism may act as a unique entry point for developing such interventions. Asking questions and engaging critically is core to Jewish scholarship. As Jewish History Professor Ismar Schorsch, writes in his seminal essay, "The Right to Question,"

To query and debate becomes the engine that drives the formation of the Talmudic corpus and deepens the human apprehension of the divine. At work here is an intuitive awareness that asking a good question is already half the answer and that growth is a function of constantly re-examining accepted truths (2000).

In the first century, two schools of Talmudic scholarship and thought—the House of Hillel and House of Shammai— had conflicting, outright contradictory interpretations of the Torah. In his book “Wrestling with God and Men: Homosexuality in the Jewish Tradition,” Rabbi Steven Greenberg writes about the split between the two houses, “The rabbis claimed ‘both these and those are the words of the living God’ (2004, p. 87).

The *drash*, a central element of the aforementioned *b'nai mitzvah* ceremony invites the person coming of age to engage briefly in the rabbinic tradition of midrash, an expositional mode that seeks and interprets meaning in ancient texts. The practice of Jewish textual exegesis invites—and mandates—grappling with the complexity of texts. Rabbi Greenberg writes, “God loves it when we ask why” (2004, p. 87). In the spirit of Jewish questioning, this analysis asks “why?” of traditional theological interpretations and posits LGBTQ+ affirming readings of Jewish texts as sites of liberation and celebration.

Chapter 3: Methods

Considerations

An overview of the literature related to LGBTQ+ psychoeducation indicates a lack of resources tailored to the unique cultural experiences and values of Jewish parents. There is also a gap in research focused on assessing the behaviors, needs, and preferences of this population. To address this gap in the literature, I set out to conduct an anonymous mixed methods survey. This survey was intended to establish the acceptability of culturally specific parenting resources among Jewish parents by exploring their current sources of information and social support, accepting and rejecting behaviors, level of endorsement of affirming theology, and preferences among various parenting intervention models. The survey was developed and administered via Qualtrics, a secure online platform.

A mixed methods online survey was the aptest method of data collection for a project of this nature, as it allowed for the inclusion of a diverse participant population from different regions, denominations, backgrounds, and levels of organizational involvement.

Due to the nature of the research, which gathered data from human subjects, it was necessary to submit a Research Proposal to the Institutional Review Board. However, the research qualified for exemption from Continuing Review as it does not procure personal information through which the identities of participants can be readily ascertained (See Appendix A).

Recruitment

Participant population

The survey was designed for parents who self-identify as Jewish. It is necessary to survey this population because individuals in this community are underserved by current LGBTQ+-affirming family programming. Because this research aims to establish what type of resources, if any, would be valuable to this demographic, self-report data from this population about the institutions, programs, and ideologies that currently shape their outlook is integral to achieving the study goals.

No restrictions were placed on the gender or race of participants. Participants were required to be at least 18 years of age. English language literacy was required, as, regrettably, the Primary Investigator could not provide translated materials. No participant screening was conducted, beyond self-report in the demographics section of the survey.

The target number of respondents was at least 50, as a group for this size across various congregations could likely capture varying degrees of observance, cultural background, and range of parents' and children's identities.

Recruitment Methods

Once IRB approval was obtained, I conducted outreach with contacts at Jewish organizations. This study employed a convenience sampling method, where individuals could self-select to participate. The participant population was indirectly accessed through communication with community leaders, including Rabbis, synagogue education program directors, coordinators at family and child-centered Jewish programs, summer camp directors, and leaders at Jewish day schools. I made an effort to establish contact with leaders at ideologically diverse congregations and organizations. Organizations were contacted by email

using variations of a form letter (Appendix B) which explained the goals, methods, and nature of the research.

I suggested dissemination strategies including sharing a blurb about the survey (Appendix C) in a community-wide newsletter, emailing relevant cohorts and groups (such as parents of children studying for their B'nai mitzvot [coming of age ceremonies]), or posting a flyer (Appendix D) to community bulletin boards. The recipients implemented these ideas at their discretion. Some recipients agreed to share the survey internally with their members using one or multiple dissemination strategies, while others offered to pass the promotional materials on to colleagues at other organizations. The following list includes organizations that the survey was disseminated through and within. However, due to snowball recruitment, survey-sharing spanned beyond these organizations. Therefore, the list is not comprehensive.

Educational institutions:

- Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (Wyncote, Pennsylvania)
- Portland Jewish Academy (Portland, Oregon)

Synagogues:

- Havurah Shalom (Portland, Oregon)
- Congregation Neveh Shalom (Portland, Oregon)
- Beth Tikvah Congregation & Centre (Richmond, British Columbia)
- Temple Beth Israel (Eugene, Oregon)

Community Centers:

- The Edlavitch DC Jewish Community Center (Washington DC)
- The Mittleman Jewish Community Center (Portland, Oregon)

Organizations and Non-Profits

- Keshet (National Organization)
- The Jewish Federation of Greater Portland (Portland, Oregon)
- Oregon Board of Rabbis (Oregon)
- Reconstructing Judaism (Wyncote, Pennsylvania)

Other

- Miscellaneous Jewish Parenting Facebook Groups

I elected to reach participants indirectly through contact with community leaders because it allowed access to readily established communication channels with existing cohorts of parents. Further, I hoped that asking leaders to amplify the survey would reassure participants that the research had been vetted by known and trusted members of their community. Especially in the context of working in a historically and contemporarily marginalized community, such as the Jewish LGBTQ+ community, which has reason to be skeptical of researchers' intentions, relying on trusted leaders as liaisons between the researcher and participants may assuage these concerns (Hall, 2022).

Consent procedures

Participants were not asked to sign Informed Consent Documents due to the anonymous nature of the survey. Instead, participants were given a blurb on the first page of the survey describing the purpose, duration, procedures, risks, and benefits of the research, and how their responses will be used (See Appendix E). Participants were informed that by proceeding to the next page of the survey they were expressing their understanding and agreement with the research conditions.

A relevant cultural consideration when establishing informed consent was that the degree to which individuals view the data being collected as sensitive and highly confidential may vary based on their community's norms and level of acceptance of LGBTQ+ identity. The informed consent statement acknowledged the potentially emotional nature of the survey and the sensitivity of the topics at hand, as well as reassurance that the study does not collect any personally identifying information. It also emphasized the option to withdraw consent and terminate participation in the study at any time, as well as the option to contact the PI, Faculty Advisor, or University of Oregon IRB with questions or concerns before, during, or after the completion of the survey.

In addition to minimizing the possibility of coercion or undue influence through broad-based, community-wide recruitment efforts, participants were not offered any financial or other material incentive to compel participation.

Constructs

I was interested in five primary constructs: **social support, informational influences, parental acceptance and affirmation, textual knowledge and interpretations, and intervention experiences and preferences**. These constructs are the primary themes at the heart of the three research questions (RQ1: What sources of **information and social support** are Jewish parents currently utilizing? RQ2: To what extent do Jewish parents exhibit LGBTQ+ **affirming** and rejecting parenting behaviors in the status quo? RQ3: Among Jewish parents, what is the perceived benefit of integrating **Jewish values** into **parenting interventions** regarding LGBTQ+ identity?) The questions survey participants were asked were grouped under each of these thematic categories, and each question was developed to elicit empirical or qualitative data about the given construct.

The questions I asked were informed by the literature base related to parenting and the relationship between faith and LGBTQ+ affirming and rejecting behaviors. What the literature does not say—i.e. gaps in the research base—was equally impactful in generating areas of inquiry. Relevant literature is discussed below. For the full survey, see Appendix E.

Before answering questions associated with the five constructs, participants were presented with a series of demographic questions. These questions are essential to establishing the characteristics of the participant population. The demographic information allows for the segmenting of the participant population during data analysis to understand if there are any meaningful differences in how participants of different ages, races, ethnicities, genders, sexualities, and denominations responded to the questions.

Demographic Questions

First, participants were asked about the Jewish ethnicities and denominations they identify with. Participants could select all options that applied and were also given a textbox to describe their identity in their own terms if none of the provided identifiers were fitting. Importantly, the framing of this question reflects the many (equally legitimate) ways to be Jewish. Further, some parts of the Jewish world strictly define Judaism matrilineally. A person is only considered “legitimately” Jewish if they are born to a Jewish mother or undergo an extensive process of conversion overseen by a Rabbi (Jacob Staub, 2001). However, the ethos of this project is that a person’s lived experiences, values, and practices are most relevant to how their Judaism manifests and intersects with their views on sociopolitical matters. Therefore, this survey allows participants to self-identify as Jewish through multiple avenues.

Participants who attend synagogue were also asked to identify the Jewish religious movement the congregation they most regularly attend is aligned with. For synagogue attendees,

their place of worship is central to their sense of meaning and connectedness (Pew Research Center, 2021). Although there is within-movement variability and immense individual variability, each major Jewish denomination has a general stance on LGBTQ+ identity and understanding the context in which participants are grounding their spiritual practice may lend context to participants' responses regarding their degree of LGBTQ+ acceptance.

The demographic data is also integral to establishing whether parents whose children currently identify as LGBTQ+ responded differently to questions about the utility of LGBTQ+-affirming resources than parents whose children's sexuality and gender identity are unknown to them, or who do not identify as LGBTQ+. This data also enables analysis of different responses between LGBTQ+ and cisgender, heterosexual parents.

Participants were also asked to indicate the age group they belong to and the age group their children belong to. Those with multiple children in different age groups were asked to select all that applied. This information is relevant because by observing response trends among different age groups, it may become clear that a particular age range would be most receptive to Jewish-specific LGBTQ+ affirming programming.

Parents were also provided text boxes to describe their and their child(ren)'s racial identity. I asked this question in an open-ended fashion due to the problematic and deeply imperfect nature of normative racial categorization. By allowing participants to describe their identity in their own words, I hoped to create a sense of agency. Collecting information about the participant population's racial makeup allows for a deeper understanding of the data set's scope and limitations.

Finally, the demographics section included questions about the sexuality and gender identities of the responding parent and their child(ren). Respondents were asked "Do you identify

as part of the LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning +) community?” and “Do you have at least one child who identifies as part of the LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning +) community?” These questions were pertinent to data analysis and informed the internal structure of the survey.

I created a skip logic that would route respondents along two different paths depending on whether they answered “yes,” “unknown,” or “no,” in response to the question asking if they have at least one LGBTQ+ child. Parents who answered “yes” or “unknown” (hereby denoted as “Group A”) were presented with questions about their degree of acceptance and rejection and their past experiences with psychoeducational programming for parents of LGBTQ+ youth, while parents who answered “no” (Group B) received a more limited set of questions that did not ask about past psychoeducational programming or specific behaviors that would only apply to parents of LGBTQ kids (such as discussing one’s child’s LGBTQ+ identity with them). Parents who reported uncertainty about their child’s identity were routed along the same path as parents who answered in the affirmative for a few key reasons.

First, many people experience gender and sexuality as fluid, non-static identities, so children’s currently ambiguous or unstated identities may eventually be understood as LGBTQ+ (Sumerau et al., 2019). Children’s understandings of their own identities may shift. Further, it was important to consider the survey from the perspective of parents of young children, particularly elementary aged and younger, who are less likely than adolescents to have articulated specific identity labels (Pew Research Center, 2013).

All parents, regardless of their children’s identities, were asked questions regarding their preferred sources of social support, knowledge of Jewish texts about gender and sexual diversity,

the level of acceptability of these texts as tools in their own family lives, and their interest in participating in psychoeducational parenting groups.

It was important to include all parents in these measures because, firstly, it allows for the establishment of a baseline for how the participant population as a whole views LGBTQ+ identity. This allows for the discernment of different trends between parents of children who identify as LGBTQ+ and parents of children who do not currently identify as LGBTQ+.

Further, there is a community-based rationale for surveying this demographic. Children are bound to have classmates, peers, and friends who are LGBTQ+, and understanding how Jewish parents as a whole feel about queerness allows for a deeper understanding of the social landscape LGBTQ+ children will encounter, both in and out of the home. LGBTQ+ youth are also indispensable—though often invisibilized—members of global Jewish communities. Understanding the attitudes they are likely to encounter within synagogues, day schools, youth programming, summer camps, and other Jewish spaces is vital to accurately forecasting the Jewish world they will encounter, as well as assessing potential sites of intervention.

