



LOS ANGELES COUNTY  
**DEPARTMENT OF  
MENTAL HEALTH**  
hope. recovery. wellbeing.

## **Bi+ Affirming Mentorship and Storytelling Lab**

LGBTQIA2-S+ UsCC Capacity Building Project  
Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health  
September 2023 - June 2024



Report

by

Nicole Kristal  
Founder and Executive Director, Still Bisexual  
Project Facilitator  
[nicole@stillbi.org](mailto:nicole@stillbi.org)

## **PROJECT INCEPTION**

The bi+ community is chronically underserved in LGBTQIA2-S+ and mental health spaces and experiences higher rates of sexual assault, intimate partner violence, poverty, substance abuse and suicidality than gays or lesbians. To address and help prevent these disparities, the Bi+ Affirming Mentorship and Storytelling Lab Project was developed as a capacity building project in the LGBTQIA2-S+ Underserved Cultural Community at the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health. While LGBTQ+ mentorship programs exist in Los Angeles County, one has never specifically addressed the mental health needs of bi+ people and the stigma they encounter.

The Bi+ Affirming Mentorship and Storytelling Lab Project program was conceived as a two-weekend lab. The first weekend would bring together an intergenerational group of bi+ community members to explore their identities, find community and connection with other bi+ people, build their bi+ confidence, and examine and develop strategies to address their personal experiences of biphobia and stigma. The second weekend would focus on bi+ community members crafting a narrative about their bi+ experiences and transforming that narrative into videos and/or art projects to build self-acceptance and confidence.

The program was designed to serve 25 bi+ community members as mentors and mentees. All mentees were required to be under the age of 25. All mentors were required to be over the age of 50. (The mentor age requirement was later changed to 40+ to address recruitment challenges.)

## **RECRUITMENT**



Still Bisexual hosted a resource table at Models of Pride in October 2023 to recruit mentees and received 30 submissions from students who wanted to learn more about the program. Over the next few months, Still Bisexual launched a Google form application for the lab and promoted the application to these Models of Pride constituents, to subscribers of the Still Bisexual newsletter, and Still Bisexual's robust social media platforms. Respondents

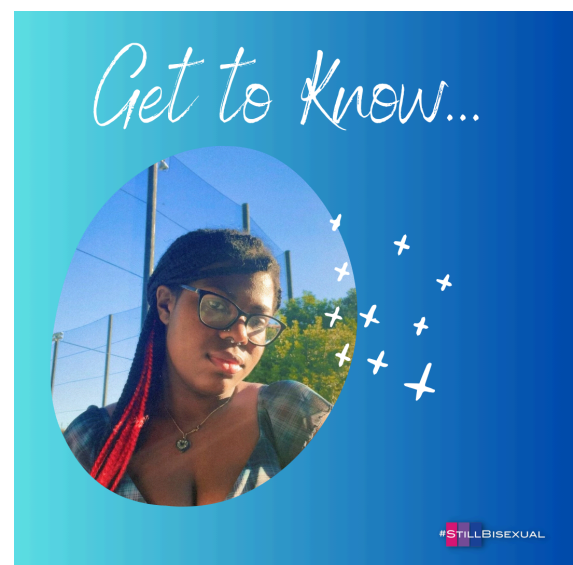
were informed that they would be compensated with a \$350 stipend for attending the program.

Still Bisexual solicited help from many Los Angeles-based LGBTQ+ organizations to get the word out to numerous colleges, including Los Angeles City College, Santa Monica Community College, UCLA and Loyola Marymount. Of this solicitation, only UCLA shared the opportunity with its students. To our knowledge, the only LGBTQ+ groups that promoted our mentorship lab to their constituents were the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health, amBI, and the Los Angeles Bi Task Force.

After a six-month recruitment push between November 12, 2023 and April 12, 2024, 61 people applied to the mentorship lab. Of those applications, 34 mentees met the requirement of being under the age of 25 and only 8 mentors met the requirement of being over the age of 50. Due to the recruitment challenge, we asked Kelly Wilkerson, LGBTQIA2-S UsCC Liaison at the Los Angeles County Department of Health, if we could lower the age for mentors to 40. Wilkerson approved this change. Executive Director Nicole Kristal reached out to more than a dozen bisexuals she knew over the age of 40 to participate after the age limit was adjusted. Of them, four applied. Two mentors dropped out—one due to being hospitalized for mental health challenges at the Department of Mental Health for two weeks in March and another, who had been involuntarily hospitalized for mental health challenges six months prior. We feel these mentors' experiences underlie the severe mental health challenges the bi+ community faces.

Many of the mentors we approached to be a part of this program were dealing with personal hardships such as recently losing loved ones, mental health challenges, and caregiving for elderly parents that prevented them from participating. Others felt they weren't "bi enough" or felt too insecure in their bi+ identity to be a mentor to youth. This didn't hinder everyone's participation. Two mentors had just come out as bisexual two years prior to participating in the mentorship lab.

To retain the mentees who had applied while we continued our search for mentors, we created a private Instagram page, @bimentorship, and had influencer and content creator @LucyandLaMer create videos about what mentees could expect from the two-weekend



program. We also hired Lucy as an intern for three months to help part-time with the implementation of this project.

We also created a Google Form for mentees, mentors, and workshop presenters called “Get to Know...” where participants could share a photo, details about their likes and dislikes and what they were looking forward to about the mentorship program. We turned this information into graphics and posts on the @bimentorship Instagram page to build excitement for the program.

## **MENTOR AND MENTEE TRAINING SESSIONS**



#STILLBISEXUAL

### **Bi+ Affirming Mentorship and Storytelling Lab** Mentee orientation

On April 6, we hosted a virtual mentor training and a virtual mentee training to set community guidelines, expectations for behavior, and to share excitement and anxiety about being in a bi+ space. We learned what the mentees hoped to gain from the experience (goal setting, support around their bi+ identities, tips

for coming out) and what the mentors hoped to gain from the experience (intergenerational understanding of what it's like to be bi+ and more acceptance and understanding of their own bisexuality).

Once we had all of the mentors enrolled, we checked them and all mentees over the age of 18 against the sex offender database and fortunately found zero matches. We also signed up with the Department of Justice to obtain the ability to LiveScan volunteers and program participants but we did not receive approval for our application in time to vet the mentors before the mentorship program launched.

## **PRE AND POST-TEST EVALUATIONS**

We hired Poshi Walker, a data researcher who previously worked for CalVoices, to create our pre and post-test evaluations for the mentorship program and for the community forum. We met with Kelly Wilkerson and Poshi Walker to finalize these questions.

## **PARENTAL CONSENT FORMS**

We combined a parental consent form used by the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health with a high school field trip permission slip template to create the parental consent form we used for all minors in our program. We purchased Adobe DocuSign so parents could sign digitally. We inquired about any food allergies and medications the youth were taking as well as obtained permission to seek medical assistance on their behalf in case of an emergency.

## **IMAGE RELEASE FORMS**

We modified Still Bisexual's existing image release form to include the Los Angeles County Department of Health and had those who participated in making #StillBisexual videos sign the form or have their parents sign it, so we could legally use their likeness and story in the videos. We also used the form to collect their music preference so we could select royalty-free songs that matched their taste for their videos.

## **PLANNING THE PROGRAMMING**

Program facilitator Nicole Kristal and intern Lucy LaForge curated the agenda for all four days of the mentorship weekends. Each day would include a workshop, an art project, and a social mixer to conclude the day's activities. This itinerary would enable people to learn, create and interact with one another. The workshops would expand understanding of bi+ identities and provide strategies for overcoming stigma, while the art projects would affirm participants' goals and self-confidence. The narrative/storytelling portion would expand participants' capacity for self-acceptance by owning and sharing their life experiences.

## **WEEKEND ONE - PROGRAMMING**

The first weekend of the mentorship program launched on April 20 and 21. Mentors and mentees met from 11 a.m. – 4 p.m. on both days at S + T Loft at 631 Wilshire Blvd. in Santa Monica. Upon arrival, participants received a new journal and the pre-evaluation test. As they waited for other participants to arrive, they filled out their evaluations and decorated their journals with bi and pan pride stickers. We provided a large assortment of snacks—trail mix, chips, fruit snacks, etc., that people enjoyed with tea and coffee.

Once everyone arrived, we had a count of 19 participants for Day One—10 mentees and 9 mentors. We started the day with Community Guidelines followed by the workshop, "Embracing and Exploring the Bi+ Identity," which covered the definitions of bisexuality, pansexuality and





other labels, defined and addressed biphobia (the stigma against bi+ people) and notable bi+ leaders in the LGBTQ+ movement. Then we broke for lunch, which was Mendocino Farms sandwiches and salad.

After lunch, we did a fun ice breaker exercise where people put post-its on giant post-its around the room that pointed out generational differences (When did you get your first cell phone? How do you feel about social media? When did you come out as bi? etc.) Everyone had a lot of fun seeing how the differences between generations weren't that large.

Then we asked a few mentors and mentees to volunteer to stand in front of the group and share what it was like being bi when they were in high school. The exercise built understanding and acceptance of generational differences throughout the group. Some mentees expressed surprise because they had never met anyone over college age who identified as bisexual—they didn't know it was possible! Another mentee expressed sadness to learn that fighting the stigma that accompanies the bi identity would be a lifelong process that wouldn't end once she graduated from college.

# FIRST QUEER TV OR FILM CHARACTER YOU NOTICED...

## MENTORS

## MENTEES

Mary Stuart  
Masterson  
(Fried Green Tomatoes)

Ridie  
My So Called  
Life

ELLEN  
DEGENERES

Julie Andrews  
in Victor Victoria  
(character not actor  
are queer... but  
I was super  
confused)

She go's

Oberon  
Mantel  
(GOT)

Rickie Vasquez  
(My So Called Life  
-Willem Cruz)

Alice "The L  
Wood"

Billy Crystal  
in  
Mary Hartman,  
Mary Hartman

Will  
(Will & Grace)  
ELLEN

That one guy  
in "Clueless"

Paul Giamatti  
in  
Hollywood  
Squinters

Ursula

The  
Fosters

POSE  
actually  
!glee!

