

2019

Bi+

YOUTH REPORT



HUMAN
RIGHTS
CAMPAIGN
FOUNDATION™

Visit hrc.org/bisexual to find resources that bi+ children, families and other youth-serving professionals need to support one another in their journeys.



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Understanding This Report

In 2017, the Human Rights Campaign Foundation partnered with researchers at the University of Connecticut to conduct a groundbreaking survey of more than 12,000 LGBTQ youth and capture their experiences in their families, schools, social circles and communities.

Nearly 9,000 bisexual, pansexual, queer and sexually fluid youth responded to the survey.¹

This resource presents data collected from these young people, shedding light on their challenges and triumphs encountered while navigating the world.

In this report, we use the term “bi+” as an umbrella term for identities that are not exclusively same-sex attracted or different-sex attracted, such as bisexual, pansexual, queer and sexually fluid. While there are a multitude of sexual orientations which people may feel best describe themselves, we use “bi+” in this report as an inclusive way to incorporate as many non-monosexual (attracted to more than one gender) groups of people as possible.

Regardless of the nuances of an individual’s sexual orientation, all bi+ people are marginalized by a system that polices sexuality to fit neatly into one of two boxes: straight or gay/lesbian. This discrimination is worsened by racism, sexism, classism, ableism and other forces that have historically restricted and invalidated the experiences of bi+ people.

In using this report, it is important to affirm and support the lives and identities of bi+ people.

¹ For more information about how respondent size numbers were determined, read the methodology section at the end of the original [2018 LGBTQ Youth Report](#).

A note on terminology

Below are a few definitions of terms used throughout this report. While terminology for many identities can differ over time and across communities, the definitions below are a good starting point for understanding many identities within the bi+ community.

Bisexual

Describes someone emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to more than one sex, gender or gender identity, though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree.

Pansexual

Describes someone who has the potential for emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to people of any gender, though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree.

Queer

Describes someone who experiences sexual orientation and/or gender identity as fluid. Often used interchangeably with “LGBTQ.”

Sexually fluid

Describes someone whose emotional, romantic or sexual attractions do not fit into any neat category, and may shift over time. These attractions can be to more than one sex, gender or gender identity, though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree.



Supporting Bi+ Youth

According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, approximately 8% of youth ages 13-17 in the United States, or nearly 2 million people, identify as bisexual.

Bi+ youth are also the largest contingent of LGBTQ youth in the country. Nearly 9,000 youth who responded to HRC's 2017 survey identified as bi+, making up nearly 52% of the survey's sample. HRC's internal analysis of General Social Survey data shows that this proportion may be even higher for adults,² with 62% of the adult LGBTQ population being comprised of bisexual-identified people.³

Sadly, we still live in a cultural reality where many bi+ young people are asked to "choose" between being gay/lesbian or straight, and bi+ identity is delegitimized as just a stepping stone to gayness. However, these myths are false and harmful. Bisexual, queer, pansexual and fluid identities are valid, complete and whole identities. Bi+ youth always have and always will exist.

The increased visibility of bi+ role models in media, film, television and sports, along with bi+-inclusive Obama-era policies and legislation,⁴ have helped to create more inclusive spaces where it is safer for bi+ young people to come out and live authentically.

Supportive parents, school administrators, teachers, counselors and other youth-serving professionals play an essential role in the lives of bi+ youth. The support of these adults is especially important when youth struggle in the absence of affirmation from their families and communities regarding their sexual orientation.

Bi+ youth continue to be their own powerful forces of change. Their stories of empowerment, resilience, activism and advocacy are pronounced in these findings. Across the country, they are demanding due respect and equity. They need us to do the same.

We must support bi+ youth in their pursuit of collective equity, inclusion and justice.

For youth-serving professionals

This resource draws on a subset of data presented in HRC's [2018 LGBTQ Youth Report](#) to highlight the experiences of bi+ youth. We hope this information helps to encourage youth-serving professionals to think critically about sexual orientation and gender identity in their work.