Additionally, the Jewish texts about gender and sexual diversity may function both as a tool of affirmation for children who are LGBTQ+ and a tool of education for those who do not. Parents of cisgender, heterosexual youth may still indicate that these texts would be useful in educating their children about Jewish perspectives on gender and sexuality. It is helpful to know how parents might raise their cisgender, heterosexual children to view LGBTQ+ identity and LGBTQ+ community members. While a parent's assessment of affirming material in the abstract is by no means a perfect indicator of how they apply the given values in their parenting practice, it may function as a general "temperature check" on the prevalence of affirming and rejecting beliefs among Jewish parents.

Finally, polling all Jewish parents, irrespective of their children's gender or sexuality, can establish the benefit of combined, universal interventions versus the utility of targeted, subgroup-specific interventions. Do parents in the community have awareness and understanding of the intersections between LGBTQ+ identity and Judaism? Do parents see affirming texts as relevant to their parenting practices regardless of their children's identities? Do parents whose children do not currently identify as LGBTQ+ indicate interest in proactive psychoeducational programming, or is interest (if any) primarily limited to parents of LGBTQ+ youth? Collecting information from a diverse sample of parents is integral to answering these questions.

Sources of Support

To answer the question at the heart of this analysis – *would Jewish-focused programming be beneficial for parents?* – it is imperative to first understand where parents are currently turning for social support and parenting guidance, and their degree of satisfaction with those resources. In short, are Jewish parents getting the social and informational parenting support they need in the status quo? Answering this question helps build an understanding of the current landscape of resources and establishes whether there is a need for additional resources and interventions. To gather information about current parental attitudes and behaviors, I sought to assess: *What sources of information and social support are Jewish parents currently utilizing?*

To answer this question, participants were asked to rank their level of agreement to several statements about their use of Jewish versus non-Jewish social support and parenting resources on a Likert-type scale, with response options including strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree. These statements provide an opportunity to gather data about status quo behavior versus aspirational behaviors, which may not be feasible in the current social landscape.

Level of Parental Acceptance and Affirmation

To understand the relevance of LGBTQ+-affirming resources for the participant population, it is important to examine the current level of acceptance and affirming beliefs and behaviors. It is also crucial to establish whether religiosity and acceptance are linked. If affirming or rejecting principles are grounded in faith-based or cultural value-based rationales, the literature suggests that working within that religious and cultural framework to promote acceptance may be particularly relevant and effective (Ryan, 2014; Vance et al., 2024).

First, parents were asked about the frequency of behaviors, such as discussing their children's LGBTQ+ identity with them, discussing past or potential hardships related to LGBTQ+ identity, and discussing LGBTQ+ identity in relation to Judaism. Though these questions do not gauge whether the content of all conversations was affirming or rejecting, they were intended to indicate whether there was an open channel of communication between parents and their children. Openness to conversation is a helpful metric of familial support, as "Transgender youth who report better family communication also demonstrate higher self-esteem and lower depression and anxiety" (Katz-Wise, Ehrensaft, Vettters, Forcier, & Austin, 2018). Researchers have historically used similar measures to assess family acceptance. For instance, Ryan (2010) calculated a categorical indicator of family acceptance using children's responses to questions such as "How often did any of your parents/caregivers talk openly about your sexual orientation? (p. 207).

To answer the question, "What is the status quo level of acceptance?" I presented parents with a series of statements about the frequency with which they engage in affirming and rejecting behaviors and attitudes. Miller (2020) suggests that youth reap the greatest value from unequivocal affirmation and acceptance of their gender and sexuality, and that parents often

display a mixture of accepting, rejecting, and ambivalent reactions to their children's identities. To assess where the present sample falls on this spectrum, parents were asked to indicate the extent to which they engage in overt accepting and rejecting behaviors and mentalities, such as expressing approval or disapproval of their child's identity and encouraging their children to make their own choices about their gender expression.

Informational Influences

To establish a baseline for current information-seeking behavior, it was important to know where Jewish parents are currently turning for information about LGBTQ+ identity. The SAMHSA's "Practitioner's Resource Guide: Helping Families to Support Their LGBT Children" explains,

Families respond to their LGBT children based on what they know, what they hear from their family, clergy, close friends, and information sources, including providers who may also have misinformation about sexual orientation and gender identity, especially in childhood and adolescence (Ryan, 2014).

Parents were asked to select up to three sources of information they believe are most influential to their perspectives on LGBTQ+ identity. Options included various forms of media (social, news, entertainment, views expressed by family and friends, secular education, and Jewish education (i.e. Rabbinical teachings, Jewish texts, etc.).

Knowing the most salient sources helps to discern the modes of information delivery that could be most effective for delivering future psychoeducation. It may also indicate if Jewish parents tend to indicate a preference for faith and culture-based sources of information about LGBTQ+ identity over secular perspectives.

Textual Knowledge and Interpretations

Evaluating participants' knowledge of LGBTQ+-affirming Jewish texts is central to establishing the utility of culturally grounded psychoeducational interventions. It is important to establish a baseline for how informed the population is that these materials exist. Further, how does this awareness, or lack thereof, manifest? What do people interpret Jewish texts to be saying about sexual diversity and gender expansiveness? How do parents respond when presented with modern and ancient Jewish texts that acknowledge and affirm queer identity? Do parents perceive that these texts and concepts could positively influence their parenting and ability to support their children? Understanding the degree of ambivalence or interest people express toward these materials is integral to establishing whether they stand to serve as helpful components of future psychoeducational parenting programming.

To establish preexisting familiarity with texts and perceived acceptability of texts, all participants were asked a series of questions related to the construct of Religious Knowledge and Interpretation. First, respondents answered the fill-in-the-blank question "I believe that Jewish texts express that it is _____ to be LGBTQ+" by selecting from the following options:

1. Unacceptable, without exception
2. Wrong only if "acted upon"
3. Acceptable
4. Actively celebrated

These options reflect some of the most common interpretations across the diverse range of Rabbinical and communal perspectives. Participants also had the option to describe a different stance in a text box, as there are many nuanced and distinctive ways of interpreting these texts, and it is helpful to understand the intricacies of how people are engaging with these texts to assess whether an intervention that involves exegesis of Torah and Talmud would be welcome or

fruitful.

In this section, participants were also presented with a series of ancient and modern Jewish texts that mention gender expansiveness and diverse sexual identities. These texts include a passage from the Talmud, a Kabbalistic (Jewish mystical) chart depicting various emanations of God, and blessings for Jewish rituals and life cycle events adapted to be queer affirming. I wanted to evaluate the extent to which parents perceive that these texts could be relevant and applicable in their lives. On a scale of 1-5, respondents ranked the extent to which the texts would aid them in parenting their children and shared other comments on the applicability and content of the texts.

Intervention Experiences and Preferences

To understand the relevance of culturally informed psychoeducation and assess how future psychoeducation could be best tailored to fit the participant population's needs, parents were surveyed about their past experiences in psychoeducational programs and their potential interest in participating in future programming.

Parents were asked whether they had previously participated in a psychoeducational group, support group, therapeutic group, or other program for parents of LGBTQ+ children. Those who said "yes" were routed to further questions about the religious orientation and framing of the program, (if any) and the aspects of the program that were most and least helpful. Guiding definitions of three primary intervention types were provided (See Appendix E).

Next, all parents, regardless of whether they had previously participated in a parenting group, were surveyed about their interest in future psychoeducational programming. Parents indicated the desirability of a program that focuses on "LGBTQ+ affirming parenting approaches" and a program that guides parents on how to "encourage children to prioritize

heterosexuality and identify with the gender they were assigned at birth.” Parents were asked to evaluate their interest in a secular and Jewish iteration of each programming angle. This distinction was important because it helps to gauge if parents are more interested in LGBTQ+ affirming or rejecting perspectives when they are delivered from a secular, culturally and religiously non-specific perspective, versus a Jewish perspective. Parents were also asked if they would be likely to participate in a Christian intervention, as most currently available religious parenting resources are Christian (Faith-Based Resources, 2023). Questions about interventions help establish whether Jewish parents are actively seeking out formal settings in which they learn parenting skills, as well as the content of those programs.

Finally, all participants were routed to a concluding question, independent of the constructs, which invited them to share any additional thoughts, recommendations, or other comments regarding the support and resources available to Jewish parents of LGBTQ+ youth. This question aimed to provide an open-ended space for parents to express anything related to the topic of the research that they did not have an opportunity to share in other parts of the survey. Responses may also raise new ideas and point to potential avenues for future research.

Chapter 4: Results

Summary

Between March 15 and April 21, 2024, 128 people opened the survey. Participants were excluded from the report if they did not answer any questions or stopped participating before responding to questions about key variables. 17 individuals did not complete any items. That left 111 respondents who responded to at least some items. Of those responses, 10 provided demographic information but dropped out before substantively engaging with the key variables of interest (acceptance, sources of parenting support, textual interpretation, and intervention preferences). This leaves a sample of 101 individuals who completed at least 75% of the survey, including most of the primary variables of interest. Responses numbers varied slightly per item and are denoted as “N” in tables and graphs. Some variables, such as Jewish identity, sum to more than 100% because respondents were allowed to endorse multiple categories.

Results for some variables are presented in the form of composite scores. Composite scores are a method of showing the average response across a group of conceptually similar questions which received statistically similar answers on a Likert-type scale. Composites indicate the salience of a particular construct (e.g. Familial Acceptance). The composite scores presented below were calculated by taking the mean of the responses used to measure a construct.

Sample Demographics

Table 1a

Sociodemographic Data

Variable	<i>N</i>	%
Jewish Identities		
Reconstructionist	46	45.5
Conservative	35	34.7
Reform	30	29.7
Orthodox	6	5.9
Renewal	1	1.0
Humanist	4	4.0
Ashkenazi	36	35.6
Sephardic	9	8.9
Mizrahi	2	2.0
Self-Described	10	9.9
Synagogue Denomination		
Reconstructionist	40	43
Conservative	24	25.8
Reform	19	20.4
Orthodox	6	6.5
Self-Described	4	4.3
Parents' Age		
30-39	10	9.90
40-49	35	24.65
50-59	41	40.59
60 or Older	15	14.15
Parents' Race		
White	74	77.08
Ashkenazi	3	3.13
Jewish	8	8.33
Latino	1	1.04
Asian	1	1.04
Multiracial	5	5.21
Person of Color	1	1.04
Hebrew	1	1.04
Declined	2	2.08
Parent LGBTQ+ Identity		
Yes	23	22.77
No	78	77.23

Table 1b*Sociodemographic Data*

Variable	N	%
Children's Age		
5 or Younger	13	12.9
6-12	32	31.7
13-18	60	59.4
19-25	36	35.6
26 or Older	13	12.9
Children's Race		
White	62	65.26
Jewish	6	6.32
Ashkenazi	4	4.21
Multiracial	17	17.89
Latino	1	1.05
Person of Color	2	2.11
Declined	3	3.16
Children's LGBTQ Identity		
Yes	56	55.45
No	36	35.64
Unknown	9	8.91

Note. $N = 101$

Reconstructionist was the most frequently selected identity among the Jewish denominational identities (45.5%, $n = 46$). Ashkenazi was the most represented Jewish ethnic identity, accounting for 35.6 % of responses ($n = 36$). There was significant overlap between those who selected Reconstructionist and Ashkenazi, representing a predominantly Ashkenazi Reconstructionist participant population.