Marceline  
(Adventure Time)

"GLEE"-Kurt

Kate Messner

She-ra

Seis  
Was the 1st openly  
show I saw and  
knew

But Ima  
Cheerleader

Gaston &  
LeFou

Genie  
from  
Aladdin

Kim  
Possibly

Jafar

Bert &  
Ernie



Lucy LaForge presented our next exercise, “What are your Bi+ Goals?” The goal-setting exercise inspired mentors and mentees to examine what they wanted in certain areas of their lives in areas like love, family, support, career, and finances. Mentors guided mentees in filling out the worksheets and a large discussion about the challenges of being bi+ was shared by all. The mentees shared their hesitancy to change their gender identity labels when it might upset their parents. Mentors shared that mentees didn’t need to worry about their parents’ needs and that they had the right to change any of their labels whenever they felt like it.

The day ended with an ice cream social where participants ate popsicles and ice cream sandwiches and discussed strategies for when to come out at school or work.



Day Two, April 21, focused on mental health and confidence building. We retained 100% of mentee attendance from Day One to Day Two. We lost two mentors on Day 2—one due to pregnancy (she had a birthing class), and another due to a prior commitment—leaving us with 17 participants. After our initial 11 a.m. check in and welcome, Kelly Wilkerson shared information about the LGBTQIA2-S UsCC with the group. Then Lucy LaForge presented her workshop, “Bi-cons: Confident Bi+ People and How to Be One.” Participants explored how they felt about their sexual orientation, biphobia they had encountered and they learned strategies for boosting their bi+ confidence in the face of stigma. The workshop ended with participants owning their bi

confidence by strutting in a catwalk to Beyonce’s “Break My Soul.”

Then the event broke for lunch provided by Benny’s Tacos with carnitas, chicken and steak tacos, chips, guacamole and churros. After lunch, Ross Victory led a workshop on creating a self-affirmation mirror (see above photo). Participants painted a canvas with affirmations, then



a mirror was hot glued to the canvas and left to dry. Victory focused on the importance of building a healthy relationship with yourself and building healthy relationships with others as participants created their art projects, which they later took home. The day ended with “Bisexual-tea time” and cookies.

## **WEEKEND TWO - PROGRAMMING**



The second weekend of the program convened on May 18 at 9:30 a.m. at the S + T Loft in Santa Monica. Despite using Instagram to maintain excitement about the second weekend of the program and text messaging past attendees reminders of our upcoming storytelling weekend, our numbers dropped to 12 participants—five mentors and seven mentees. One of the mentees we later learned did not attend because she was involuntarily hospitalized by her father. Several of the mentors dropped out due to unexpected acting gigs while a mentee and mentor dropped out due to panic attacks.

Participants enjoyed fresh bagels and cream cheese and socialized before we got started with Community Guidelines and then went over the script worksheet so folks could start writing their

narratives. The objective was to tell their “bi+ story” in a similar style to our past #StillBisexual videos, which we screened as inspiration.

The script worksheet included suggestions for “b roll” (shots of the participant doing things they enjoyed like reading, drawing, playing video games, etc.) that would play as the mentor/mentee read their script, which we recorded separately as voiceover. We were very fortunate to have Stacy Goldate, a professional film and television editor, join us for this weekend. (She filmed many of the mentors and mentees along with Lucy LaForge, who is a professional content creator, and our Executive Director, Nicole Kristal.)

We took a lunch break where we had Benny’s Tacos again (they were a big hit last time) and began filming folks as they completed their narratives.

We retained the 12 participants from the day before on May 19. We started the day with having participants complete their evaluation forms at 11 a.m. and Stacy, Lucy, and Nicole continued to film mentors' and mentees' stories for the remainder of the day. Some mentees made drawings and paintings while others made videos. Some did both.

We had Mendocino Farms for lunch once more with salad. By the end of the day, all of the mentors and mentees had cemented their friendships and helped one another with filming their videos. Everyone was very happy to have found bi+ community.

We ended the weekend with footage and audio recorded for 12 #StillBisexual stories. Stacy Goldate assembled a team of professional film and television editors to edit the videos between May 20 and June 8, when we had our final community forum screening event. The majority of editors worked either pro bono or for a small \$50 kit rental fee. We are extremely happy with how professional the videos look and sound.

### **COMMUNITY FORUM - SUMMARY**

On June 8, we hosted our Community Forum at Junior High Los Angeles, an indie art venue in Glendale, from 6 p.m. - 9 p.m. We provided free food, snacks, and refreshments from Nonna’s Empanadas. We had 42 attendees. We had a mixer until about 7 p.m. when we screened the videos for 22 minutes. Everyone loved the videos. We had the mentors and mentees in attendance come up and share what the experience was like for them. They said it was “a safe space” where they felt safe to be themselves and share. We then had people fill out the evaluation forms. Then a community discussion happened where the majority of attendees said they’d never been in a bi+ space and how welcome they felt. One of the editors shared that

editing the project inspired her to come out to her siblings and there were few dry eyes in the house.

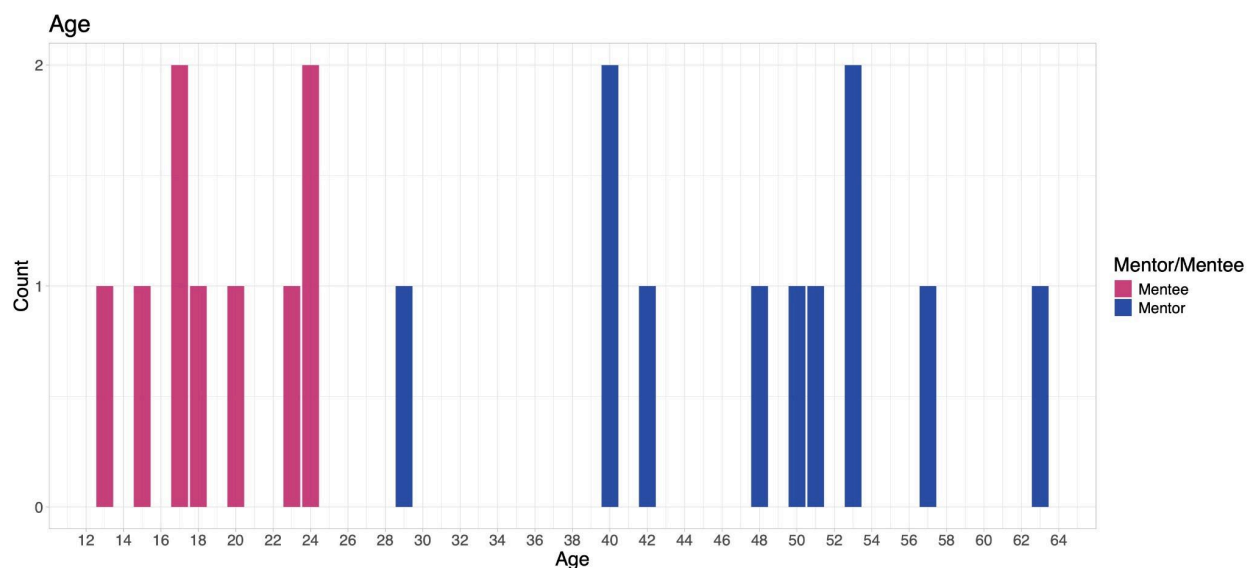
People lingered until 9 p.m., excited to be amongst bi+ community.

## **PROJECT RESULTS**

The Bi+ Affirming Mentorship and Storytelling Lab served 20 bi+ people in Los Angeles County.

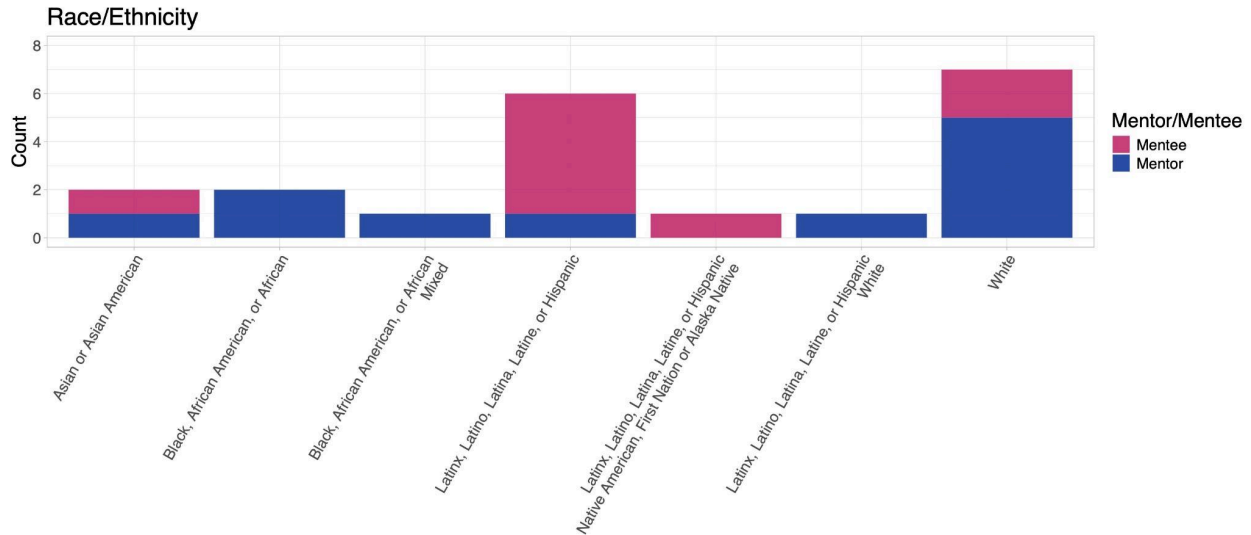
The ages of the population served ranged from the youngest (13) to the oldest age (63).

Please note one mentor was invited to participate who was 29 years old because we did not have any Latina cisgender mentors, and we wanted to make certain that demographic was represented given the majority of our mentees were Latinx.