² Whittington, C. H. (2019). LGBTQ Population Estimates Based on the 2018 General Social Survey. Human Rights Campaign Foundation Internal Analysis.

³ Estimates are weighted for nonresponse subsampling strategies. See Appendix A of the GSS Codebook: <https://gssdataexplorer.norc.umd.edu/documents/441/display>

⁴ <https://www.advocate.com/bisexuality/2015/9/23/white-house-hosts-bisexual-advocates-community-policy-briefing>



The Importance of Family

Parents and families have a critical role to play in affecting the self-esteem, mental health and overall well-being of bi+ youth.

Youth whose families provide supportive, safe and affirming homes are more likely to experience positive health outcomes across several dimensions, including greater self esteem and resilience; a lowered risk of depression, distress and feelings of hopelessness; and a reduced risk of substance use.

69%

of bi+ youth hear their families make **negative comments about LGBTQ people.**



Moreover, supportive and affirming families can also act as a buffer against some of the discrimination, harassment and bullying that bi+ youth might experience in their schools and communities.

Yet, the youth in our survey report that sharing their sexual orientations or gender identities with their families is incredibly stressful. These young people say that their real and perceived fears of rejection are compounded by negative comments they hear about the LGBTQ community from parents and family members. These comments are often based on specific myths of bi+ identity, such as the false ideas that bi+ people are hypersexual, greedy or simply just can't make up their minds. Furthering these stereotypes is dangerous to the well-being of bi+ youth.

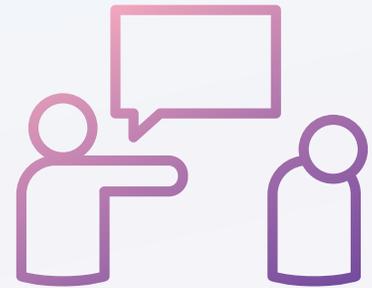
As a youth-serving professional, family member or community member, you can provide life-changing support to bi+ youth who may not receive it from their parents or immediate family. Where possible, you may also be able to play a role in educating families in your community.

Negative attitudes voiced by family members, peers and other community members can make bi+ youth reluctant to disclose or embrace their own identities.

Living authentically is a deeply personal process and one that can be even more complex for bi+ youth. Youth-serving professionals who wish to better understand the specific challenges these youth face, particularly around coming out, are encouraged to read HRC's [Resource Guide to Coming Out As Bisexual](#).

52%

of bi+ youth report that **their families have made them feel bad about being LGBTQ**, compared to **45%** of gay and lesbian youth.



More than

40%

of bi+ youth have been **mocked by their families for being LGBTQ**.