Jewish Denominational Identity in 2020 (Pew Research Center, 2021)

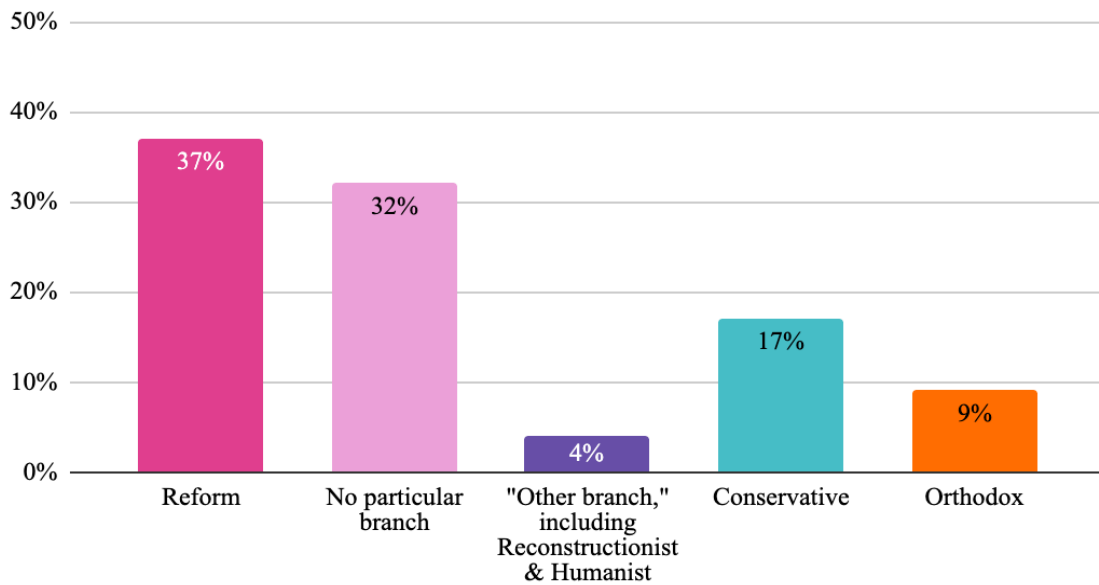


Figure 2: National Jewish Denominational Identity

Figure 2 depicts the distribution of denominational identity in a 2020 National Sample (Pew Research, 2021)

Jewish Denominational Identity in Survey Dataset (2024)

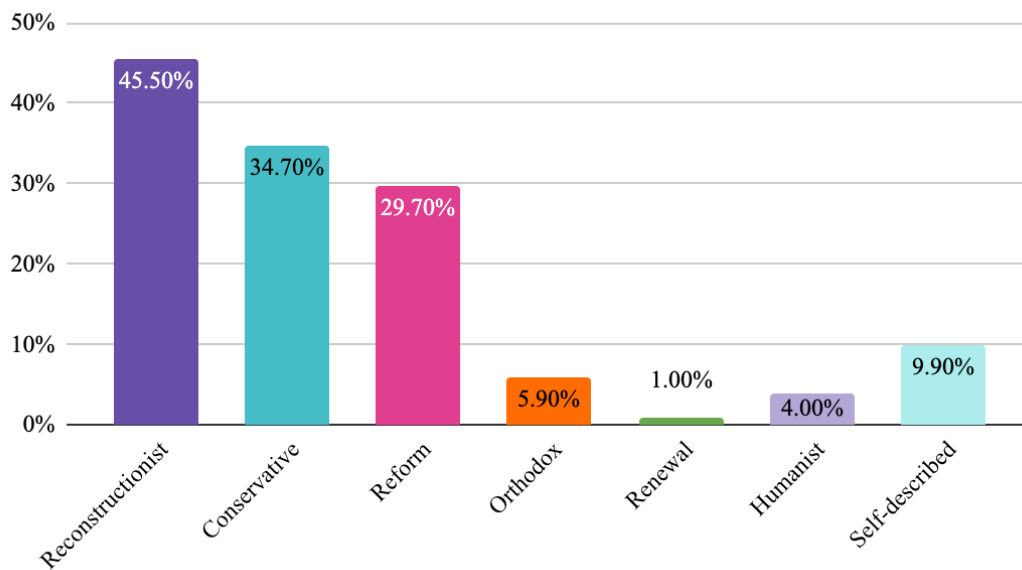


Figure 3: Study Jewish Denominational Identity

Figure 3 depicts the distribution of denominational identity in the Present Study (2024).

As depicted in Figure 2, nationally, the majority (54%) of Jews identify with one of the two major Jewish movements: 37% identify as Reform and 17% as Conservative (Pew Research Center, 2021). In the most recent national census of American Jewish identity, Reconstructionist, and Humanist Jews comprised such a small portion of the population (4%) that their demographic data was reported aggregately under the heading “other branch” (Pew Research Center, 2021). The sample in this study is strikingly different from the national average, as highlighted by the contrast between Figures 2 and 3—i.e., Reconstructionist and Conservative Jews are overrepresented in the current sample (See Figure 3).

Among the 10 participants who elected to describe their identity in their own words (See Table 1), there was significant diversity, including individuals who self-described as “[a] cultural and mystical Jew,” “Traditional Egalitarian,” “Conservadox,” and “just Jewish.” These responses underscore the expansive and complex nature of Jewish identity.

Synagogue attendance fell along similar lines as the demographic makeup. Among respondents who reported that they attend synagogue ($n = 93$), 43% reported that the congregation they most regularly attend is affiliated with the Reconstructionist movement, followed by Conservative (25.8%, $n = 24$) and Reform (20.4%, $n = 19$). The Orthodox community was underrepresented in this sample, with Orthodox accounting for 3.35% of answers to the question about Jewish identity, and just 6.6% reporting that they attend Orthodox Temples most often.

Of participants who chose to report their racial identity ($n = 96$), the vast majority (77.08%) identified as White. Individuals who self-identified as “Caucasian” were also considered White. Those who responded, “Ashkenazi and White,” “Jewish and White,” or other iterations expressing Jewish identity in tandem with Whiteness were considered White in the

results reporting, as Jewish religious, cultural, and ethnic identity was measured separately in Question 1 (See Appendix E). However, several individuals exclusively wrote in “Jewish” or “Ashkenazi.” These responses were reported as such to reflect the salience of Jewish identity in shaping participants’ understanding of the construct of race. The same logic was applied to analysis and categorization of children’s racial identities. 65.26% ($n = 62$) reported that their children are White. There was a higher percentage of Multiracial individuals among children than parents (17.89%, $n = 18$).

The majority of parents (75.24%, $n = 76$) were between the ages of 40 and 59. Most respondents indicated that they are parents of teenagers, with 57.1% of respondents indicating that they have one or more children between the ages of 13 and 18 ($n = 60$).

Most parents (77.23%, $n = 78$) did not identify as members of the LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning +) community. A majority (55.45%, $n = 56$) reported that they had at least one child who identified as LGBTQ+. 35.64% ($n = 36$) answered that they do not have an LGBTQ+ child, while the remaining respondents (8.91%, $n = 9$) did not know whether one or more of their children identified as LGBTQ+. Refer to Table 1 for complete sociodemographic data.

Resources in the Status Quo: Sources of Support and Information

In order to assess the need for intervention and expanded support for Jewish parents of LGBTQ+ youth, it is essential to first answer: What sources of information and social support are Jewish parents currently utilizing?

#	Support Utilization Items	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	N
1	The majority of the people I seek emotional support from share my Jewish identity.	1.00	5.00	3.19	1.11	1.24	101
2	The majority of the people I seek parenting advice from share my Jewish identity.	1.00	5.00	3.01	1.03	1.07	100
3	The majority of sources I seek parenting advice from are Jewish sources.	1.00	5.00	2.50	0.80	0.64	98
4	I would prefer to receive parenting support from Jewish sources over non-Jewish sources.	1.00	5.00	3.18	0.76	0.58	101

Table 2: Jewish Support Utilization Measures

A descriptive table depicting four measures of Jewish Support Utilization, including 3 measures of current support seeking behaviors (pink) and 1 measure of preferred sources (blue).

For those who responded to statements 1-3, regarding current support-seeking behaviors, the composite mean Jewish Support Utilization Score is 2.94 ($SD = 0.70$). This score indicates that, on average, respondents' level of agreement that they primarily seek support from fellow Jews and Jewish sources lies somewhere between slight disagreement and indifference. Parents do not appear to have a strong tendency to seek parenting support or advice from individuals who share their Jewish identity. The mean Jewish Support Preference score is 3.18 ($SD = 0.76$), indicating that, on average, the desire for Jewish support and resources exceeds the current utilization of such resources and relationships. The statement "The majority of the people I seek emotional support from share my Jewish identity" received the highest average score of the status quo Jewish Support Utilization items ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 1.11$), indicating that, on average, respondents depend on individuals who share their Jewish identity for emotional support slightly more than for explicit parenting support. While respondents slightly disagreed that they mostly rely on

Jewish sources of parenting support in the status quo, on average, participants indicated a slight preference for such resources.

#	Source of Information about LGBTQ+ Identity	%	N
1	My Jewish values	50.5	51
2	Other. Please specify below	38.6	39
3	Secular education	38.6	39
4	My family's views	38.6	39
5	My friends' views	37.6	38
6	News media (reading articles, watching the news)	32.7	33
7	Social media (Facebook, Instagram, X (Twitter), etc.)	14.9	15
8	Entertainment media (television and movies)	9.9	10
9	Jewish religious texts and rabbinical teachings, such as Torah and Talmud	6.9	7

Table 3: Participants' Top 3 Most Influential Sources of Information about LGBTQ+ Identity

Participants were asked to select the three sources of information they believe most heavily inform their ideas and beliefs about LGBTQ+ identity ($N = 101$).

Table 3 represents participants' rankings of the three sources they find to have the most significant influences on their perceptions of LGBTQ+ identity. "My Jewish values" was the most frequently selected source, with 50.5% of participants ranking it among the three most influential sources. Secular education and the views of friends and family were also salient sources of information, with approximately 38% of participants selecting each source. 38.6% of participants wrote in their own answers for at least one of their three primary sources.

One theme that emerged among these responses is that, for LGBTQ+ parents, their own perceptions of Jewish values and lived experiences shape their ideas and beliefs about LGBTQ+

identity. Several respondents also referenced interactions with LGBTQ+ friends, family, colleagues, and community members as formative experiences that shaped their perception of LGBTQ+ identity. Academic and professional experiences, particularly in psychology and medicine, were also represented in the open-response answers.

Social and entertainment media seem less influential for most participants. Jewish religious texts and rabbinical teachings, such as Torah and Talmud, were least frequently selected, with just 6.9% of the sample ranking these forms of knowledge among their top three influences. While these results do not indicate the strength of influence of each individual source, they do emphasize participants' self-reported prioritization of information, which may be more important to consider when developing resources that parents may self-select to engage with.

Level of Parental Acceptance and Affirmation

Having established the social and informational resources that Jewish parents rely on to inform their parenting and perspectives on LGBTQ+ identity in the status quo, the next question to explore is RQ 2: To what extent do Jewish parents exhibit LGBTQ+ affirming and rejecting parenting behaviors in the status quo? Exploring the current landscape of resources and social support, along with the prevalence of affirming and rejecting behaviors, further illustrates the strengths of the participant population and potential sites for intervention.

#	Topic of Conversation	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	N
1	My child(ren) and I have discussed their LGBTQ+ identity.	1.00	5.00	3.88	1.05	1.09	65
2	My child(ren) and I have discussed hardships that they have faced due to societal responses to their LGBTQ+ identity.	1.00	5.00	3.32	1.33	1.76	65
3	My child(ren) and I have discussed potential hardships that they may face in the future due to societal responses to their LGBTQ+ identity.	1.00	5.00	3.20	1.22	1.48	65
4	My child(ren) and I have spoken about their LGBTQ+ identity in relationship to Judaism.	1.00	5.00	2.52	1.30	1.70	65

Table 4: Frequency of Parent-Child Conversations About LGBTQ+ Identity

Parents were asked to rate the frequency with which they have discussed various topics related to LGBTQ+ identity with their child, with 1 being “never” and 5 being “very frequently”

Table 4 represents the extent to which parents agreed with statements that reflect status quo openness to discussing LGBTQ+ identity. The sample mean across all four variables constitutes a Dialogue Readiness Measure: an indicator of openness to conversations about LGBTQ+ identity. This is a helpful metric in establishing a parents’ degree of engagement with the subject, a necessary starting point for developing proactively affirming dialogues.