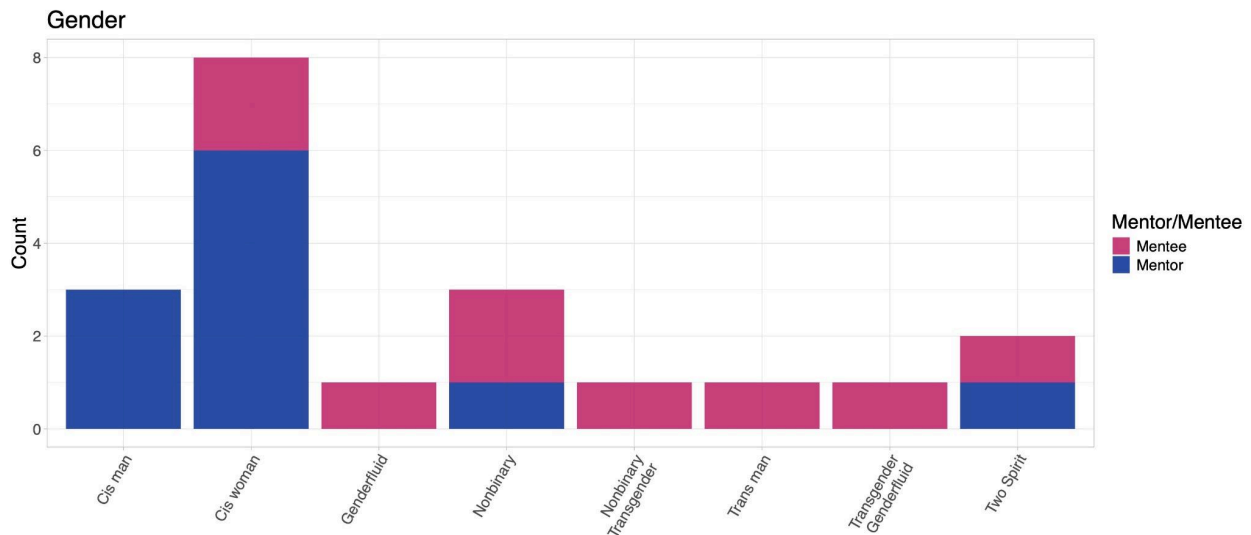


The demographic breakdown of the mentorship program represented the diversity of Los Angeles County. Races represented include API, Black/African-American, Native American with the majority of participants identifying as Latinx, Latino, Latina, Latine or Hispanic or White.

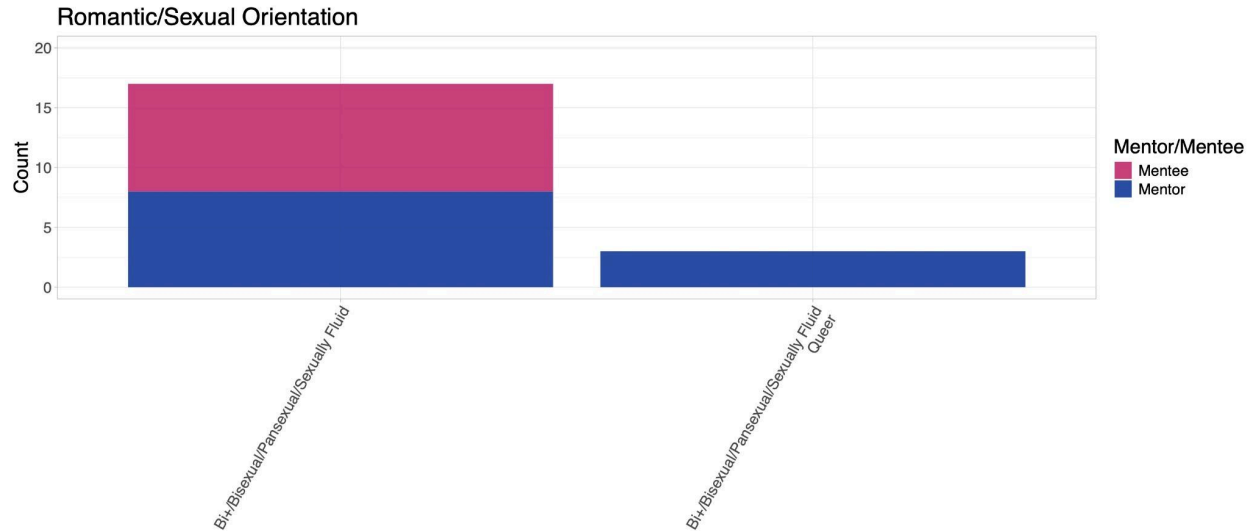




The majority of the mentors identified as cisgender while the majority of the mentees identified as Genderfluid, Nonbinary, Nonbinary Transgender, Transgender, and Transgender Genderfluid.



All of the participants identified as Bi+/Bisexual/Pansexual/Sexually Fluid and Queer. In this way, the program succeeded in specifically serving a population of bi+ people across the Los Angeles County area.



The 20 participants represented populations in six of the eight service areas, representing 75% of Los Angeles County:

Service Area 1

Service Area 2 – 91342, 91601

Service Area 3

Service Area 4 – 90012, 90004, 90027, 90027, 90036, 90018

Service Area 5 – 90024, 90049

Service Area 6 – 90262, 90222, 90059, 90262, 90043

Service Area 7 – 90201

Service Area 8 – 90732, 90732, 90808

## **OUTCOMES**

### **Mentorship and storytelling lab**

When asked what mentors and mentees found helpful about the mentorship program, they said:

- “The community building, the automatic safety.”
- “Meeting people who are also bisexual.”
- “Community. Allyship. Open communication. Civility.”
- “It helped with my mental health and acceptance.”
- “Learning about the health disparities facing our community. Connecting and learning about other bi and pan people.”
- “I felt more confident in my identity afterwards.”

The majority of participants felt confident in their bi+ identity at the start of the Mentorship and Storytelling Lab, so it was hard to document through quantitative data how much more affirmed they felt as bi+ people after attending both weekends of the mentorship program. We learned during the recruitment process that people who didn't feel confident in their bi+ identities were hesitant to apply for the program.

Coming into the intergenerational space, most mentees assumed that mentors felt more isolated as bi+ people, that there was more stigma, less social support and fewer media representations of bi+ people when the mentors were coming of age. Mentors assumed that the mentees experienced greater visibility, more access to community resources and more acceptance for their bi+ identities. Mentors also noted there seems to be more *"visible and vocal"* hostility toward LGBTQ+ people now due to political backlash from the civil rights LGBTQ+ people have gained.

But a few mentees commented, *"Being queer is still stigmatized. I can't imagine how much harder it was a decade before. I hope it is something we'll hear about from them. Being queer is beautiful so I hope they had equally beautiful experiences even if it was harder back then."*

Another mentee noted, *"It was probably a lot harder than my experience. It was a lot less accepted. Although I don't feel too accepted at my current school by everyone, I understand it was probably a lot harder to find a community that was accepting."*

After learning about each others' experiences, many of the mentees found their suspicions confirmed—it was hard to be bi+ in past generations: *"The mentors described how bisexuality wasn't talked about as much. Many grew up hearing homophobic things and even came out late on in life. In hearing their stories, I felt a lot of empathy for them. As the first person in my family to come out now, I felt less alone in learning how other earlier generations navigated [things]."*

Mentees also noted that past generations had *"no specific bi education or resources"* and said being bi was a *"hush in the corner topic."*

The mentors were surprised to learn that despite being less apologetic about their identities and less binary in their genders, it wasn't that much easier for the mentees to be bi+. Much of the same stigma they experienced 30 years ago still existed and played an outsized role in the mentees' lives. One mentor noted, *"In some ways they are learning things at a younger age than I did. In other ways there is still a lot of discrimination or lack of understanding that still exists."* Some mentors expressed gratitude that they didn't also have to contend with social media while navigating their identities as youths.

Overall, both sides learned that they couldn't generalize about the others' experiences, even though there was some common ground. As one mentor noted, *"I learned that it is a wide*



*range even within the same cities. Some of the young mentees experienced a popularity/wide acceptance of being pansexual and Bi+ in their schools while others felt alone and othered. Several of them expressed that they feel they can explore and take their time disclosing who they are. Some felt the label was put on them before they could understand themselves."*

Participants were also asked to identify things they did to boost their bi+ confidence before starting the mentorship. Some of the strategies they used were going to the movies or Dave and Busters, journaling, making art, sharing bi stories online, being around other bi+ people, consuming bi+ media representations, wearing bi colors, coming out as bi, and educating others on bisexuality.

In the post-evaluation, participants were asked what they had learned that would help boost their bi+ confidence moving forward. Here are some of the things they listed:

- Just hearing other people's experiences.
- You don't have to be confident to do something. DO IT SCARED!
- That there are other Bi people out there and that they could be people I would've never guessed were Bi.
- I learned that Bi+ people exist in a vast spectrum and have played a role in the LGBTQ+ rights movement. It validates my fluidity and thus my confidence.
- I learned a lot more media personalities are vocal about being Bi+.
- Being in community and knowing more resources helps.
- I learned about how the Mentors managed to find their identities and were able to navigate that especially with mental health disparities.
- I've reconfirmed that I/we are not alone!
- That my experience isn't just mine but started with others that have similar identities.
- That the younger generation is more accepting and emotionally more in touch with their needs than the mentors.
- That there are more Bi people than I thought.
- I love interacting with the youth to understand what they are going through, learn their abbreviations and try to understand their anxieties.
- We have a larger community than I felt growing up and I love how young people today seem to embrace it a lot more - being Bi+/pan.
- I learned new ways to cope with stress and how to gain back confidence.