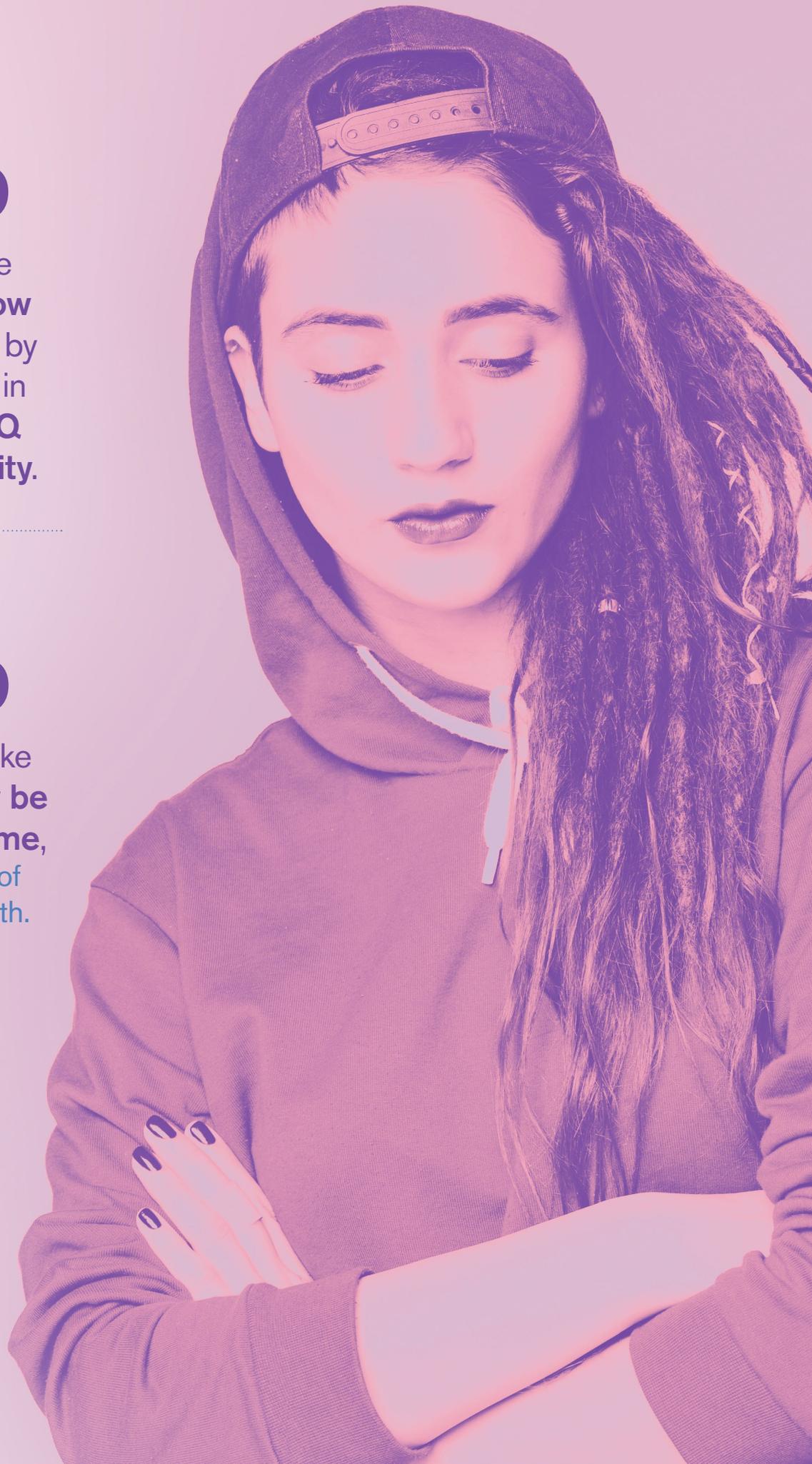


Only
31%

of bi+ youth have families who show support for them by getting involved in the larger LGBTQ and ally community.

Only
21%

of bi+ youth feel like they can definitely be themselves at home, compared to **28%** of gay and lesbian youth.



“It’s more comfortable when I’m having a conversation with anyone but my mother. When I speak to my mother about my bisexuality, she usually takes it too far and starts an argument.”

“My parents look past me being bisexual and think it’s because of the friends I’m around. I don’t like talking to people about my sexuality. It scares me what they will think about me because of the stereotypes they’ve built about the LGBT community. I don’t want that to affect how people act around me.”



The Burden of Rejection

Along with the fear of familial rejection, bi+ youth face a variety of other stressors – harassment, peer rejection, bullying and isolation – that can take a major toll on their overall well-being.⁵

⁵ Birkett, M., Newcomb, M.E., & Mustanski, B. (2014). Does it Get Better? A Longitudinal Analysis of Psychological Distress and Victimization in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Youth. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 56 (3), 280-285.



96%
of bi+ youth have
trouble sleeping
at night.

