

# For Black LGBTQ+ Americans, intersectional experiences can hurt—or help, YSPH study finds

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Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

For Black LGBTQ+ Americans, Intersectional Experiences Can Hurt—Or Help, YSPH Study Finds Using a new method for quantifying intersectional experiences, a new Yale School of Public Health study

finds that Black LGBTQ+ Americans tend to feel better about themselves after encountering events that affirm their identity.

In the study, which was recently published in the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, researchers asked 131 Black members of the LGBTQ+ community to chronicle their daily experiences for a week and record any times in which their racial and [sexual identity](#) was simultaneously challenged or supported—an intersectional event. What they found was surprising: 31% of all days featured at least one positive experience, and 11% had at least one [negative experience](#). Both types of events were related to changes in psychological well-being, the data showed.

The findings are a major step forward in figuring out how to reduce stigma and improve [mental health](#) for Black LGBTQ+ Americans, who often struggle to find acceptance, said Skyler Jackson, the study's lead author and an associate research scientist. Jackson is also affiliated with the Center for Interdisciplinary Research on AIDS (CIRA) at Yale.

"I can speak for myself as a Black, gay/queer-identifying person that certainly these identities bring challenges and hardships," Jackson said. "But they also bring opportunities for joy, and culture, connection, and so many other wonderful things."

Unlike in other studies, the researchers looked for experiences that were in some way intersectional, like a enjoying a gathering of Black LGBTQ+ people or encountering a racist stereotype from an LGBTQ+ community member. Jackson's team also asked participants to not only quantify their intersectional experiences but also describe them every day for a week.

That way, Jackson said, the researchers could get a better understanding of what these events look like and how they shape perceptions of daily life.

The study cannot confirm that these experiences cause shifts in well-being, Jackson added. But the findings do shed light on potential factors: The data suggests that negative intersectional experiences could exacerbate feelings of [identity](#) conflict, which can lead to psychological distress among Black LGBTQ+ people.

Jackson plans to use his new method to study other subgroups that face complex experiences of stigma, including both multiracial people and gender non-binary individuals. The methodology will be further outlined in an article that will be published in the *Journal of Counseling Psychology* early next year.

"You feel that these identities—and the powerful experiences they lead to—are much more alive when you measure them within a person's everyday life," he said.

The study's findings also have key implications for public health. Participants' responses suggest that spaces that cater to—and represent—members of the Black LGBTQ+ community can lift their spirits and contribute to their well-being.

"There are these moments where people from marginalized groups have these sort of micro-liberations—they get free," Jackson said. "Not despite their identities, but because of them."

**More information:** Skyler D. Jackson et al, Intersectional experiences, stigma-related stress, and psychological health among Black LGBTQ individuals., *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* (2020). [DOI: 10.1037/ccp0000489](https://doi.org/10.1037/ccp0000489)

Provided by Yale School of Public Health

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