One mentee said, *"Seeing people who navigated their lives while being bi, still being proud of it, still having fruitful, amazing lives, giving me so much advice...it just, it made me realize it's not something I have to hide. It's not something that I have to brush away. It's something that I could be proud of and I could still be very happy in my life knowing that I was bi."*

*A mentor noted, “I guess, I’ve always had a lot of courage, and I’m growing more and more into that and more comfortable in my skin but this was a little bit different because I didn’t have to be that tough person. I wasn’t in a space where I was like, ‘Okay, who’s going to ask the weird thing?’ It was just such a beautiful way of letting my guard down and being in a supportive space and developing perspectives and hearing how things are now. And hearing other people’s experiences like ‘Oh yeah, I experienced that too,’ growing up in the ‘70s. It’s really hard to put into words but the best thing I can say is it definitely was a healing experience and it’s also a little sad too hearing how we’re still dealing with a lot of the same problems.”*

*Another mentor added, “Hearing some of these young people and hearing their stories I have hope for the future—more than ever before.”*

*“I’ve almost never been—being out 30 years—in a bi space, where everyone in the room is down with the program in their unique and special ways. And I’ve gotta tell you, it’s really life changing for me,” noted one mentor.*

*Another mentee added, “Whoever I start a conversation with, I’m safe. I felt so comfortable.”*

*“The first day we spent time looking at data we don’t often see and talk about suicide rates and talk about depression and talk about mental health in this context. And it was fascinating. That context helped us learn and grow as partners in this conversation,” said another mentor.*

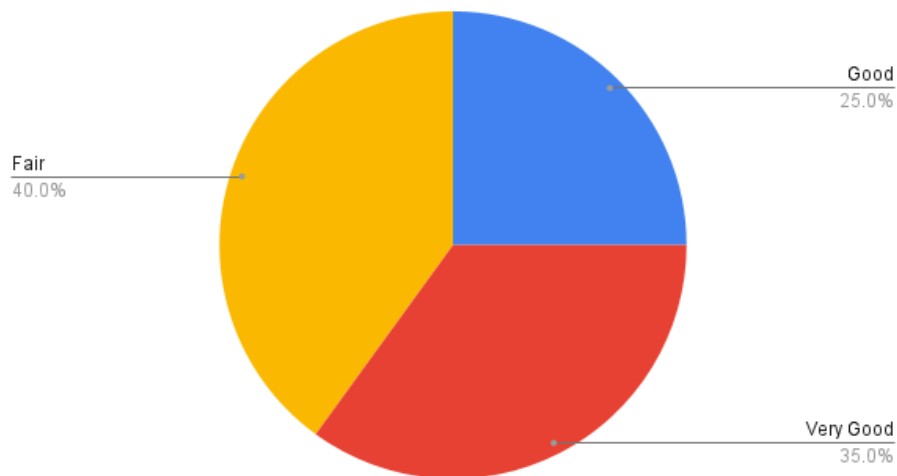
Through workshops, attendees learned about the unique health disparities facing bi+ people. The majority of participants came into the mentorship program assuming the predominant mental health risks and issues faced by bi+ people were anxiety and depression. After learning the statistics about bi+ people during the mentorship workshops, mentees and mentors in the post-evaluation noted bi+ people also experience higher rates of suicidality, intimate partner violence, and sexual assault.

Additionally, most of the mentors and mentees didn’t know the names of any bi+ people who played an integral role in the LGBTQ+ civil rights movement. By the end of the mentorship they could name activists like Brenda Howard, who created the first pride parade, Stephen Donaldson, who created the first college campus LGBTQ+ group, and Silvia Rivera—but many still listed David Bowie.

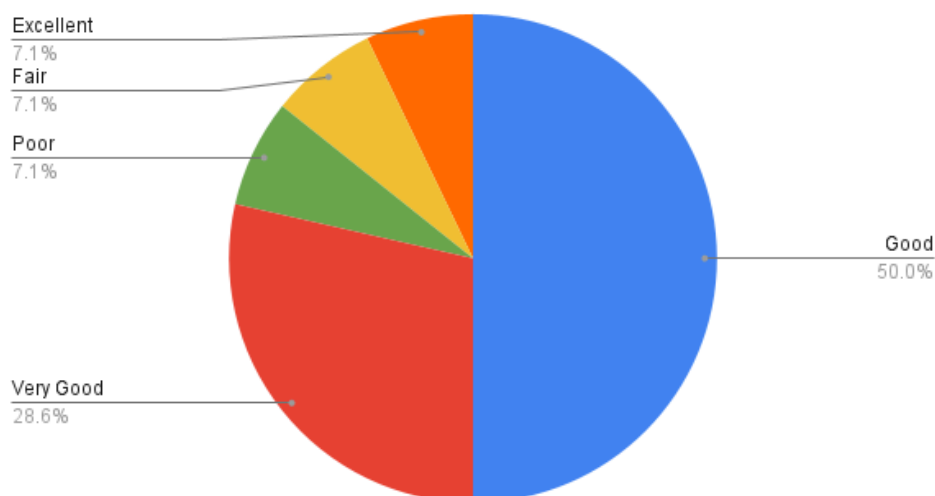
## Mental Health Evaluation Results

An evaluation of the participants' mental health when they arrived on the day one of the mentorship program showed that 35% of participants rated their mental health as "Very Good," while 25% rated their mental health as "Good" while 40% rated their mental health as "Fair." By the end of the program, more people rated their mental health as "Excellent," "Good" or "Very Good" and fewer people cited their mental health as "Fair."

How would you rate your mental health right now? (Before)

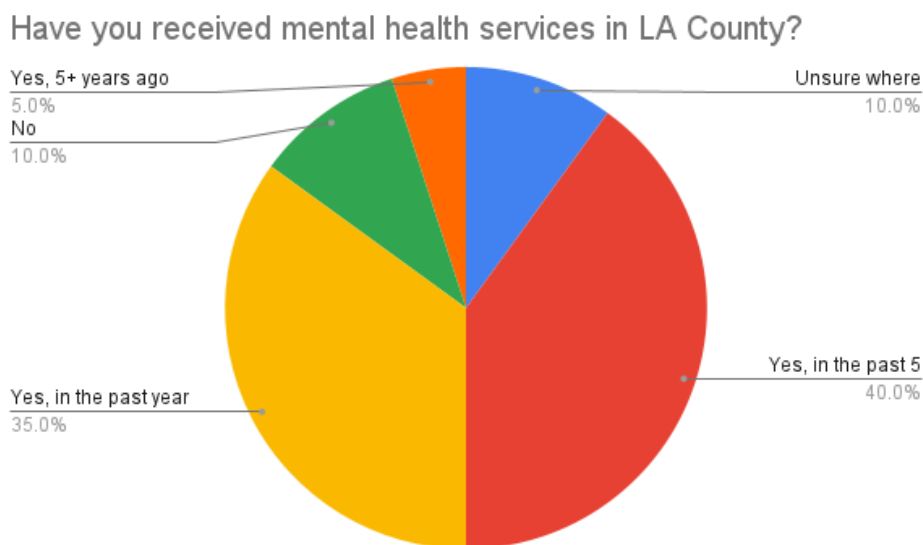


How would you rate your mental health right now? (After)





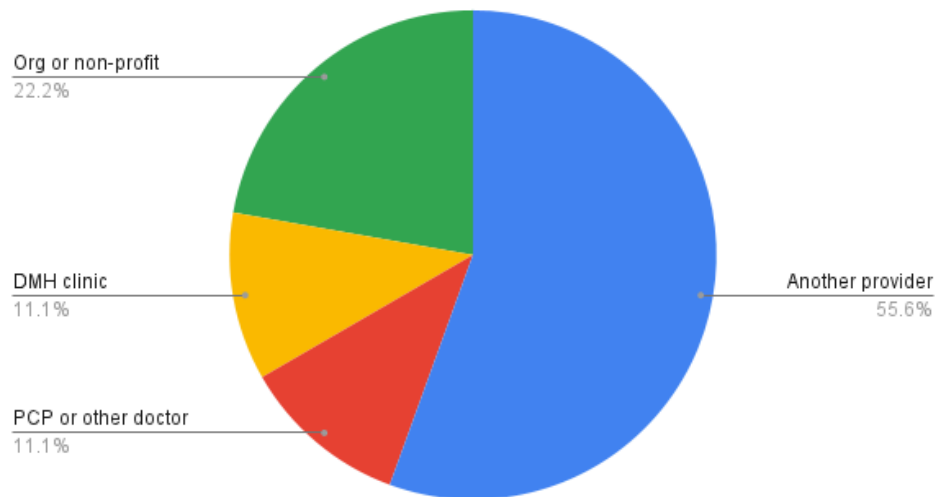
Participants were also asked at the beginning of the mentorship program, “Have you received mental health services for yourself that were located in LA County?” Thirty-five percent responded, “Yes, in the past year” while 40% responded, “Yes, in the past 5 years” and 10% stated they had received mental health services but they weren’t sure if they were located in LA County. Five percent stated they received mental health services more than 5 years ago and 10 percent (two participants) stated “No.”



Of the participants who stated they had received mental health services for themselves that were NOT located in LA County, 10% had received services in the past five years, 5% did not know where the mental health services they received were located, and 5% received mental health services elsewhere in the past year.

We then asked participants to be more specific about where they received mental health services by asking, “If you received mental health services in LA County, were these services provided by: (Please circle all letters/answers that apply.) “An LA County Department of Mental Health directly operated clinic,” “A community-based organization or non-profit (such as the LA LGBTQ Center),” “Another provider (such as Kaiser, a private therapist, or a school clinic), “Your Primary Care Provider or other doctor (e.g. medication support),” or “I’m not sure.” The people who chose to respond to this question dropped in half from 20 respondents to just 9.

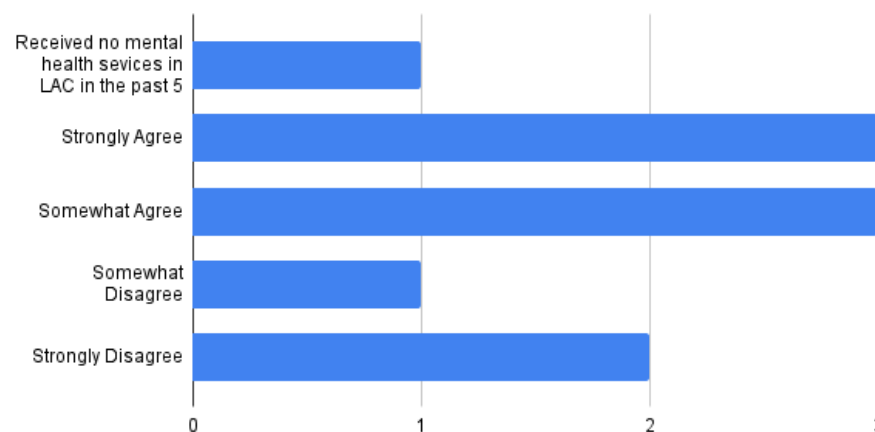
### Who provided these mental health services you received?