Bi+ youth have a high risk of negative health and mental health outcomes, often beyond that of their gay and lesbian peers. Too many of these young people feel pressure from their families, schools or communities to conform to societal expectations of heterosexuality or homosexuality. Bi+ youth who do not receive affirming support or are forced to hide their sexuality face elevated mental health risks and remain at higher risk across adolescence and into young adulthood.⁶

Negative perceptions about bi+ youth can also lead to verbal and physical violence. Regardless of the robustness of their social support system, the majority of bi+ youth have been subjected to threats and unwanted comments about their sexuality. Additionally, far too many have been pushed into unwanted sexual situations. We must work as a society to shape a culture where verbal, physical and sexual violence are not tolerated.

⁶ McConnell, E., Birkett, M., Mustanski, B. (2016). Families Matter: Social Support and Mental Health Trajectories Among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 59 (6), 674-680.

12% of bi+ youth have been **sexually attacked** or **raped** because of their **actual or assumed identity**.

69% of bi+ youth have **received unwanted sexual comments, jokes and gestures** in the **past year**, compared to **63%** of gay and lesbian youth.

23% of bi+ youth have **been forced to do unwanted sexual acts**, compared to **16%** of gay and lesbian youth.

87%

of bi+ youth **rate** their **average stress level** as **“5” or higher** on a 1-10 scale.

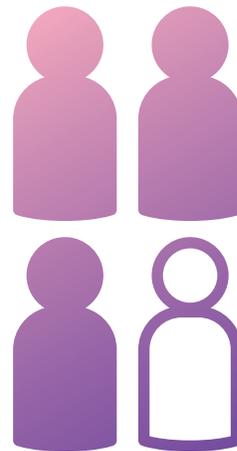
41%

of bi+ youth **feel** **critical** of their **LGBTQ identities**.



More than
3 in 4

bi+ youth “usually” feel
hopeless or **worthless**,
compared to **64%** of
gay and lesbian youth.



85%

of bi+ youth
“usually” feel worried,
nervous or **panicked**,
compared to **77%** of
gay and lesbian youth.

81%

of bi+ youth
“usually” feel down
or **depressed**,
compared to **71%** of
gay and lesbian youth.

Unfortunately, there is little research specifically focused on bi+ counseling and mental health, with most of what exists integrated into general LGBTQ counseling. In addition, bi+ youth are nearly two times less likely than their gay and lesbian peers to be out to their doctors and healthcare providers. However, bi+ youth have specific and unique mental and physical health needs, and more research on bi+ mental, physical and sexual health is sorely needed.

Thankfully, learning opportunities are available to professional counselors and therapists who work with LGBTQ youth and wish to improve their skills, knowledge and competence in working with bi+ youth. Look out for local or online trainings or take a look at HRC's [Coming Out as Bisexual to Your Doctor](#) and [Tips for Doctors to Better Treat Bisexual Patients](#).

Only
9%

of bi+ youth would be **very comfortable** discussing a question about their LGBTQ identity with a counselor.

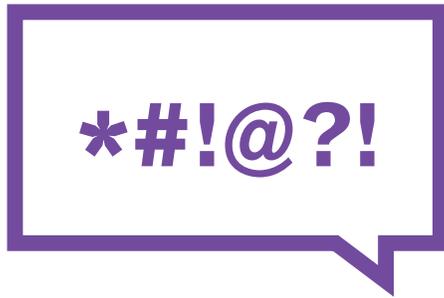
43%

of bi+ youth report that they have **received psychological or emotional counseling** in the **last 12 months**.



“At my past school, I got extremely bullied for being LGBT+. I am now going into high school, and I’m afraid of the same thing happening. I don’t want anyone at this school knowing that I’m LGBTQ, so I would be slightly or very uncomfortable.”

“Because of being bisexual, I would imagine that an adult counselor would have judgements of me, thinking it’s just a phase, that I don’t want to come out as fully gay, or even not believing in bisexuality.”



71%

of bi+ youth have experienced verbal threats because of their actual or perceived LGBTQ identity.

20%

of bi+ youth were bullied because someone thought they were LGBTQ.