The mean Dialogue Readiness Composite Score, representing parents' level of readiness to engage in dialogue with their children about LGBTQ+ identity, is 3.23 ($SD = 1.09$). This indicates that, on average, parents have sometimes discussed their child’s LGBTQ+ identity with them. Of the individual variables, “My child(ren) and I have spoken about their LGBTQ+ identity in relationship to Judaism” received the lowest score ($M = 2.52$, $SD = 1.30$), suggesting that conversations that explicitly connect Jewish identity and LGBTQ+ identity are the least frequent type of dialogue between parents and children, among the options provided. A follow-

up question asked parents who indicated that they have spoken to their child(ren) about their LGBTQ+ identity in relationship to Judaism to reflect on the content of those conversations.

Most text box answers in response to this prompt described conversations containing affirming content. A primary theme was community acceptance. Many parents reported that they spoke with their children about their perception that their synagogue or primary Jewish community is accepting. The intersection of antisemitism and homophobia was also a predominant theme. For example, one participant wrote, “The only time I’ve really correlated the two identifiers for her is when we are discussing where she will go for college and that we need to find a school somewhere that a gay Jewish woman won’t be in danger just for being gay and Jewish.” Another voiced a similar sentiment, saying “We are scared for the [U.S. Presidential] election in November because we are both gay and Jewish.”

Some parent-child dyads have also discussed the difficulty of navigating homophobia and transphobia within sectors of the Jewish community. As one parent shared, “For them and me, in our Jewish community and practice, there is no conflict; in the larger Jewish world there may be.” Another echoed this feeling, writing, “They might experience some discrimination from some parts of the Jewish world.” One parent addressed the bidirectional nature of exclusion, saying “They’ll probably experience both some form of antisemitism as well as anti-LGBTQ+ behavior from others in their life...and probably antisemitism from within their LGBTQ community (and vice versa)”. The concept of a clash or tension between Jewish identity and queer identity was a recurring theme, underscoring the need for interventions that connect the two.

#	Measure of acceptance or rejection	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	I regularly express love to my child(ren).	2.00	5.00	4.89	0.40	0.16	101
2	I express acceptance of my child(ren)'s LGBTQ+ identity.	3.00	5.00	4.78	0.51	0.26	65
3	It is important to me to refer to my child(ren) by the pronouns they prefer to be addressed with.	2.00	5.00	4.73	0.52	0.28	101
4	It is important to me to refer to my child(ren) by the name they prefer to be called.	3.00	5.00	4.70	0.55	0.31	101
5	I encourage my child(ren) to make their own choices about their gender expression (e.g. clothing, haircuts, etc).	3.00	5.00	4.66	0.55	0.30	101
6	I worry that my child(ren) will lead a less fulfilled life because of their LGBTQ+ identity.	1.00	4.00	1.92	1.06	1.12	65
7	My child'(ren)'s LGBTQ+ identity conflicts with Jewish teachings.	1.00	4.00	1.45	0.77	0.59	65
8	My child(ren)'s LGBTQ+ identity is wrong in the eyes of G-d.	1.00	5.00	1.08	0.51	0.26	65
9	I express disapproval of my child(ren)'s LGBTQ+ identity.	1.00	2.00	1.06	0.24	0.06	65

Table 5: Measures of Parental Acceptance and Rejection

Table 5 contains measures of accepting (pink) and rejecting (blue) parental attitudes and behaviors toward their children related to gender expression and sexuality. Parents rated their level of agreement with each statement on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

A Mean Parental Acceptance and Affirmation Score, reflecting the average rating across all measures, excluding variable 7, was calculated for three cohorts of parents based on their response to Question 8: Do you have at least one child who identifies as part of the LGBTQ+ community? Statement 7, “I worry that my child(ren) will lead a less fulfilled life because of their LGBTQ+ identity,” was excluded from the analysis, as despite providing information about parental beliefs, the degree of “worry” does not function as an operationalized measure of the degree of accepting or affirming behaviors. Measures of rejection, which received low scores, were reverse coded, to reflect their status as indicators of acceptance.

Parents of LGBTQ+ children received a Mean Parental Acceptance and Affirmation Score of 4.75 ($SD = 0.25$), while parents of non-LGBTQ+ children received a score of 4.6 ($SD = 0.42$). Parents who were unsure of their children’s identity received a score of 4.59 ($SD = 0.29$).

These results indicate that while parents who have at least one LGBTQ+ child exhibit slightly stronger agreement with accepting value statements than parents of non-LGBTQ+ children or who do not know their children's identity, all three cohorts expressed a high degree of affirmation and acceptance.

While only parents who answered “yes” or “unsure” in response to Question 8 were surveyed on explicit measures of LGBTQ+ acceptance, parents who answered “no” expressed a high baseline value of respecting their children's self-expression and gender presentation.

Textual Interpretations and Intervention Preferences

Having investigated status quo behaviors, the study turned to assessing the value and utility of resources, seeking to answer the guiding question: Among Jewish parents, what is the perceived benefit of integrating Jewish values into parenting interventions regarding LGBTQ+ identity? First, what is the acceptability of Jewish texts as tools of parental support? Secondly, what is the level of parental interest in various forms of formal interventions?

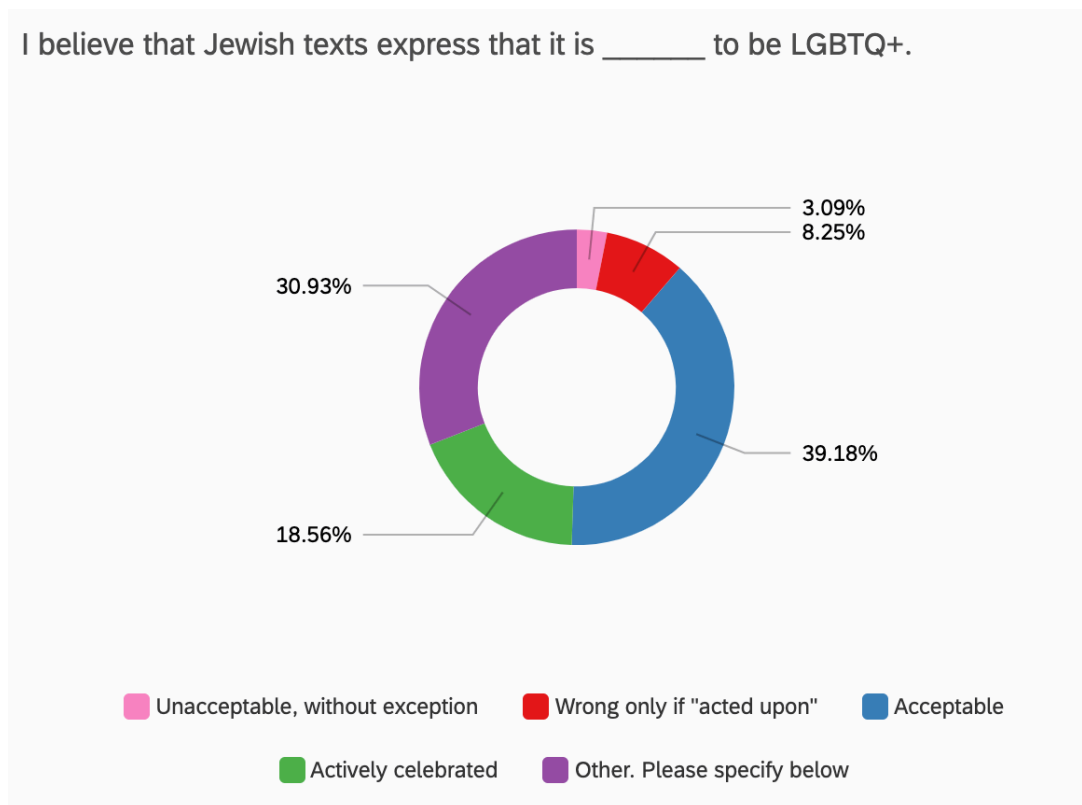


Figure 4: Interpretations of Jewish Texts

Figure 4 presents participants’ answers to the fill-in-the-blank question “I believe Jewish texts express that it is _____ to be LGBTQ+.”

“Acceptable” was the most common response (39.18%, $n = 38$). 30.93% of participants ($n = 30$) chose to answer the question in their own words, reflecting the complexity and variability of Jewish theological interpretations. Among self-described responses, a resonant theme was the subjectivity, malleability, and temporally situated nature of Torah and Talmud. The sentiment that Torah does not have a permanent, objective meaning was reflected in statements such as:

“I believe Jewish texts are meant to be interpreted and re-evaluated,”

“The question is framed too simplistically. What kinds of Jewish texts? Through what kind of interpretive lens? Many traditional Jewish texts express disapproval but they can often be reinterpreted in a more positive light.”

“Jewish texts fundamentally express multiple views. That's the best part of Judaism.”

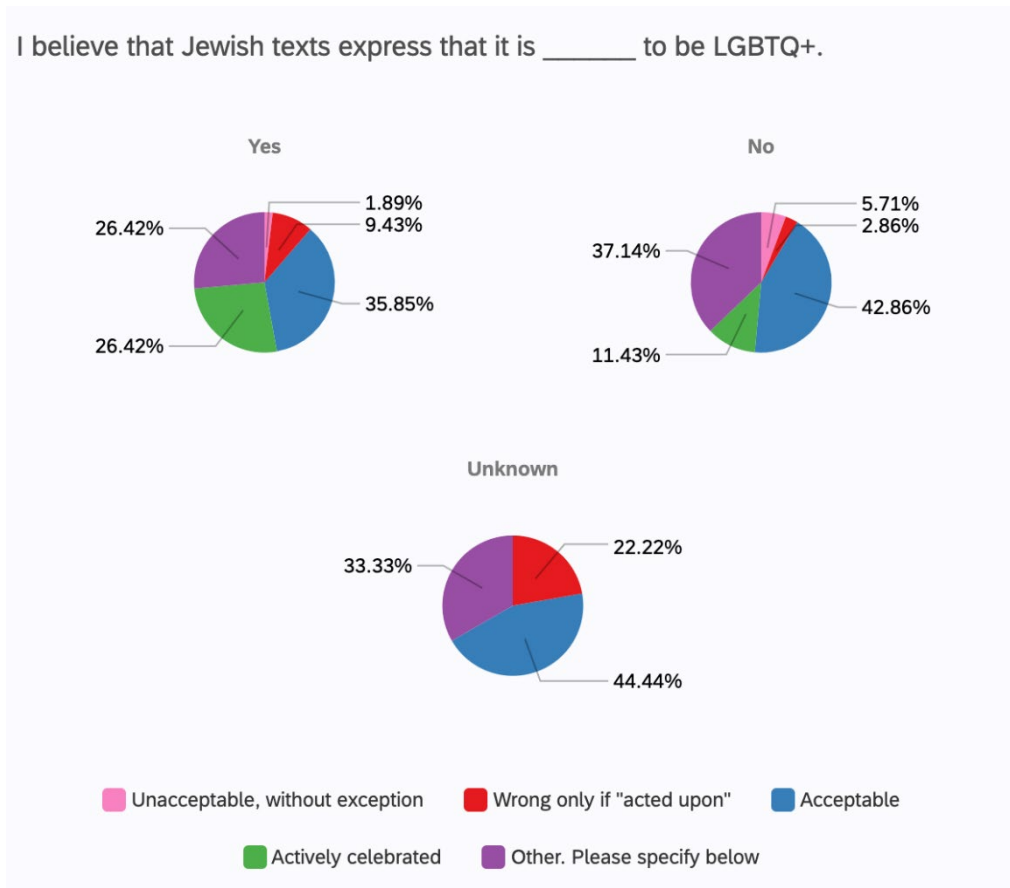


Figure 5: Interpretations of Jewish Texts: A Comparison by Parental Awareness of Children’s LGBTQ+ Identity Status

Figure 5 presents participants’ answers to the fill-in-the-blank question “I believe Jewish texts express that it is _____ to be LGBTQ+.” Responses are grouped depending on participants’ response to the question “Do you have at least one child who is part of the LGBTQ+ community?”