Of the respondents, the majority (55.6%) noted they received mental health services from “Another provider,” while 22.2% received mental health services from a community-based organization or non-profit. The number of participants who received mental health services from the LA County Department of Mental Health and their Primary Care provider were tied at 11.1% each.

More participants reported an affirming experience while accessing mental health services in LA County in regards to their bi+ identity but half of respondents left the question blank.

### "Overall, the mental health services I received in LA County in the past five years affirmed my bi+ identity"

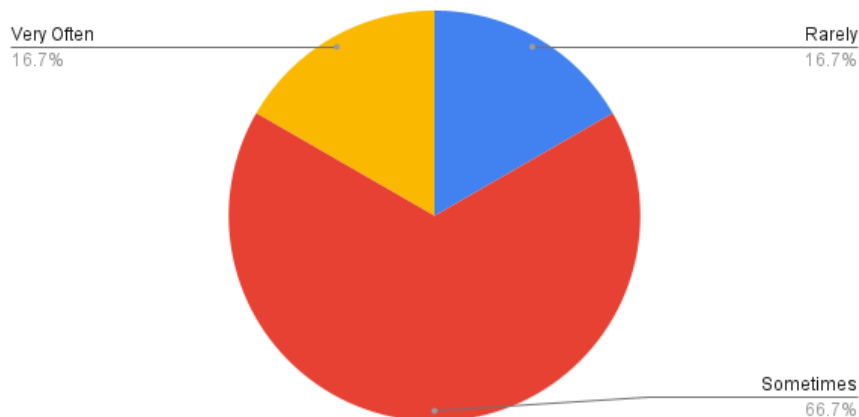


This data doesn't match the data about Bi+ people in past surveys conducted by the #Out4MentalHealth project before the pandemic. We are also curious whether participants

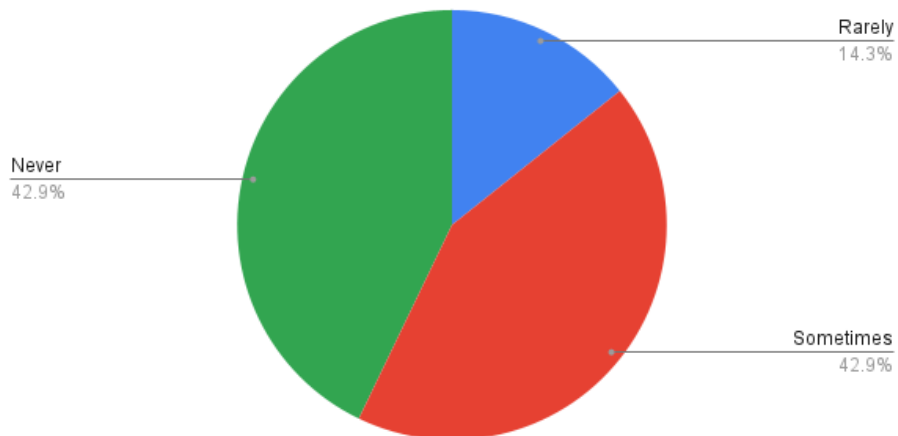
didn't fully understand what "bi affirming" meant given they were asked this question before attending any of our workshops.

The follow up question, "When you sought mental health services in LA County in the past 5 years, how often did you feel you had the option to choose a provider who understands Bi+ issues, is Bi+ affirming and/or identifies as Bi+ themselves?" Again, the number of participants answering this question dropped even further down to seven respondents from 20.

How often did you have the option of a provider who understands Bi+ issues, is Bi+ affirming or identifies as Bi+?



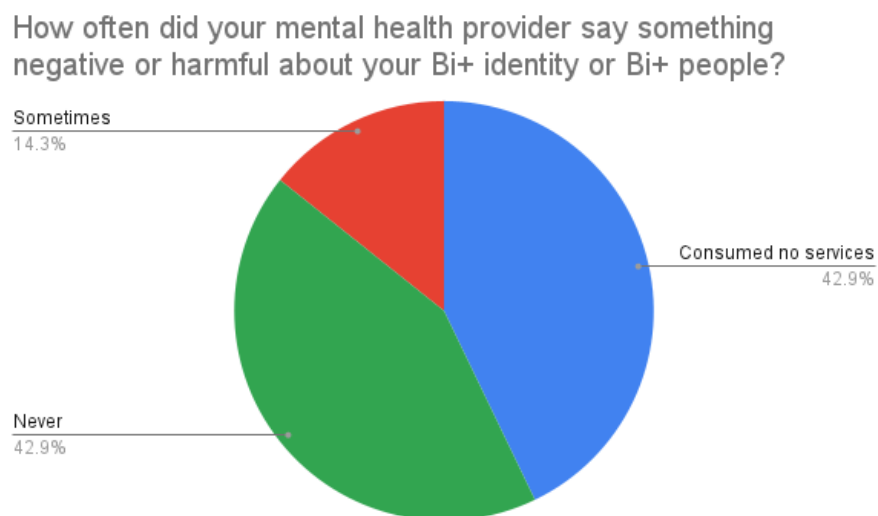
How often did your LA County mental health services provider say something negative about your Bi+ identity or Bi+ people?



Additionally, when asked how often their mental health services provider in LA County said "something negative or harmful about their Bi+ identity or Bi+ people," only seven people responded again with 42.9% saying, "Sometimes," 42.9% saying "Never" and 14.3% stating "Rarely." We did not ask these respondents if they were out as Bi+ to their mental health

providers so we have to wonder if any of the non-responses to this question were related to that.

Finally, we asked, “In the past 12 months, how often did your mental health services provider(s) in LA County say something negative or harmful about your Bi+ identity or Bi+ people?” Only seven people responded.



Nearly half of them hadn’t used any mental health services in LA County in the past year while 42.9% said their provider had never said anything harmful about their Bi+ identity or Bi+ people, and 14.3% said their provider “Sometimes” said something negative or harmful about their Bi+ identity or Bi+ people. In contrast, the #Out4MentalHealth community survey of 2,875 people in 2019 found that 88% of Bi+ people wanted mental health services in the past year. It’s unlikely that fewer people in the post-pandemic era want mental health services.

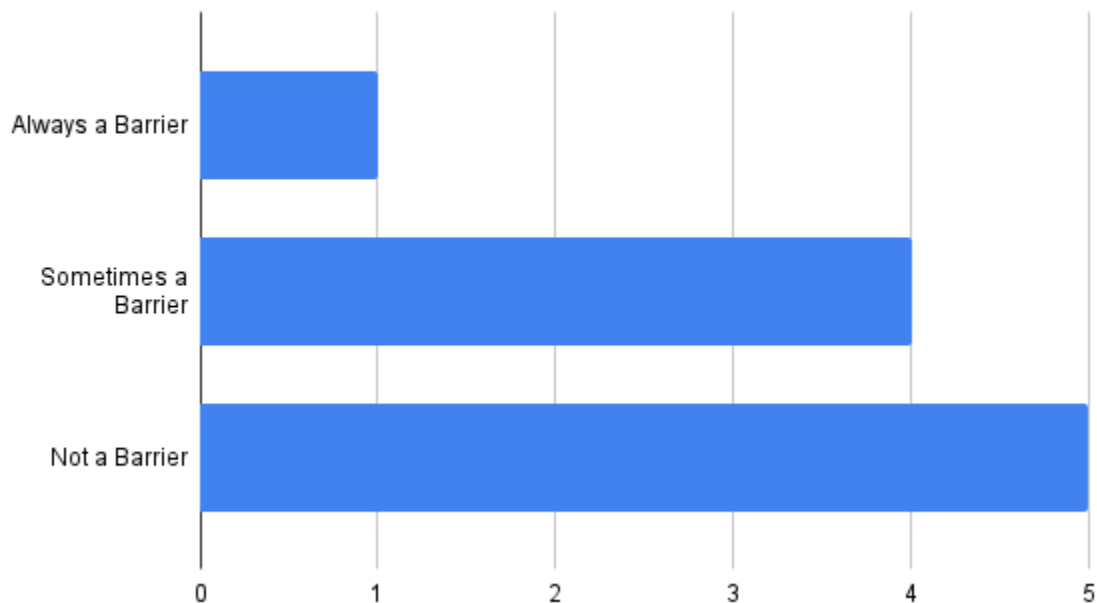
We asked a series of questions to determine mental health barriers facing Bi+ people in LA County, stating, “Below are barriers that individuals may face when seeking mental health services. For each statement below, please indicate whether this was a barrier for you in the past 12 months.”

Only 10 out of our 20 respondents answered the questions about barriers. It is important to note that nearly half of our mentorship participants hadn’t used any mental health services in the past 12 months, so this might account for losing half of our responses to the following



questions.

I cannot afford the mental health services that I want or need.



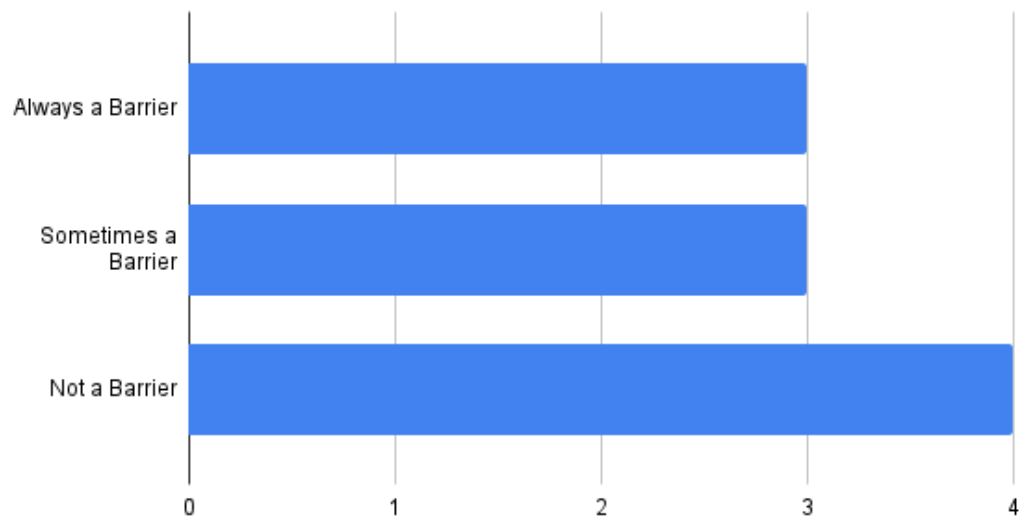
For most of our respondents, affordability was not a barrier to receiving mental health care. In contrast, the #Out4MentalHealth Community Survey of 2,875 people found that the number one barrier facing Bi+ people seeking mental health services is that they cannot afford care.