29%

of bi+ youth have received physical threats due to their LGBTQ identity.



When Schools Fall Short

While some schools offer safe and affirming spaces that enable LGBTQ youth to thrive, many young people still experience negative – and even hostile – school environments.



Only

1 in 4

bi+ youth **always** feels
safe in the **classroom**.



68%

of bi+ youth report being teased or treated poorly at school because of their sexual orientation, compared to **60%** of gay and lesbian youth.

43%

of bi+ youth have been bullied on school property in the past 12 months.

Only

26%

of bi+ youth can “definitely” be themselves in school, compared to **nearly 33%** of gay and lesbian youth.

Without non-discrimination laws and statewide policies to protect LGBTQ students or comprehensive inclusion training, the majority of these youth remain vulnerable to discrimination, harassment and bullying from peers, teachers and administrators.

Negative experiences, whether in the classroom, in the halls, at lunch or during extracurricular activities, have a tremendous impact on bi+ youth’s overall health and well-being.

Youth-serving professionals have a responsibility to ensure the safety and well-being of bi+ youth and create inclusive learning environments that allow all students, regardless of their sexual orientation, to learn and to thrive.

Educators who wish to learn how to make bi+ inclusivity a priority in their classrooms and schools are encouraged to read HRC’s [Resources for an LGBTQ and Gender Inclusive School](#) and [Checklist for a Welcoming LGBTQ and Gender Inclusive School Environment](#).

“In grade school, I attended a Catholic school, and sex ed was strictly about the dangers of STIs, premarital sex and how it is dangerous and against the Church, and how abstinence until marriage is the best route. LGBTQ+ relationships were heavily frowned upon, if even mentioned. At my more progressive, all-girls school, we learn about different forms of contraception and healthy relationships. However, LGBTQ relationships were never brought up for either topic, and I still do not have formal teachings on how to have safe sex.”

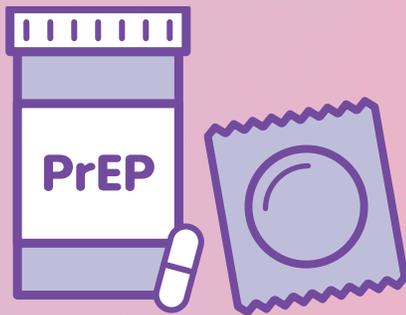
“No topics of LGBTQ are currently talked about in my school. In health class last year when the teacher was asked about LGBTQ STD prevention, he gave a nasty look and just moved on.”



Only

17%

of bi+ youth hear
positive messages
about being LGBTQ
in school.



Just

13%

of bi+ youth have
received information
about safer sex that is
relevant to their identity.





Being Bi+ and Gender-Expansive

Gender-expansive* youth of all backgrounds face particularly serious challenges in the school system.

Gender-expansive bi+ youth, like all gender-expansive youth, report that they often feel unsafe and unprotected at school. Furthermore, **gender-expansive bi+ youth report being barred from using locker rooms and bathroom facilities that match their gender identity, being misgendered and being called the wrong name by adults and peers.**

Combined, the effects of verbal and physical harassment, along with overtly discriminatory practices and policies, have damaging implications for gender-expansive bi+ youth.

Approximately

58%

of gender-expansive youth sampled in **HRC's 2017 LGBTQ youth survey** also identified as bi+.

*We use the term "**gender-expansive**" to convey a wider, more flexible range of gender identity and/or expression than typically associated with identifying as either male or female exclusively.

Cisgender is a term used to describe a person whose gender identity, expression, or lived experience aligns with what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth.

We use **gender-expansive**, rather than **transgender**, to describe all non-cisgender respondents because every person defines their identity differently. For example, some non-binary people identify as transgender, but not all do. It is imperative that we expand our understanding of terms and definitions to accommodate everyone's individual experience and self-identification process.

With over half of gender-expansive youth identifying as bi+, it is important to know the experiences specific to bi+ gender-expansive youth.