Figure 5 shows breakout responses to Question 14 based on participants’ responses to Question 8: Do you have at least one child who identifies as LGBTQ+? Parents who have an LGBTQ+ child were more likely than both other cohorts to answer that Jewish texts “actively celebrate” LGBTQ+ identity. Those who are uncertain of their children’s identity were most likely to

perceive texts as conveying that LGBTQ+ identity is “wrong only if acted upon.” Parents who do not have LGBTQ+ children were most likely to believe that Jewish texts completely prohibit being LGBTQ+. Parents in this cohort were also more likely than peers to write their own answer. “Acceptable” was the most common response in each cohort.

After being presented with three sources of affirming Jewish texts—theology, mystical structure, and blessings—53.5% ($n = 54$) of participants indicated that they were not previously aware that ancient Jewish texts explicitly mention gender diversity. When asked whether these texts increased their feelings of acceptance toward LGBTQ+ people, the majority of participants (51%, $n = 51$) expressed ambivalence, selecting “neither agree nor disagree.” 50% of the sample elaborated on their rationale for their answer in a textbox. A dominant theme among qualitative responses is that participants already considered their baseline support to be high and fixed. Many stated that because of their preexisting firm commitment to LGBTQ+ acceptance, the texts did not influence their degree of support. Several participants noted that although their acceptance of queerness did not shift, their feelings of warmth toward Judaism did increase as a result of viewing the texts.

#	Affirming Text	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	N
1	Text 1: The Talmud depicts 8 different gender designations.	1.00	5.00	4.32	0.89	0.79	88
2	Text 2: Jewish mysticism represents the most divine emanation of G-d as androgynous.	1.00	5.00	4.08	1.15	1.33	86
3	Texts 3-5: LGBTQ+ blessings for Jewish rituals or lifecycle events, which may be modified to mention your child(ren)'s specific identity or adapted to suit different life events.	1.00	5.00	4.17	1.02	1.05	93

Table 6: Utility of Affirming Texts

This descriptive table portrays the average ratings participants allotted to each affirming text using a 5-point scale, with 1 being "very unhelpful" and 5 being "very helpful."

Please categorize the Jewish texts that you just viewed based on how beneficial they would be in assisting you in supporting your child, with 1 being "very unhelpful" and 5 being "very helpful."

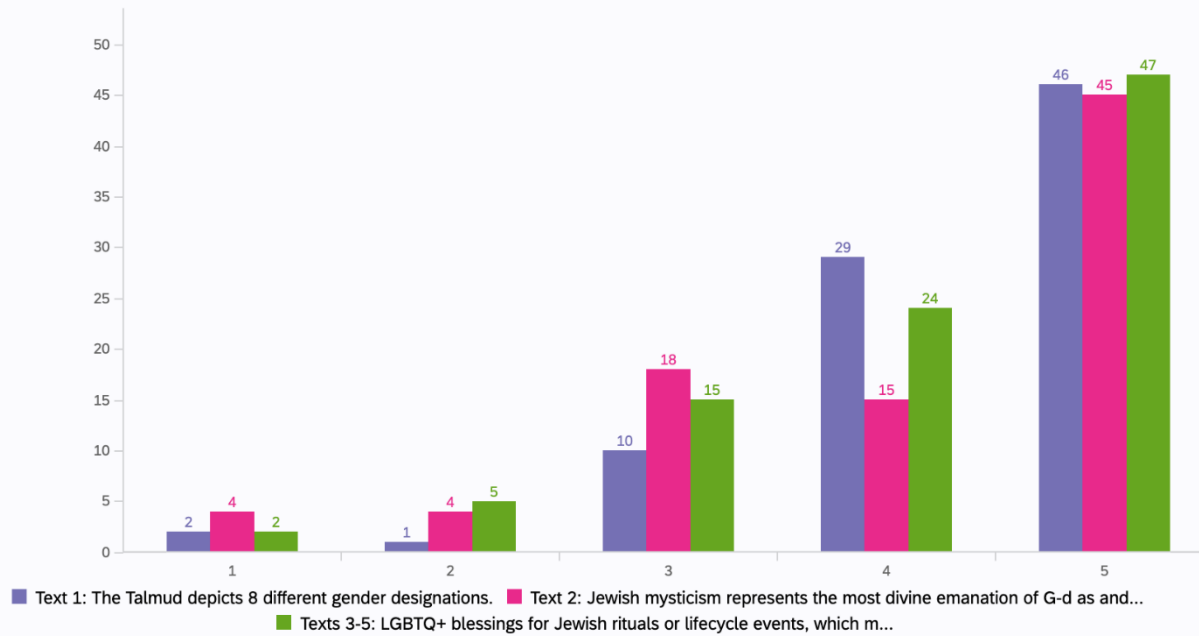


Figure 6: Distribution of Affirming Texts Rating

The bar chart depicts the distribution of participants' ratings of the three types of affirming texts, highlighting a high concentration of 4- and 5-point scores.

Participants ranked the texts "on how beneficial they would be in assisting you in supporting your child," with 1 being "very unhelpful" and 5 being "very helpful." Each text independently received a high mean score, and the composite Affirming Text Utility Score was 4.23 ($SD = 0.83$). Table 6 illustrates the high average endorsement of affirming texts, while Figure 6 provides a striking visual representation of the distribution of ratings. These rankings did not vary notably between denominations. Parents of teens ranked the utility of texts slightly higher than parents of children under 5 or over 26.

Finally, of the parents who reported that they do have an LGBTQ+ child, just 12 participants (21.4%, $n = 56$) reported that they had previously participated in a

psychoeducational group, support group, therapeutic group, or other program for parents of LGBTQ+ children. Of the 10 participants who elaborated on their experiences, 100% reported that the group was secular and focused on parenting approaches that aim to support and affirm children who identify as LGBTQ+. Connecting with other parents who had similar experiences was consistently noted as the most helpful aspect of the program.

#	Parenting Program Interest Items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	N
1	I would be likely to participate in a secular program about LGBTQ+ affirming parenting approaches.	11.11%	7.07%	44.44%	29.29%	8.08%	99
2	I would be likely to participate in a Jewish program about LGBTQ+ affirming parenting approaches.	9.09%	8.08%	40.40%	32.32%	10.10%	99
3	I would be likely to participate in a Jewish program about parenting approaches that encourage children to prioritize heterosexuality and identify with the gender they were assigned at birth.	85.86%	11.11%	3.03%	0.00%	0.00%	99
4	I would be likely to participate in a secular program about parenting approaches that encourage children to prioritize heterosexuality and identify with the gender they were assigned at birth.	91.84%	6.12%	2.04%	0.00%	0.00%	98

Table 7: Parenting Program Interest

Parents indicated the likelihood that they would participate in parenting programs of different religious orientations and affirming/rejecting stances.

“Neither agree nor disagree” was the most common response regarding interest in participating in a program about LGBTQ+ affirming parenting approaches, whether the program was secular or Jewish. An overwhelming majority of participants were strongly disinterested in a program of any religious or cultural orientation that seeks to encourage children to prioritize heterosexuality and identify with the gender they were assigned at birth. Participants expressed higher levels of interest in Jewish programs, irrespective of the programs’ affirming or rejecting stance.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The present study expanded understanding of information and support-seeking behaviors, as well as affirming attitudes and parenting practices among Jewish parents. Existing research on the efficacy of family-centered LGBTQ+ acceptance promotion interventions and the culturally specific needs of Jewish families is sparse, and no known studies have sought to pair the two concepts. This study seeks to fill this gap in the literature by characterizing the participant population and parsing the acceptability of theologically grounded resources about LGBTQ+ identity for Jewish parents.

RQ 1: What sources of information and social support are Jewish parents currently utilizing?

Although parents, on average, are not primarily using Jewish parenting resources, respondents do tend to indicate that they would prefer Jewish sources over non-Jewish sources. The mismatch between participants' current social relationships and the form of relationships they would prefer to develop, as well as the difference between the parenting resources that participants are currently utilizing and the resources they indicate they would like to use, may highlight a paucity of available Jewish parenting resources and supports. The gap between status quo behaviors and aspirational behaviors underscores the need for culturally specific interventions that make Jewish-specific parenting resources and social relationships increasingly accessible.

Further, it is notable that although Jewish values play a significant role in shaping most participants' ideas and beliefs about LGBTQ+ identity, Jewish texts, and rabbinical teachings are the least salient influence among those listed. This could be due, in part, to the low level of religious Orthodoxy among the sample. Reconstructionist, Reform, and Conservative Jews tend to ascribe less significance to literal readings of texts and prioritize transcendent Jewish

principles and values as a guide to righteous living (Shanes, 2023). However, a lack of awareness of Jewish texts about LGBTQ+ identity could also contribute to their low ranking among the participants' most influential informational sources. This inference is supported by the fact that the majority of the sample (53.5%, $n = 54$) was unaware that there are ancient Jewish texts that explicitly mention gender diversity, yet, when presented with such texts, rated them highly on a measure of helpfulness. The need for increased access to culturally specific parenting support is further underscored by the gap between parents' low baseline knowledge of affirming texts and their significant appreciation of the texts upon introduction.

RQ2: To what extent do Jewish parents exhibit LGBTQ+ affirming and rejecting parenting behaviors in the status quo?

The vast majority of survey participants expressed exceptionally high levels of support. The entire sample either disagreed or *strongly* disagreed with the statement “I express disapproval of my child’s LGBTQ+ identity,” and most agreed or *strongly* agreed that they express approval of their child’s gender and sexuality. Given the extensive literature on the protective nature of familial acceptance, these findings bode well for the socio-emotional and physical wellbeing of the children of the participant population. Queer youth who experience high levels of familial rejection are 8.4 times more likely to attempt suicide than peers whose families express minimal to no rejection, underscoring the potentially life-saving nature of accepting behaviors (Aranmolate et al., 2017). Youth whose families exhibit high levels of acceptance are not only physically healthier and safer, but also far more optimistic about their futures (Ryan & Rees, 2012).

While these findings are highly encouraging, they are representative of a small snapshot of a specific part of the Jewish community. As discussed, Reconstructionist perspectives, which

are overrepresented in the sample compared to national trends in affiliation, approach traditional texts as malleable, historically specific documents. This orientation, as well as institutional support for LGBTQ+ rights within organizations such as Reconstructing Judaism, may facilitate high levels of acceptance among this population. The denominational makeup and denominationally consistent accepting views among the present sample seems to have implications for parents' degree of interest in affirming parenting programming.

RQ3: Among Jewish parents, what is the perceived benefit of integrating Jewish values into parenting interventions regarding LGBTQ+ identity?

Because the literature reflects the efficacy of culturally grounded strengths-based therapeutic and psychoeducational approaches, participants were surveyed about their experience and interest in such interventions (Benish et al., 2011; Hall et al., 2016; T. B. Smith et al., 2010). On average, parents indicated a relative ambivalence for formal programming (i.e., parenting groups, therapeutic interventions, psychoeducation). Many parents expressed that they are “already affirming” and are therefore disinterested in interventions that seek to enhance affirming beliefs and behaviors. Because this data set does not represent parents who express moderate to high levels of rejecting behaviors, it is not possible to conclude their preferences for parenting programming or assess those preferences relative to those of accepting parents.

Despite respondents' high level of baseline support and equivocal stances on formal parenting support, quantitative and qualitative results both point to the potential benefits of informal (i.e., microsystemic, interpersonal) use of affirming Jewish theology. Most parents indicated that they believed the affirming Jewish texts would assist them in supporting their children. Each text received a mean score of 4 or higher on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating the texts would be “very unhelpful” and 5 meaning “very helpful.” In qualitative responses

elaborating on participants' rankings, several individuals shared that while these texts did not change or increase their preexisting affirming beliefs, the existence of texts that explicitly connect Judaism and gender and sexual expansiveness is impactful. Multiple participants remarked on ways they envisioned integrating the texts into their own lives. As one parent shared, "I did...find the Mishibeirach for Re[na]ming quite moving, and wish my daughter could have or maybe still could experience it." Another wrote, "The *brachot* [blessings] are gorgeous, I raised my kid within Conservative rather than Reform, but they might well take comfort here." Multiple parents said that although their children do not currently identify as LGBTQ+, they took solace in knowing that they could share these texts with their children if they did come out at some point in their journeys. In their own words:

"It's wonderful that there are Jewish traditions and practices for such situations. If my daughter ever decided she was gay or transgender, I would definitely rely on this content. :)"

"My children do not identify as part of the lgbtq community however, if they did reveal themselves to be a part of it I would use these concepts and prayers to support them in their journey to develop themselves."