The #Out4MentalHealth Community Survey also found the following three barriers to seeking mental health care were prevalent for Bi+ people:

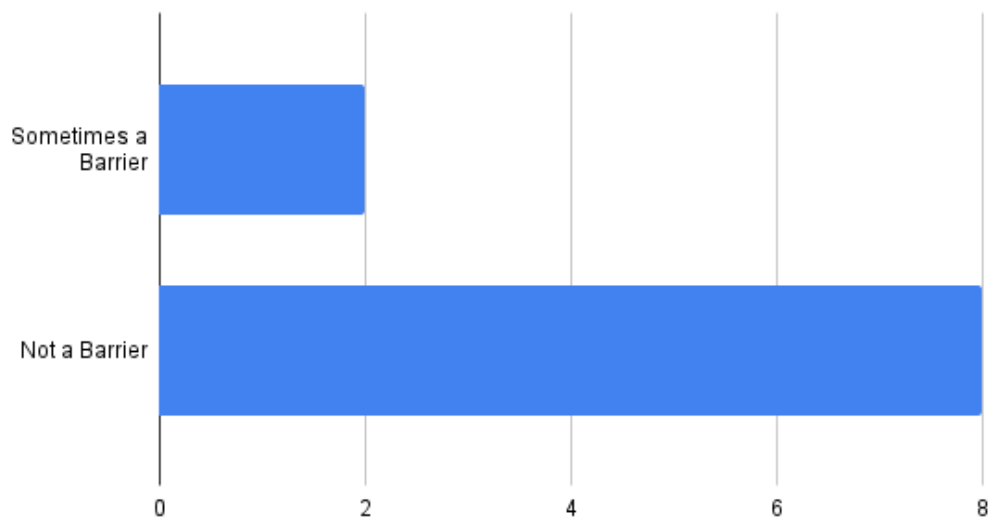
- I cannot afford the mental health services that I want or need.
- I feel ashamed to seek out mental health services
- The wait time to be seen by a mental health service provider was too long.
- I am concerned that my mental health care will not be kept confidential

In the responses we received from attendees of the mentorship project, only one of these barriers was still proven to be significant—wait times to see a mental health service provider. Shame about their Bi+ identity and fears that their identity not being kept confidential did not play a large role in what our attendees perceived as barriers to care.

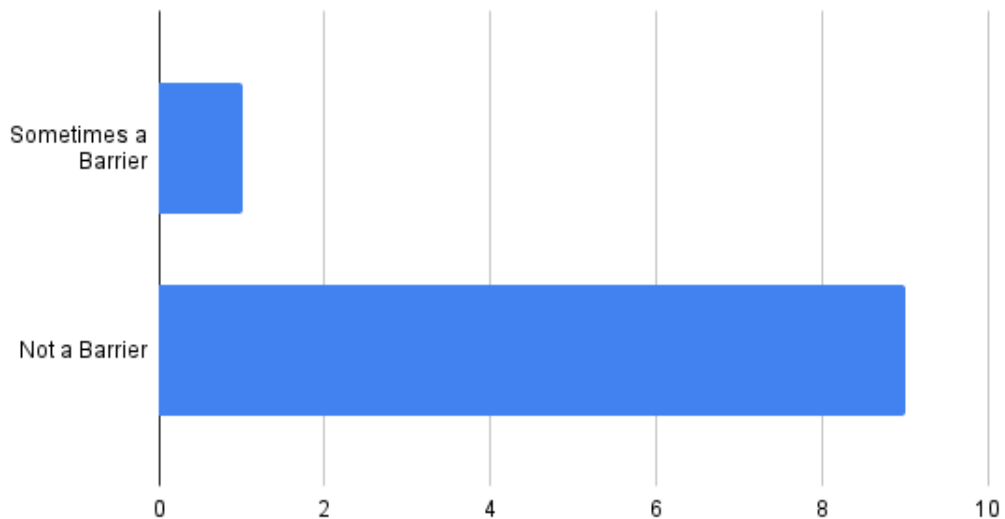
The wait time to be seen by a mental health service provider was too long.



I feel ashamed to seek out mental health services (e.g., keep it in the family; don't air dirty laundry).



I am concerned that my mental health services will not be kept confidential.



Additionally, the majority of respondents did not consider the following to be significant barriers in LA County:

- I do not know how to find a mental health service provider that is Bi+ competent (7 out of 10 people stated this was “Not a barrier”)
- I am concerned that my provider would not be supportive of my Bi+ identity or behavior (7 out of 10 people stated this was “Not a barrier”)
- I cannot find a provider that I am comfortable with who is also Bi+ knowledgeable (6 out of 10 stated this was “Not a barrier” with 3 stating it was “Sometimes a barrier” and 1 stating it was “Always a barrier”)
- There are not Bi+ knowledgeable mental health services in my neighborhood (7 out of 10 stated this is “Not a barrier”)
- There are no Bi+ knowledgeable mental health services at my school/college (8 out of 10 stated this is “Not a barrier”)

It is important to note that Los Angeles County is one of the most affirming parts of the country to be LGBTQ+ but often that competency often does not extend to the bi+ community. This data is notably different from data about the Bi+ community’s experiences seeking mental health services but the sample size infers that this data is not consistent with what the bi+ community has reported experiencing in mental health spaces in larger sample sizes.

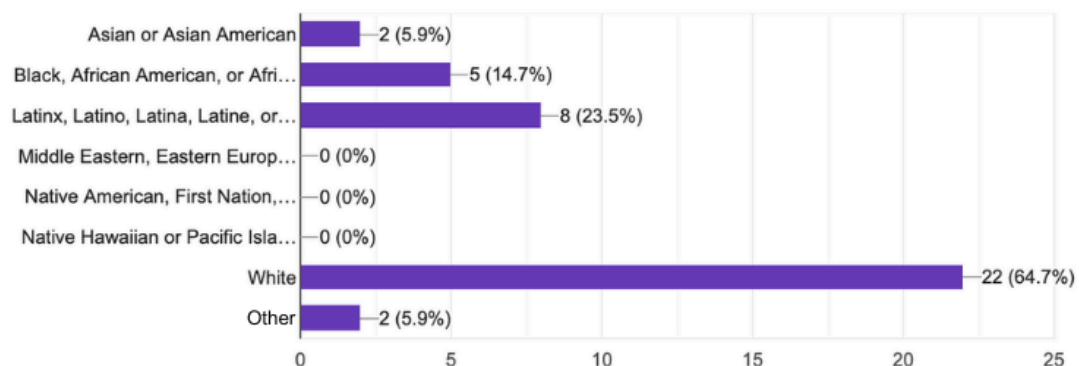
## Community forum



Forty-two people attended the Community Forum on June 8 at Junior High Los Angeles in Glendale and 34 people in attendance filled out the evaluation form for the Community Forum. The majority of attendees were White (64.7%), followed by Latinx, Latino, Latina, and Latine attendees (23.5%), Black/African American (14.7%) and Asian or Asian American (5.9%).

What best describes your race and/or ethnicity? (Please check all that apply)

34 responses

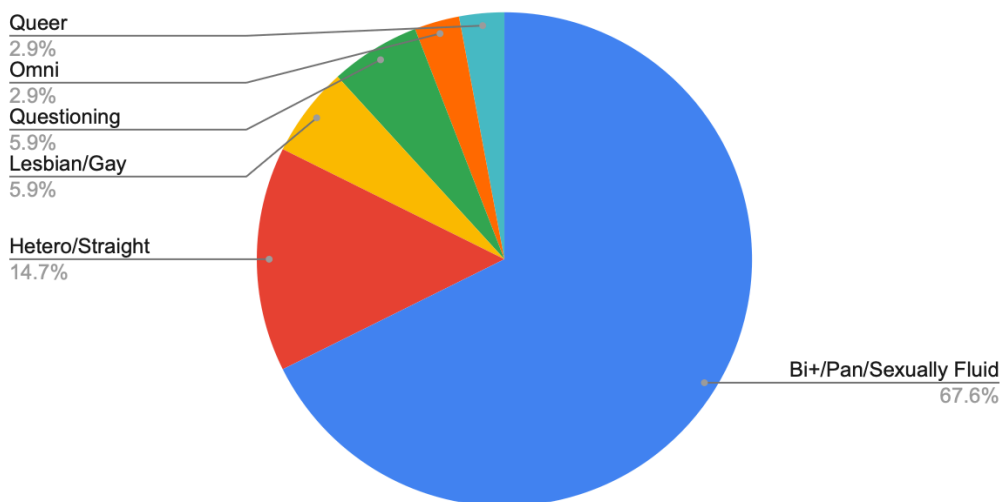




The majority of attendees identified as Cis women (55.9%) followed by Cis men (26.5%) with the remaining 17.6% identifying as Nonbinary, Transgender, Trans man, Trans woman, Two-Spirit or questioning.

The majority of attendees identified as Bi+/Bisexual/Pansexual/Sexually Fluid (67.6%) with folks identifying as Heterosexual/Straight (14.7%) coming in a close second.