More than
75%

of gender-expansive bi+ youth can't always use the restroom that best reflects their gender identity in school.

35%

of gender-expansive bi+ youth **avoid using the restroom at school altogether.**

Nearly
33%

of gender-expansive bi+ youth **don't feel safe using the restrooms in school.**

26%

of gender-expansive bi+ youth **don't know if they're allowed to use the restrooms in school.**

“My parents have constantly forced my transgender identity back into the closet. They are the only ones allowed to know, and I am only ‘allowed’ to have the identity as long as I keep it completely hidden and they reserve the right to make fun of me for it.”

“I just don’t go to the bathroom at school. I’ve had friends who were harassed about it, and don’t feel comfortable using them.”

“LGBTQ+ topics have been educated in a way that isn’t very inclusive to nonbinary individuals and lesser known sexualities. Schools rarely recognize sexualities and genders other than gay, lesbian, bisexual, FtM transgender, and MtF transgender. As someone who is both nonbinary (agender) and pansexual (although I prefer to label myself as queer), I feel like we don’t get enough recognition.”

HELLO

my name is

Just
35%

of gender-expansive
bi+ youth are **always**
called by their true
name at school

Only
29%

of gender-expansive bi+
youth can **dress** and
express themselves
at school in a way that
completely reflects
their gender identity.

Only
17%

of gender-expansive bi+
youth report that they
are **always referred**
to by their correct
pronouns in school.

In order to support a bi+ and gender-expansive young person's well-being, we must first ensure their right to exist safely in public spaces. Unfortunately, anti-equality legislative efforts and exclusionary policies attack authentic, courageous gender-expansive bi+ young people simply for existing as they are.

These actions are not just hateful and misinformed, they put all gender-expansive young people – including those who are bi+ – in harm's way. **Being forced to use incorrect names, pronouns and facilities has a devastating effect on their mental health and personal safety.** We must all commit to creating spaces and procedures that support and affirm the identities of all young people.





Adolescence at the Intersection

Bi+ youth of color face additional stress and adverse effects to their health and well-being as a result of bias and discrimination around their intersecting identities.

83%

of bi+ youth of color **have experienced racism.**



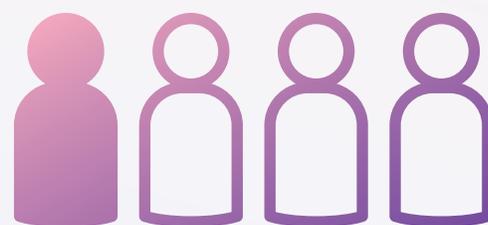
“I go to a white school, and as a Black LGBT student I simply don't feel comfortable going to a white counselor and expressing my grievances because she simply won't understand.”

They may encounter racism and discrimination on a daily basis and in various forms that further complicate their ability to express, explore and/or manage their bi+ identities.

For these youth, **difficulty in finding LGBTQ counselors of color or programs that relate directly to their experiences with biphobia and race-based discrimination often leads to feelings of isolation and a lack of sense of belonging.**

It is imperative that youth-serving professionals understand the intersection of race and LGBTQ identities, and the ways in which white supremacy polices the identities, expressions and existences of bi+ people of color.

To address these disparities, programs are needed that accommodate the specific needs and experiences of bi+ youth of color, including anti-racist and bi+-affirming programs. Youth-serving professionals also require training that addresses bi+ youths' multiple and intersecting identities.