Further, responses suggest that for some members of the Jewish community, learning that there is an existing textual foundation that aligns with their preexisting affirmation of queer people—or of their own LGBTQ+ identity—is heartening and healing. As one parent shared, "It makes me feel perhaps a little closer to allowing Judaism fully into my life." Several parents echoed this sentiment. For some individuals and families, affirming Jewish texts may help to resolve feelings of alienation and distance from one's Jewish identity, even if feelings of LGBTQ+ acceptance were already present. This is especially meaningful in the context of findings that having a strong cultural, ethnic, or religious identity can buffer against deleterious mental health impacts, including those associated with Minority Stress Experiences (Brewster et al., 2016; Weisskirch et al., 2016). Utilization of affirming texts in parenting and support of

LGBTQ+ youth may be an avenue for fostering intersectional queer Jewish identities and alleviating negative mental health impacts.

Limitations

The conclusions that can be drawn from this study are limited due to aspects of the research design, data set, and data analysis. The limitations of this study highlight opportunities for future improvement and exploration in this area of inquiry.

First, this sample seems to exhibit exceptionally high rates of acceptance. While it is valuable to know that LGBTQ+ affirming Jewish resources have a high acceptability and utility rating among affirming parents, parents with lower affirmation scores are often the targets of interventions and programming that seek to enhance and promote understanding. As underscored by research on the biopsychosocial detriments of familial rejection, there is a particularly pressing need to increase acceptance among parents who are currently expressing disapproval of their children's identities. Further, it is likely that parents who already have affirming perspectives and belong to religious traditions that welcome more freedom of interpretation may be more quickly receptive to materials that affirm LGBTQ+ identity than those who have deeply held rejecting beliefs and are committed to strict, literal readings. It is important to establish how acceptability and utility ratings may differ among members of different movements and traditions. Future research that makes a concerted effort to survey Jewish parents with higher levels of LGBTQ+ rejecting behavior at baseline is advisable to establish the utility of psychoeducation for the population as a whole.

Similarly, the denominational representation in this sample was roughly the inverse of national trends, with members of the Reconstructionist movement comprising a notably high proportion of the sample (45.5%). Because the Reconstructionist movement is such a small

fragment (< 4%) of the national population and has a uniquely flexible relationship to textual exegesis (see Literature Review), this study cannot be taken as indicative of cross-denominational trends.

Further, though it is difficult to pinpoint the regional origins of responses due to snowball recruitment, most of the organizations through which recruitment and dissemination were directly conducted occurred in Oregon. Therefore, regional differences are largely unaccounted for.

Limited racial and ethnic diversity of the sample also constrain the generalizability of this study. The sample is mostly White and Ashkenazi. Results should not be generalized to Jews of all racial-ethnic identities, as to avoid flattening the complex interplay of factors that collide to influence resource access and utilization, LGBTQ+ accepting and affirming attitudes, and intervention desirability. A larger, more racially, ethnically, and regionally diverse sample would allow for more extensive breakout analyses and more expansive conclusions.

Additionally, because this study uses LGBTQ+ identity as an umbrella term, we cannot conclude differences in the data between members of marginalized sexualities, marginalized gender identities, and individuals who belong to both groups. Because the ancient texts presented focus on gender rather than sexuality, parents whose children are gay, lesbian, or bisexual, but not transgender, non-binary, or otherwise gender-expansive may rank the utility of these texts differently. An analysis that disaggregates sexuality and gender would allow for a nuanced breakout analysis of specific identities.

Lastly, because the present analysis is strictly descriptive, claims of statistical significance cannot be made. Therefore, it is not possible to know the degree to which relationships between variables are due to chance, as opposed to reflective of meaningful

patterns. An inferential statistical analysis of a larger sample size could yield results allowing for greater confidence in the value of affirming texts among specific cohorts of parents.

Implications

Implications for Future Research

Both the existing data set and general area of inquiry present opportunities for future research. First, an analysis between participants of the present study and members of a more traditional, primarily Orthodox sample would help to establish the extent to which denominational affiliation influences a person's perspective on LGBTQ+ identity and perception of what Jewish texts have to say about queerness. An independent samples t-test comparing the composite mean Affirming Text Utility Scores of a sample of progressive Jews and a sample of traditional Jews would provide insight into whether Jews of different movement alignments have significantly different views on the utility of LGBTQ+ affirming Jewish texts as parenting tools. An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) comparing a greater number of specific denominations would allow for an even more granular assessment of the same concept. It seems likely that the high degree of endorsement of affirming texts among the present sample is related to the pre-existing high level of acceptance beliefs and behaviors, as well as the flexible approach to textual exegesis that is prevalent among many Reconstructionist, Reform, and some Conservative communities. Such analyses would help to discern whether denomination does play a significant role in influencing how individuals assess the validity and utility of textual interpretations. Using independent samples t-tests and ANOVAs to evaluate the difference in baseline levels of parental acceptance and rejection behaviors will also help to establish whether, among a more heterogenous sample of parents who express a mixture of accepting and rejecting behaviors, there is a significant difference in the Mean Parental Acceptance and Affirmation Score by

denomination. These analyses are valuable for characterizing the presence and strength of significant relationships between stratified groups from the present or future samples.

Another potential direction for future research is the implementation of a longitudinal focus or study group of Jewish parents of various denominational identities. One major limitation of the present study is that the survey format constrains the Jewish cultural norm of lively debate and dynamic textual exegesis. Answering survey questions independently and quickly may not provide participants with enough time to evaluate their options and contemplate their answers. For example, when asked to respond to the fill in the blank statement “I believe Jewish texts express that it is _____ to be LGBTQ+,” one participant replied “The question is framed too simplistically. What kinds of Jewish texts? Through what kind of interpretive lens? Many traditional Jewish texts express disapproval but they can often be reinterpreted in a more positive light.” If the question were posed in an in-person community forum, as opposed to a non-interactive open response box, these ideas could have been discussed further. Other parents had qualms about the affirming texts that were cited and indicated that they wished for more time to do further research, hear other’s perspectives, or review the original source material before indicating whether they believed the texts would aide them in supporting their children.

By conducting a multi-session study group in which Jewish parents could congregate, learn, and discuss together, it is possible that parents who were initially indifferent, apprehensive, or critical of the texts would gather new information and shift their perspectives. This analysis posits that the Jewish tradition of rigorous questioning and theological debate lends itself to a multiplicity of possible interpretations of Jewish texts and values. Though individuals certainly internalize an inquisitive mindset through cultural membership, the practices of sharing ideas, back-and-forth questioning in pursuit of answers, and engaging in extensive individual and

collective scholarship is lost in the survey. It is advisable to run a study group on Jewish affirming texts and conduct a paired samples t-test between pre and post-test Affirming Text Utility Scores, as well as a comparative analysis between pre and post-test qualitative assessments of the texts. This study may further establish the functionality of questioning and scholarship as modes of enhancing LGBTQ+ acceptance.

Implications for Practice

Because most parents indicated a sense of ambivalence toward the suggestion of formal parenting programming, but a high degree of endorsement of Jewish values and affirming texts, informal implementation of LGBTQ+ affirming texts at the family and community level is advisable. Jewish institutions, such as synagogues, schools, and community organizations might choose to house pamphlets or reading lists directing parents toward these affirming texts. Such materials could also include a brief instructive guide on sharing the texts with children of different ages and initiating developmentally accessible conversations about the intersection of Judaism and queerness.

Synagogues are a hub of Jewish life for many North American Jews. 92% of Jews who attend services regularly say that their primary reason for attendance is that they find it spiritually meaningful (Pew Research Center, 2021). The second most chosen reason for attendance (87%) is feeling a sense of belonging in the congregation (Pew Research Center, 2021). To further enrich the spiritual meaning and sense of belonging for all Jews, synagogues might consider incorporating some of the affirming *brachot*, such as Rabbi Sonja K. Pilz's candle-lighting prayer, into their *siddurim* (prayer books), so that families may learn them and integrate them into at-home-rituals and practice (Eger, 2020). The previously discussed

integration of gender inclusive Torah honors is one example of what a more expansive, inclusive liturgy might look like.

Another example of the profound impact that the integration of affirming texts may have is illuminated by the Shabbat ritual. The home, in addition to synagogue, is a central space in Jewish life. Shabbat, the Jewish Sabbath ritual, is most often conducted at home in the presence of family and other loved ones. The Friday evening Shabbat ceremony welcomes in a day of rest and reflection that is also frequently spent in the presence of family and community. Shabbat has been cited as a source of Jewish community and identity-building that reifies familial bonds (Marks et al., 2017). In a qualitative study of Jewish emerging adults and families, the notion that “Shabbat brings us together” was a poignant theme (Marks et al., 2017). A central aspect of *Shabbos* “togetherness” stems from the intimate intergenerational ritual of blessing the children (Marks et al., 2017). It is customary for parents to place their hands atop their child’s head or hug them while imparting the blessing. Many parents whisper an additional wish, gratitude, compliment, or other expression of love and appreciation for their child after reciting the prayer (Marks et al., 2017). Though different denominations and individual families use different prayers and translations, the sentiment of these blessings is consistent; may our children be watched over, may they be granted peace and prosperity, may they live proudly in the image and tradition of their ancestors (Marks et al., 2017).

Another consistency among these prayers is that they tend to be highly gendered. Most *siddurim* contain one blessing for sons, which often contains a line wishing that they may be blessed like the Biblical Ephraim and Menasseh, sons of Jacob, and another blessing for daughters, which typically wishes that they will embody the attributes of matriarchs Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah. For non-binary and transgender children, what may have once been

a “beautifully wonderful and tender moment that we have really come to [love] and our children have come to expect,” may instead become yet another moment of being misgendered and ascribed traits that do not resonate with one’s sense of self (Marks et al., 2017).

Even among largely accepting families, such as those represented in the present study, there may be a profound sense of loss associated with not having knowledge of or access to a non-gendered blessing for children. If such blessings were made widely available, they could serve to both reconnect LGBTQ+ Jewish children with familiar Jewish rituals that they may have become alienated from *and* create a weekly opportunity for parents to express love, gratitude, and prayers for their children in a manner that weaves together affirmation of their child’s gender identity and Judaism.

Ultimately, the high composite Affirming Text Utility Score (4.23, $SD = 0.83$) and abundance of qualitative responses conveying that the discovery of LGBTQ+ affirming Jewish texts allows people to feel closer to their Judaism highlights the importance of normalizing and visibilizing LGBTQ+ affirming texts. Making such materials accessible within religious and cultural spaces where families congregate is one potentially fruitful method of allowing youth and parents alike to engage with and absorb their poignant messages.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

LGBTQ+ youth are faced with a daunting, often discriminatory social landscape, which results in distal and proximal minority stress. Familial rejection exacerbates these hardships, while familial support and strong cultural identity buffer against deleterious mental health impacts. For Jewish youth, religion, sexuality, and gender may feel like disparate identities that are challenging to reconcile, and this disconnect is entrenched by the lack of familial support interventions that explicitly acknowledge and address the unique values and experiences of this population.

By identifying status quo Jewish parent support utilization, accepting beliefs, and intervention preferences, the present study establishes that although current knowledge and use of Jewish LGBTQ+ affirming resources are low among the participant population, when parents are presented with LGBTQ+ affirming texts, they confidently endorse them as a helpful parenting tool. Parents also indicate significant openness to informal integration of these resources in the family and community context. These results highlight that even among a decidedly accepting participant population, resources that explicitly connect queer identity and Judaism are lacking.