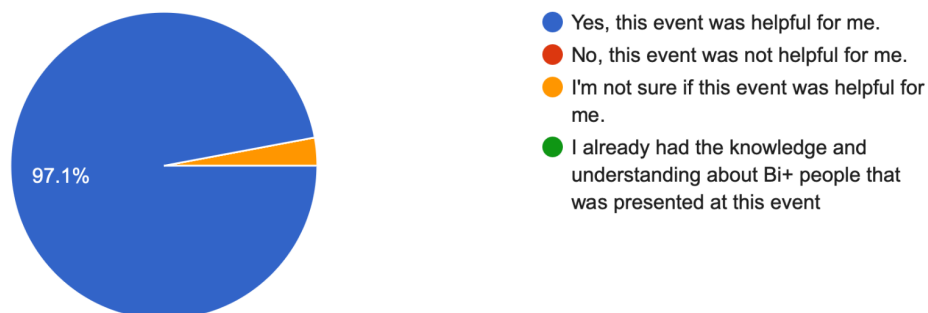
**If you had to pick a label from the following list, which term BEST describes your sexual/romantic orientation:**



When asked if the Community Forum helped increase attendees' knowledge about Bi+ people, 97.1% responded, "Yes, this event was helpful for me."

**Do you feel this event helped increased your knowledge about Bi+ people?**

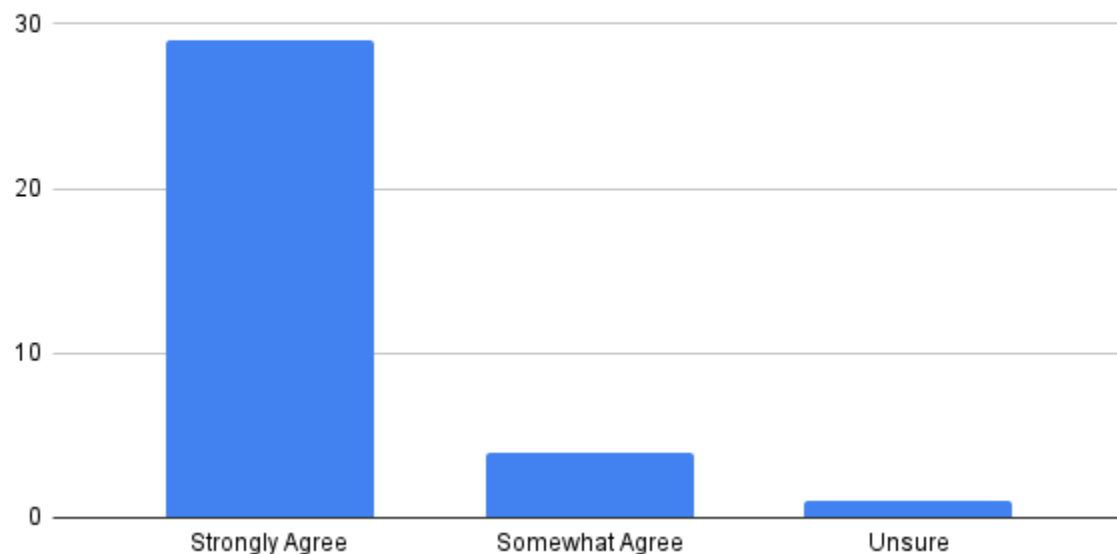
34 responses



Likewise, the majority of respondents felt that attending the Community Forum and watching the #StillBisexual stories during the screening made them feel more positively about Bi+ people

than they did before with 85.3% strongly agreeing and 11.8% somewhat agreeing. Only one attendee was unsure how the event changed their feelings about bi+ people.

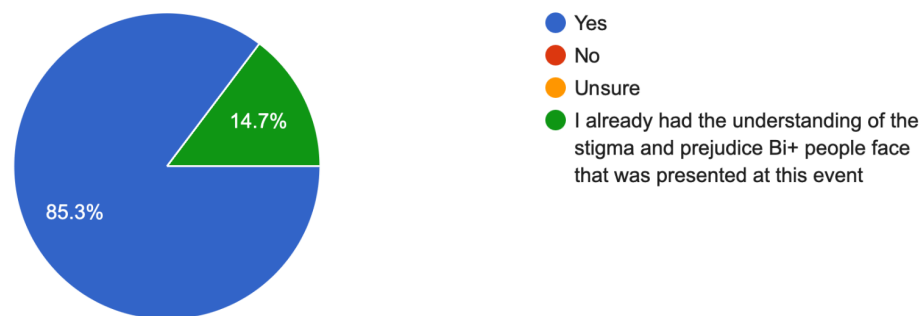
### The stories I heard today made me feel more positive about Bi+ people than I did before



The majority of respondents felt that they had a better understanding of stigma and prejudice faced by Bi+ people after attending the event with 85.3% responding in the affirmative while 14.7% of attendees felt that they already had an understanding of the stigma and prejudice Bi+ people face (which makes sense given that the majority of attendees identified as Bi+).

After attending this event, do you think you have a better understanding of the stigma and prejudice Bi+ people face?

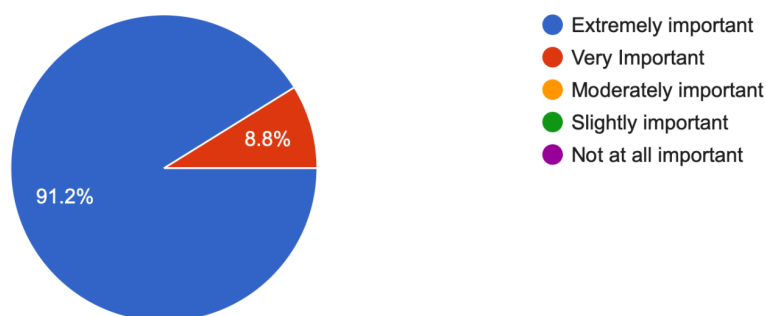
34 responses



Hearing the #StillBisexual stories at the Community Forum screening had a powerful impact on those in attendance in influencing their opinions on the importance of Bi+ knowledgeable mental healthcare with 91.2% stating that Bi+ knowledgeable mental healthcare was “extremely important” for Bi+ people and 8.8% stating that it’s “very important.”

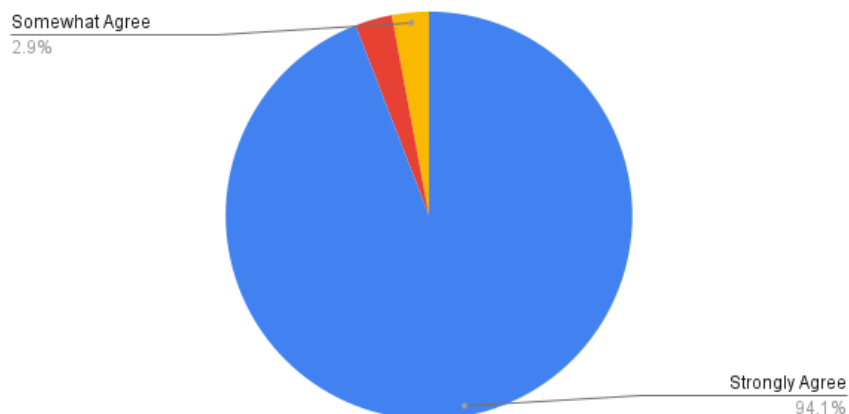
After watching this presentation, how important do you think Bi+ knowledgeable mental healthcare is for Bi+ people?

34 responses



Additionally, attending the #StillBisexual stories screening at the Community Forum led 94.1% of attendees to strongly agree that “County mental health systems should require their mental health providers to participate in trainings regarding the disparities and issues that are unique to Bi+ people.”

County mental health systems should require their providers to participate in Bi+ mental health trainings regarding Bi+ issues

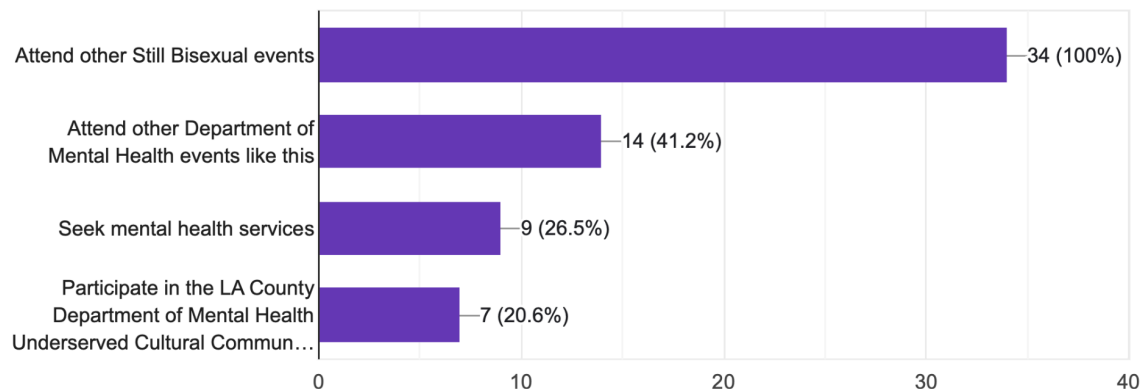


Furthermore, the majority of attendees said the event made them more likely to attend Still Bisexual and Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health events in the future with 100%

stating they would attend a future Still Bi event and 41.2% stating that they would attend a Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health event in the future. Twenty-six percent of attendees said the event made them more likely to seek mental health services and 20.6% said they would be more likely to participate in the LGBTQIA2-S UsCC.