For the Jewish community, familial acceptance is not merely a matter of encouraging parents to accept their children; it is also a task of bridging LGBTQ+ and Jewish identities. One of the key stories that came through in the qualitative data is that participants see Judaism not only as a religion or culture, but as a peoplehood. As explored in the literature review, there are many ways to be Jewish, including through shared culture, ancestry, or history, or due to religious beliefs and practices. Most often, Jewish identity is an amalgamation of these factors (Himmelfarb, 2009). It makes sense that the notion of belonging to a people is so salient among

the participant population, as the concept of peoplehood is deeply embedded in Reconstructionism. Mordecai Kaplan, the founder of the Reconstructionist movement, held that Judaism was not constituted by either beliefs or behaviors alone. Rather, Kaplan “insisted that the primary form of Jewish identification is belonging—that intuitive sense of kinship that binds a Jew to every other Jew in history and in the contemporary world. Whatever Jews believe, and however they behave as Jews, serves to shape and concretize that underlying sense of being bound to a people with a shared history and destiny” (Gillman, 1990).

Within this context, it is clear that bridging the gap between queerness and Judaism does not solely function to close the divide between a person’s sexual or gender identity and their religion. If Judaism is understood as a peoplehood, exclusion from Judaism based on one’s LGBTQ+ identity is a negation of belonging to a global community with a shared past and shared future. Such rejection is a denial of one’s complete personhood. Therefore, while affirmation rooted in secular egalitarianism is beneficial and reaps protective benefits for youth wellbeing, fusing queer affirmation and Jewish tradition uniquely produces *holistic* affirmation. In the words of one participant, “[Reading the affirming texts] doesn’t necessarily change my feelings toward LGBTQ+ people, which are already affirming in nature, but it does make me less distanced from (and ashamed of) ancient texts/roots in Judaism.” Speaking to the value of LGBTQ+ affirming Jewish texts, another participant voices the hope at the heart of this investigation: “Maybe it could contribute to some Jews' sense of belonging.”

Appendix A



EXEMPT DETERMINATION

December 28, 2023

Talia Cordova
taliac@uoregon.edu

Dear Talia Cordova:

The following research was reviewed and determined to qualify for exemption.

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Study Title:	Exploring Macro-Systemic Messaging Around Gender and Sexuality: The Jewish Practice of Questioning as a Paradigm for Culturally Specific Family Interventions
Principal Investigator:	Talia Cordova
Parent Study ID:	STUDY00001152
Transaction ID:	STUDY00001152
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cordova IRB Conflict of Interest Form .pdf, Category: IRB Protocol;• Cordova IRB Exempt Determination Application .pdf, Category: IRB Protocol;• Cordova IRB Exemption Category 2 Form.pdf, Category: IRB Protocol;• Informed Consent Procedure.pdf, Category: Consent Form;• Institutional Review Board Research Proposal (2).pdf, Category: IRB Protocol;
Approval Date:	12/14/2023
Effective Date:	12/28/2023
Expiration Date:	12/13/2024

For this research, the following determinations have been made:

- This study has been reviewed under the 2018 Common Rule and determined to qualify for exemption under Title 45 CFR 46.104(d) ((2)(i) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation (non-identifiable)).

The research is approved to be conducted as described in the approved protocol using the approved materials. Approved materials can be accessed in the protocol workspace in the IRB module of the research administration portal (RAP).

All changes to this research must be assessed to ensure the study continues to qualify for exemption. Research Compliance Services has developed [specific guidance](#) to help you understand when a modification is required before a change can be implemented. It is your responsibility to ensure modifications are submitted when required and approval secured before implementing changes to the protocol

Continuing Review is not required for this study. An institutional approval period has been established based on your application materials. If you anticipate the research will continue beyond the approval period, you must submit a Continuing Review Application at least 45 days prior to the expiration date. A closure report must be submitted once human subject research activities are complete. Failure to maintain current approval or properly close the protocol constitutes non-compliance.

With the submission of your request, you agreed to uphold the responsibilities of the Principal Investigator and have agreed to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB module of the RAP.

If you have any questions regarding your protocol or the review process, please contact Research Compliance Services at ResearchCompliance@uoregon.edu or (541)346-2510. The University of Oregon and Research Compliance Services appreciate your commitment to the ethical and responsible conduct of research with human subjects.

Please consider completing our [user satisfaction survey](#). It only takes a few minutes, and we would like to hear about your experience working with our office!

Sincerely,

Research Compliance Services
on behalf of the Committee for Protection of Human Subjects

cc: Karrie Walters

Appendix B

Hello,

My name is Talia Cordova and I am a Family and Human Services student at the University of Oregon. I am currently working on an undergraduate thesis about developing culturally relevant resources for Jewish parents of LGBTQ+ youth.

I am reaching out to ask if you would be willing and able to assist in sharing an anonymous, web-based survey for this project with members of the _____ community. The survey is focused on the question: Would Jewish-focused programming be beneficial for parents as they navigate raising their children, who may currently or at some point identify as LGBTQ+?

The survey is completely anonymous and will not collect any personally identifying information about participants. We estimate that the survey will take 10 to 15 minutes to complete via cell phone or computer. The questions, which are both multiple choice and short answer, pertain to respondents' Jewish values, perspectives on LGBTQ+ identity, preferred sources of social support, and past parenting intervention experiences. We hope to receive as many responses as possible from parents who come from a diverse range of Jewish denominations, backgrounds, and beliefs. The survey is ready to complete now and easily accessible via the link and QR code included in the attached materials. Our goal is to collect the majority of responses by April 7, 2024.

To distribute the survey, please use the approach that works best for your organization. A flyer and brief survey description are included as attachments to this email. For example, you might consider any combination of the following:

1. Print the flyer and post it to bulletin boards in your building.
2. Include the flyer and/or survey description in an email to all members, or to groups, cohorts, or committees in your community (for example, b'nai mitzvah parent groups, religious or Hebrew school parents, etc).
3. Include the flyer and/or the survey description in a community newsletter or other routine communication
4. Post the [link to the survey](#) with the attached description to your organization's website or social media.

The one restriction is that we ask that congregants/members are not invited individually, to avoid creating a sense of obligation to participate. Instead, please send the survey to groups or cohorts in your community you feel it is most relevant to.

If possible, we encourage you to share the survey in multiple ways to reach the largest audience possible, but any method of sharing is welcome and appreciated!

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask. I can be reached by email, or by phone at (503) 544-7287. If you would like to direct any questions to my Faculty Advisor, Dr. Karrie Walters, who is overseeing my research, she can be contacted by email at kwalters@uoregon.edu.

If you intend to disseminate this survey, please let me know. Your support in sharing this with your community's parents is greatly appreciated.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best,
Talia

Appendix C

Survey Blurb:

Calling ALL Jewish parents!

Talia Cordova, a Family and Human Services student at the University of Oregon, is working on an undergraduate thesis exploring **the potential benefits of theologically grounded Jewish educational resources for the parents of LGBTQ+ youth.**

As part of Talia's research, she is conducting an **anonymous online survey** that seeks **input from Jewish parents of all denominations** and beliefs regarding the type of culturally specific parenting resources they would prefer, if any.

Regardless of whether or not you have a child who currently identifies as LGBTQ+, we would love to hear from you!

We're curious to know: Do you feel that your Jewish values shape your parenting practices and understanding of LGBTQ+ identity? Are you interested in seeing more Jewish-specific parenting resources? Do you prefer secular parenting tools?

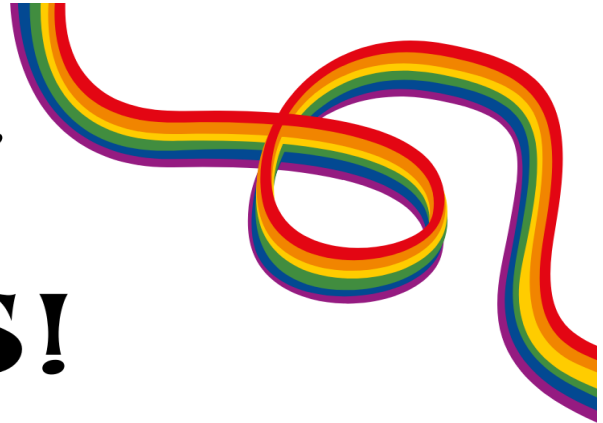
If you are interested, please share your perspective by going to <https://bit.ly/3wDZTmW> on a computer or mobile device.

Responses will be accepted through April 15, 2024.

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Appendix D

Calling *ALL* JEWISH PARENTS!



WHAT? An anonymous online survey!

We're curious to know: Do you feel that your Jewish values shape your parenting practices and understanding of LGBTQ+ identity? Are you interested in seeing more Jewish-specific parenting resources? Do you prefer secular parenting tools?

WHO? We are seeking input from Jewish parents of all denominations and beliefs to inform the development of culturally relevant resources for Jewish parents of LGBTQ+ youth.

Regardless of whether you have a child who currently identifies as LGBTQ+, we would love to hear from you!

WHY? My name is Talia Cordova and I am a Family and Human Services student at the University of Oregon. I am currently working on an undergraduate thesis that explores the potential benefits of theologically grounded Jewish educational resources for the parents of LGBTQ+ youth.

HOW? Share your perspective by scanning the QR code or going to <https://bit.ly/3wDZTmW> on a computer or mobile device.

WHEN? We are accepting responses until April 15, 2024!



Questions? Contact taliac@uoregon.edu



Appendix E



Introduction

You are being asked to participate in a research study, the anonymous results of which will be included in the researcher's undergraduate thesis at the University of Oregon. Below is key information about this research for you to consider when deciding whether or not to participate.

Please ask questions about any of the information you do not understand before you decide whether to participate. If you have any questions or concerns, you may contact the researcher, Talia Cordova, by email at taliac@uoregon.edu or the researcher's Faculty Advisor, Dr. Karrie Walters, at kwalters@uoregon.edu. If you have questions about your rights or wish to speak with someone other than the research team, you may contact:

Research Compliance Services
5237 University of Oregon Eugene, OR 97403-5237
(541) 346-2510
ResearchCompliance@uoregon.edu

Key information for you to consider:

Voluntary Consent: You are being asked to volunteer for a research study. It is up to you whether you choose to participate or not. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you choose not to participate or if you discontinue participation.

Purpose: You are invited to participate in research to gather information about Jewish parents' current sources of parenting support and perspective on LGBTQ+ identity, as well as to gauge what form of parenting support parents would prefer, if any.

Duration: It is expected that your participation in the survey will take between 10 and 15 minutes.

Procedures and Activities: You will be asked to anonymously answer multiple-choice, single-answer, and short-answer questions about your own and your child's demographic characteristics, your primary sources of support and information, your beliefs about Jewish theological perspective, and your preferences among various forms of parenting curricula.

Risks: You will be asked about your and your child(ren)'s identities, and your social and religious beliefs. Some participants may experience some emotional discomfort when answering questions about these subjects. To minimize risk and discomfort, this study does not collect any personally identifying information about you, and you may skip any questions that you do not wish to answer.

Benefits: Participants may directly benefit from the educational value of the research process, as participants will be introduced to Jewish theological texts of which they may have previously been unaware. These materials may equip participants with knowledge that will be applicable in their daily lives and relationships. The researchers hope that the study will be beneficial to the participant population (Jewish parents) as a whole by indicating the degree to which culturally specific parenting curricula for the parents of LGBTQ+ children would be beneficial.

By proceeding with the survey it is assumed you affirm the following:

I have had the opportunity to read and consider the information in this form. I have asked any questions necessary to make a decision about my participation. I understand that I can ask additional questions throughout my participation.

I understand that by proceeding, I volunteer to participate in this research. I understand that I am not waiving any legal rights. I understand that if my ability to consent or assent for myself changes, either I or my legal representative may be asked to re-consent prior to my continued participation in this study.

I confirm that I am 18 years or older.

I consent to participate in this study.

Demographic questions

1. Which of the following do you identify with? Please select all of the following options that apply or describe in the text box below.

Reconstructionist

Reform

Conservative

Orthodox

Renewal

Humanist

Sephardic

Ashkenazi

Mizrahi

Beta Israel

Describe below

2. If you attend synagogue, what Jewish religious movement is the congregation that you most regularly attend aligned with?