Now that I have attended this event, I am more likely in the future to:

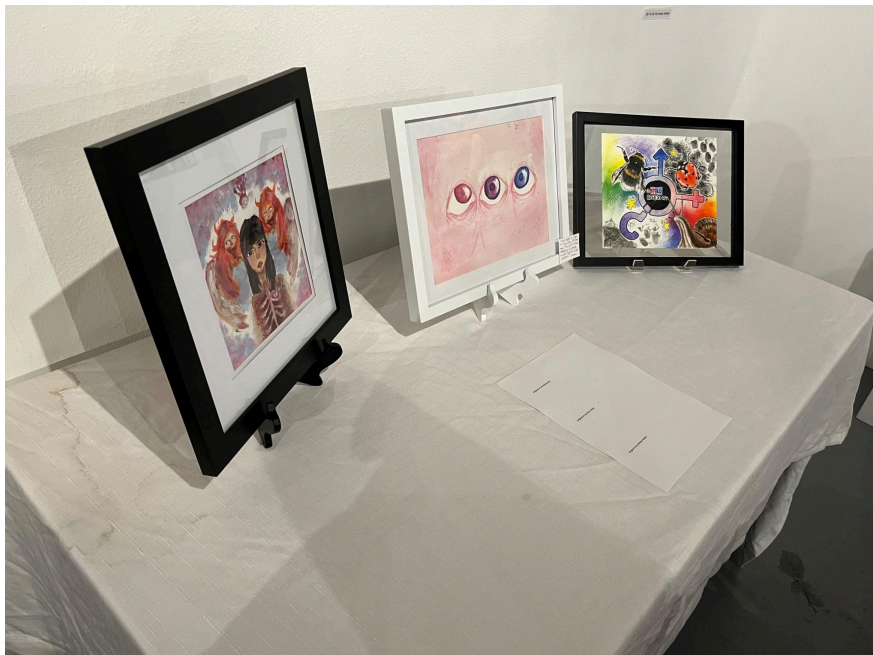
34 responses



When asked what they enjoyed about the Community Forum, attendees responded:

- The community gathering
- Community and seeing folks across a wide variety of life experiences share their stories
- The sense of community and safety
- Great atmosphere
- Hearing the stories
- The beautiful stories
- The stories and art
- The storytelling, hearing people that might not have participated share their stories
- The stories were personal and vulnerable. Hearing about people's experiences is the most effective way to learn.
- The videos were very special
- The films were fantastic. I'm impressed by what they got done in such a short period of time
- The genuine human experiences shared
- The discussion and connection with others
- It was fun and inspiring
- The bi space created and the vulnerability
- Everything was so super beautiful, the testimonies and Q&A afterwards was awesome!
- Learning that bisexuals' lived experiences sometimes get denied by gay people
- It was touching and inspiring. I feel relieved and accepted.
- Seeing the culmination of our work and reconnecting

- The commentary of the mentors and mentees
- Connecting with new people
- The safe community I found and the people here. It was amazing to see how just a small group of people can come together and feel like friends already. It creates a good sense of belonging.
- Watching and hearing BI stories
- Everything! Hearing the stories, realizing how rare and special it is to be in a space designated specifically for bi folks.





## **LESSONS LEARNED**

### **Recruitment challenges**

It is extremely challenging to conduct outreach to bi+ people over the age of 40 due to internalized biphobia and stigma. Many of the bi+ people over the age of 40 did not feel comfortable with their bi+ identities enough to participate as mentors to younger generations who they assumed felt more comfortable with their sexual orientation than they did. Two mentors dropped out of the program a month before it started due to involuntary hospitalizations due to mental health challenges.

The mentors who did participate felt extremely worried about verbal missteps such as the potential for misgendering mentees or saying something unintentionally offensive. Despite this fear, we experienced zero conflicts within the group around language and cultural differences due to age. The mentees and mentors at times said they didn't feel the age gap had any relevance in how they related to one another as bi+ people. Overall, mentors and mentees felt Still Bisexual had successfully created a safe space for folks to explore who they were and the experience of other bi+ people.

It is important to note that the mentees seemed to have more resilience around emotional discomfort when discussing sexual orientation and gender identity. Many arrived at the workshops with pre-existing coping skills for when they felt overstimulated. Many brought headphones and did not hesitate to head upstairs to the quiet space to color or have alone time when they felt overstimulated.

The mentors, on the other hand, did not cope as well with emotional discomfort. One arrived late on the second day of the program, felt anxious about belonging and went home, never to return to the mentorship program again. When we conducted outreach to this mentor, we were told he was busy and had to work.

Additionally, two other mentors dropped out of the second weekend entirely for acting gigs and to attend a film festival. The commitment to the program was not taken as seriously by the mentors, unfortunately, and due to low response on the applicant front, we did not have enough choice when it came to mentor candidates. Some mentors warned us ahead of time that they could only attend one or two days. Others dropped out unexpectedly. Fortunately, the mentees had bonded so much with each other that no one complained about the mentors' inconsistent attendance.

We must also note that we only had one cisgender male mentee. This particular mentee opted out of attending the second weekend and we can't help but wonder if there had been more mentees with a similar gender and age if he might have returned for weekend two. Recruiting bi+ male mentees is a challenge due to the stigma confronting bi+ men. Only 12% are out to their families and the people in their lives they are closest to, and since the program required parental consent, it's possible bi+ male mentees didn't attend due to the stigma of coming out as bi+ to their parents.

If we were to do this program again, we would recruit mentors over the age of 25. We had many people in the bisexual community in their 20s and 30s who reached out to volunteer as mentors and were disappointed they weren't old enough to participate. We feel we could have overcome this recruitment challenge with a more flexible age requirement.

### **Confirming Attendance**

Another lesson we learned is that it is extremely hard to gauge youth attendance due to the communication style of people under the age of 25. We texted and emailed reminders about the parental consent forms, training sessions and the start date of the program repeatedly to all of our mentees but very rarely received any sort of response. Some attended the training, which gave us an inflated idea of how many people would attend until the program started on April 20. Fortunately, many of the youth were planning on attending but had just failed to confirm attendance. Or they corresponded but could not secure parental consent for the program or viable transportation to the Santa Monica location. In the future, we would choose a location near Downtown L.A. to make the commute easier for people who lived on the Eastside.

### **Timeline Issues**

We recruited participants at Models of Pride in October but couldn't launch the mentorship program until April due to challenges recruiting mentors. If recruiting youth again, we would try to launch the program within a month of recruitment when most of the people who signed up were still excited about the program. Six months is a long time to wait to participate, particularly for youth. Additionally, launching the program in spring was the worst time because we had to work around spring break times for all of the students, finals week, and graduation times.

### **LiveScan Complications**

As Still Bisexual had not previously worked with youth under the age of 18, we were surprised to learn how difficult and lengthy a process it was to apply to the Department of Justice for permission to LiveScan our volunteers and mentors. Due to our naivete in that area, we did not get approval to LiveScan our mentors and volunteers before the program launched. Fortunately,

all youth under the age of 18 had parents or guardians sign their permission slips and we were able to only enlist mentors that our project facilitator had known for 10+ years or who worked for LA County, and thus had already been background checked. Additionally, all mentors and mentees over the age of 18 were vetted against the sexual offender database and all were cleared. We now have a LiveScan account for future projects that require working with youth.

### **Time Management**

During the program, we consistently underestimated the amount of time art projects take and thus gave attendees too long of a lunch break on both days, which left us scrambling at the end of the day to complete projects that, for example, required paint to dry. In the future, we would start the day earlier than 11 a.m. to give us more time to conduct workshops before lunch. That said, filming the footage of the participants during our storytelling weekend took less time than we anticipated because participation dropped to 12 from 20—we feel this was due to mentor attrition and because some mentees were uncomfortable telling their stories on video and also weren't visual artists, so they didn't want to participate.

### **Better Equipment Needed**

We would bring better sound equipment for the voiceover recordings next time. A few of the recordings had to be re-recorded because the low tonality of the male mentors' voices were causing distortion and buzzing. This was the first time #StillBisexual had recorded sound for our videos, so it was a learning process.

### **Things That Worked**

Elements of the program that really worked included the space—everyone loved S + T Loft and its nooks and crannies both upstairs and outside on the balcony where they could enjoy ocean breezes and feel calmed by the serene environment. Participants enjoyed filming their videos at the bluffs of Santa Monica and throughout the creative space. Neurodivergent attendees felt there were plenty of spaces where they could escape the large group of people if they needed alone time.

Additionally, everyone loved the food. The free sandwiches and tacos were a huge hit with many participants taking home leftovers. They noted how they felt cared for by the abundance of snacks and like their needs were consistently met.

Overall participants felt affirmed by the mentorship program and the opportunity to exist in a bi+ space even for two weekends. Many said they dreaded returning to work or school after feeling so accepted at the Bi+ Mentorship program. Many now have their first group of bi+ friends due to connections and relationships they built at the lab.

Everyone left with the understanding that bi+ community members have been part of the LGBTQ+ since the beginning of the LGBTQ+ civil rights movement. Many felt reassured that their bi+ identities were valid and that they no longer had to prove their legitimacy to the monosexual community (those who are attracted to one gender).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The bi+ community is notoriously hard to organize. Despite having a mailing list of 1,000 people and robust social media platforms, Still Bisexual still struggled to get 20 people from across Los Angeles County to attend our mentorship program after six months of outreach. Outreach to other LGBTQ+ organizations and colleges to help promote our program were largely ignored—possibly due to their own challenges in engaging the bi+ community or due to biphobia in LGBTQ+ spaces.

The decentralization of Los Angeles is a challenge for community organizations conducting outreach across the County. But we assumed the rarity of offering bi+ programming, something that many people at our Community Forum stated was extremely lacking in their lives, would draw people out of their shells. Given the horrific mental health statistics plaguing the bi+ community, we knew there was a need for resources such as our mentorship program. We felt the stipend would also prove as an incentive for participation. Unfortunately, none of these strategies increased participation.

Internalized bi-negativity and stigma led many mentor candidates to not feel valid enough to participate in programming that addressed their attractions to multiple genders. The tragedy of this is that these people are the ones who need their identities to be affirmed the most. Additionally, many bi+ people have never been in exclusively bi+ spaces so they don't know what they're missing—how affirming and safe it can feel to be among other bi+ people, knowing you are safe from microaggressions and biphobia. For many people, once they experience these spaces, a gap in their hearts is filled that they didn't even realize existed.

That said, it's important to view creating bi+ mental health resources and programming as valuable in its incremental success in providing resources to a small group of people. We strongly recommend that LA County continues to pave new strategies for enlisting the bi+ community through community organizations that serve bi+ populations. Organizations like Still Bisexual, amBI and the LA Bi Task Force all serve bi+ populations in LA County. It's also important to impress upon LGBTQ+ serving organizations to ensure they have resources and programming to address bi+ populations given that our numbers are only increasing in

Generation Z. We are half the LGB community so to not provide resources to the bi+ community is to neglect the majority of queer people. It's crucial LA County takes steps to make bi+ people feel included when they seek mental health resources and community support.