Reconstructionist

Reform

Conservative

Orthodox

Renewal

Humanist

Other (please specify)

3. Which age group do you belong to?

18-20

21-29

30-39

40-49

50-59

60 or older

4. How would you describe your racial identity?

5. Do you identify as part of the LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning +) community?

Yes

No

6. Which age group does your child belong to? If you have multiple children, please select all that apply.

5 or younger

6-12

13-18

19-25

26 or older

7. How would you describe your child(ren)'s racial identity?

8. Do you have at least one child who identifies as part of the LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning +) community?

Yes

No

Unknown

Construct 1: Sources of Social Support

9. Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements about your sources of social support.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
The majority of the people I seek emotional support from share my Jewish identity.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The majority of the people I seek parenting advice from share my Jewish identity.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The majority of sources I seek parenting advice from are Jewish sources.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I would prefer to receive parenting support from Jewish sources over non-Jewish sources.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Construct 2: Levels of Parental Acceptance and Affirmation

10. Please indicate how frequently you have experienced the following scenarios:

	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Very Frequently
My child(ren) and I have discussed their LGBTQ+ identity.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Very Frequently
My child(ren) and I have discussed hardships that they have faced due to societal responses to their LGBTQ+ identity.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My child(ren) and I have discussed potential hardships that they may face in the future due to societal responses to their LGBTQ+ identity.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Very Frequently
My child(ren) and I have spoken about their LGBTQ+ identity in relationship to Judaism.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. If you have spoken to your child about their LGBTQ+ identity in relation to Judaism, please share what you wish about the content of the conversation(s).

12. Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I regularly express love to my child(ren).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I express disapproval of my child(ren)'s LGBTQ+ identity.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I express acceptance of my child(ren)'s LGBTQ+ identity.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I encourage my child(ren) to make their own choices about their gender expression (e.g. clothing, haircuts, etc).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
It is important to me to refer to my child(ren) by the name they prefer to be called.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is important to me to refer to my child(ren) by the pronouns they prefer to be addressed with.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I worry that my child(ren) will lead a less fulfilled life because of their LGBTQ+ identity.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My child(ren)'s LGBTQ+ identity is wrong in the eyes of G-d.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Construct 4: Textual Knowledge and Interpretations

14. I believe that Jewish texts express that it is _____ to be LGBTQ+.

- Unacceptable, without exception
- Wrong only if "acted upon"
- Acceptable
- Actively celebrated
- Other. Please specify below

15. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
In my primary Jewish community, the majority of leaders interpret Jewish texts as affirming of LGBTQ+ identity.	○	○	○	○	○

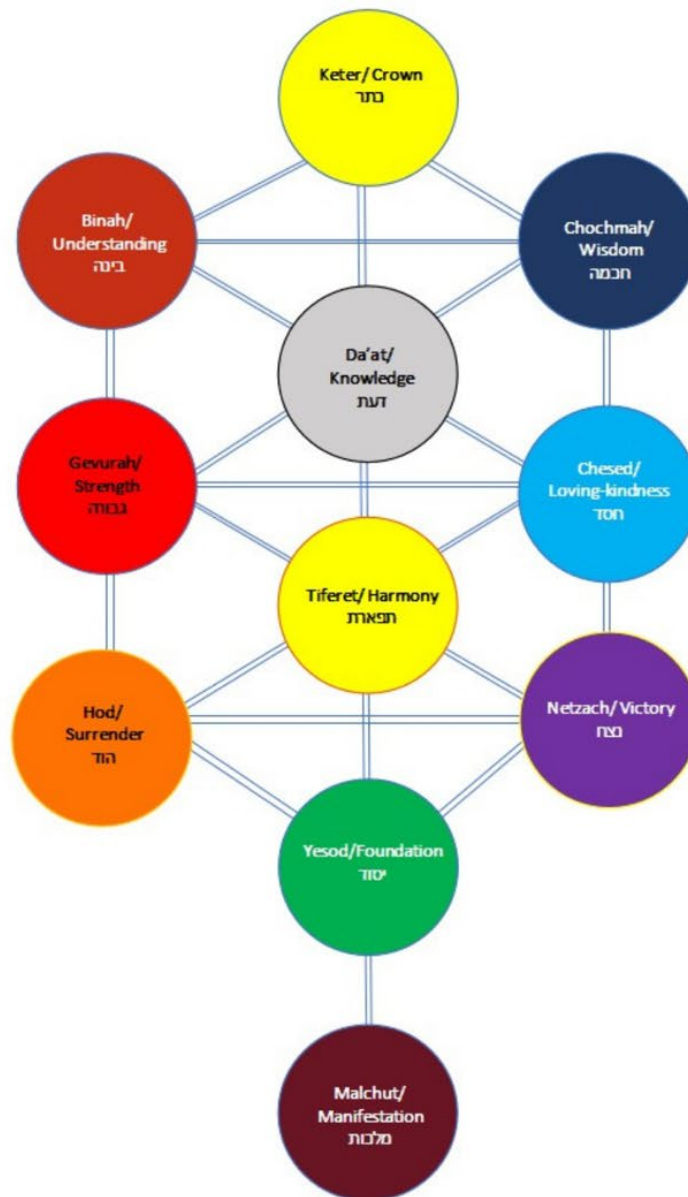
Texts

The following section contains Jewish texts that reference diverse gender and sexual identities. Please review the materials at your own pace and respond to the following questions.

The Talmud recognizes eight different gender designations:

1. **Zachar**, male.
2. **Nekevah**, female.
3. **Androgynos**, having *both* male and female characteristics.
4. **Tumtum**, lacking sexual characteristics.
5. **Aylonit hamah**, identified female at birth but later naturally developing male characteristics.
6. **Aylonit adam**, identified female at birth but later developing male characteristics *through human intervention*.
7. **Saris hamah**, identified male at birth but later naturally developing female characteristics.
8. **Saris adam**, identified male at birth and later developing female characteristics *through human intervention*.

Within Jewish mystical thought (Kabbalah), there are 10 divine emanations of G-d's will. These emanations are depicted in the diagram below. Each emanation is considered to be masculine, feminine, or androgynous (genderless, or possessing both masculine and feminine traits). Keter, the holiest attribute, is represented as androgynous.



16. Before beginning this survey, were you aware that ancient Jewish texts explicitly mention gender diversity?

Yes

No

The following are examples of modern LGBTQ+ affirming Jewish prayers and blessings:

A Prayer after My Child Came Out

Adonai, I have learned that my child is (gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender/genderqueer/non-binary), and I look to You for strength.

I pray for the strength to learn and to understand.

I pray for the strength to overcome my own prejudice.

I pray for the strength to face my own fear as I encounter my family and friends.

I pray for the strength to support my child in the face of an environment filled with prejudice and hate.

I pray for the strength to embrace my child with compassion.

I pray, most of all, for the strength to love my child unconditionally and with a whole heart.

Adonai, I look to you for strength.

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha'olam matir asurim.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who frees the captive.

—by Rabbi David M. Horowitz, 2019

Mi Shebeirach for a Renaming Ceremony

May the One who blessed our ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David; Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, and Rachel, and Ruth, bless you.

After a journey of discovery, you have taken for yourself a new name and found for yourself a new blessing in life. May you move forward on the path toward realizing your truest self, toward living out the blessings of your past and future, as your story continues to unfold.

The Jewish people are called עברי (ivrim)-"those who cross over." This moment marks a crossing over for you. You have chosen the name ___ for yourself.

After long nights of wrestling, you have taken for yourself a new name and demanded for yourself a new blessing in life. May you move forward on the path toward realizing your truest self, toward living out the blessings of your past and future, as your story continues to unfold.

V'nomar; amein.

And let us say: Amen.

– Based on the Central Conference for American Rabbis Gender Affirmation and Naming Certificate, 2019

A Prayer before Candle Lighting: A Blessing of Gratitude for a Life Lived with Friends, Family, and Partners of Many Genders and Sexual Orientations

Creator of light, Source of wisdom, You know the depth of the human soul. As You filled this world with the glance of Your presence, so let me fill my world with the calm wisdom that love does not ask "what?" but instead asks "whom?"

May we, as we watch the two flames of memory and practice enlighten this space, remember all parts of our stories, and make space for all that we are.

Creator of light, Source of wisdom, may Your light fill every inch of our bodies, and may it exceed all forms.

Baruch atah Adonai Elobeinu Melech ha'olam asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hadlik neir shel shabbat.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who hallows us with mitzvot, commanding us to kindle the light of Shabbat.

-By Rabbi Sonja K. Pilz, PhD, 2019

17. Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statement.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Learning about these texts increases my feelings of acceptance of LGBTQ+ people.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

18. If you wish, please elaborate on your answer to the previous question in the text box below.

19. Please categorize the Jewish texts that you just viewed based on how beneficial they would be in assisting you in supporting your child, with 1 being "very unhelpful" and 5 being "very helpful."

	1	2	3	4	5
Text 1: The Talmud depicts 8 different gender designations.					<input type="checkbox"/>
Text 2: Jewish mysticism represents the most divine emanation of G-d as androgynous.					<input type="checkbox"/>
Texts 3-5: LGBTQ+ blessings for Jewish rituals or lifecycle events, which may be modified to mention your child(ren)'s specific identity, or adapted to suit different life event					<input type="checkbox"/>

20. Is there anything else you would like to share about your reaction to these texts?

Construct 5: Intervention Experiences and Preferences

21. I have previously participated in a psychoeducational group, support group, therapeutic group, or other program for parents of LGBTQ+ children.

Yes

No

22. What was the religious orientation of the program, if any?

Please refer to these guiding definitions as needed:

Jewish Parenting Program: A program that acknowledges Jewish cultural attitudes towards LGBTQ+ identity, culturally specific barriers and protective factors that LGBTQ+ Jewish youth may encounter, integrates Jewish beliefs and values into parenting approaches and may include reference to both LGBTQ-affirming and rejecting interpretations of Jewish texts.

Secular Parenting Program: A program that acknowledges dominant cultural attitudes towards LGBTQ+ identity, barriers and protective factors that LGBTQ+ youth may encounter regardless of their religious identity, and presents general positive parenting approaches, without addressing the intersection of any particular religious values.

Christian Parenting Program: A program that acknowledges Christian cultural attitudes towards LGBTQ+ identity, whether broadly or regarding specific denominations. Addresses culturally specific barriers and protective factors that LGBTQ+ Christian youth may encounter, integrates Christian beliefs and values into parenting approaches and may include reference to both LGBTQ-affirming and rejecting interpretations of Christian texts.

The program was secular and did not present religiously-based LGBTQ+ accepting principles.

The program was geared toward Christian parents.

The program was geared toward Jewish parents.

The program was geared toward a religious group not mentioned above. Please specify below.

23. What was the angle of the program?

The program focused on parenting approaches that aim to encourage children to prioritize heterosexuality and identify with the gender they were assigned at birth.

The program focused on parenting approaches that aim to support and affirm children who identify as LGBTQ+.

24. What aspects of the program(s), if any, did you find helpful?

25. What aspects of the program(s), if any, did you find unhelpful?

26. Are there any other comments about your experience with the program(s) that you would like to include?

27. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I would be likely to participate in a Jewish program about LGBTQ+ affirming parenting approaches.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would be likely to participate in a Jewish program about parenting approaches that encourage children to prioritize heterosexuality and identify with the gender they were assigned at birth.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I would be likely to participate in a secular program about LGBTQ+ affirming parenting approaches.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would be likely to participate in a secular program about parenting approaches that encourage children to prioritize heterosexuality and identify with the gender they were assigned at birth.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

28. I would be likely to participate in a Christian parenting program.

Yes

Maybe

No

29. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I would be likely to participate in a Christian program about LGBTQ+ affirming parenting approaches.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would be likely to participate in a Christian program about parenting approaches that encourage children to prioritize heterosexuality and identify with the gender they were assigned at birth.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

27/28

Final Question

30. Thank you for sharing your perspective. Do you have any additional thoughts, recommendations, or other comments you would like to share regarding the support and resources available to Jewish parents of LGBTQ+ youth?

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