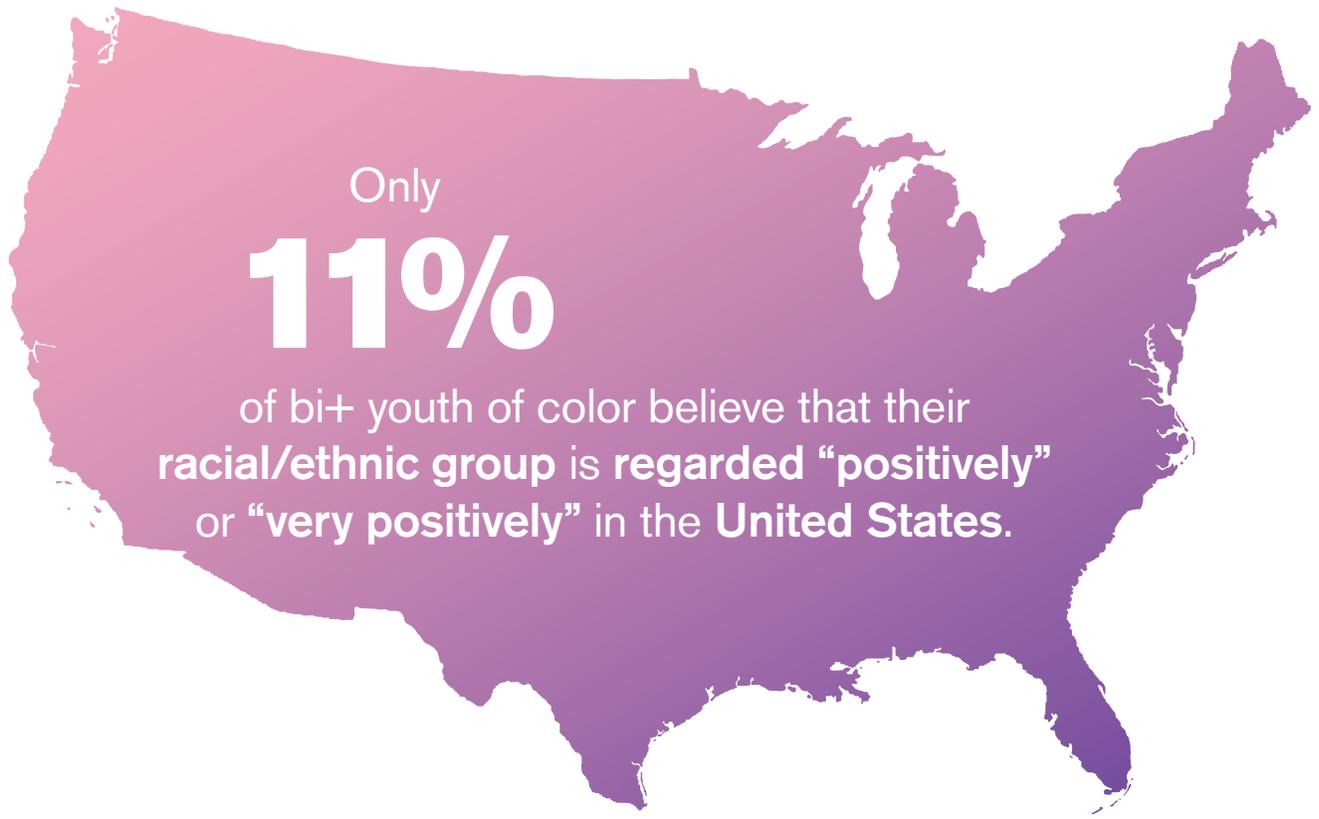
Nearly

1 in 4

bi+ youth of color
thinks about racism
every day.

87%

of bi+ youth of color
say **their families and friends are negatively affected by racism.**



94%

of bi+ youth of color say **racism affects people in their same racial or ethnic group.**

87%

of bi+ youth of color report that **racism has impacted their life experience.**



Coming Out

The decision to come out is a deeply personal journey that is shaped by each individual's unique experiences and circumstances.

For bi+ people, coming out can present some unique challenges. For many youth, the decision to come out varies widely depending on who they can come out to and in which contexts they feel the most safe disclosing their bi+ identities.

Bi+ people often face skepticism and stereotypes about their sexuality, and are ignored and excluded from many LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ spaces alike. As a result, bi+ people are often invisible to each other.

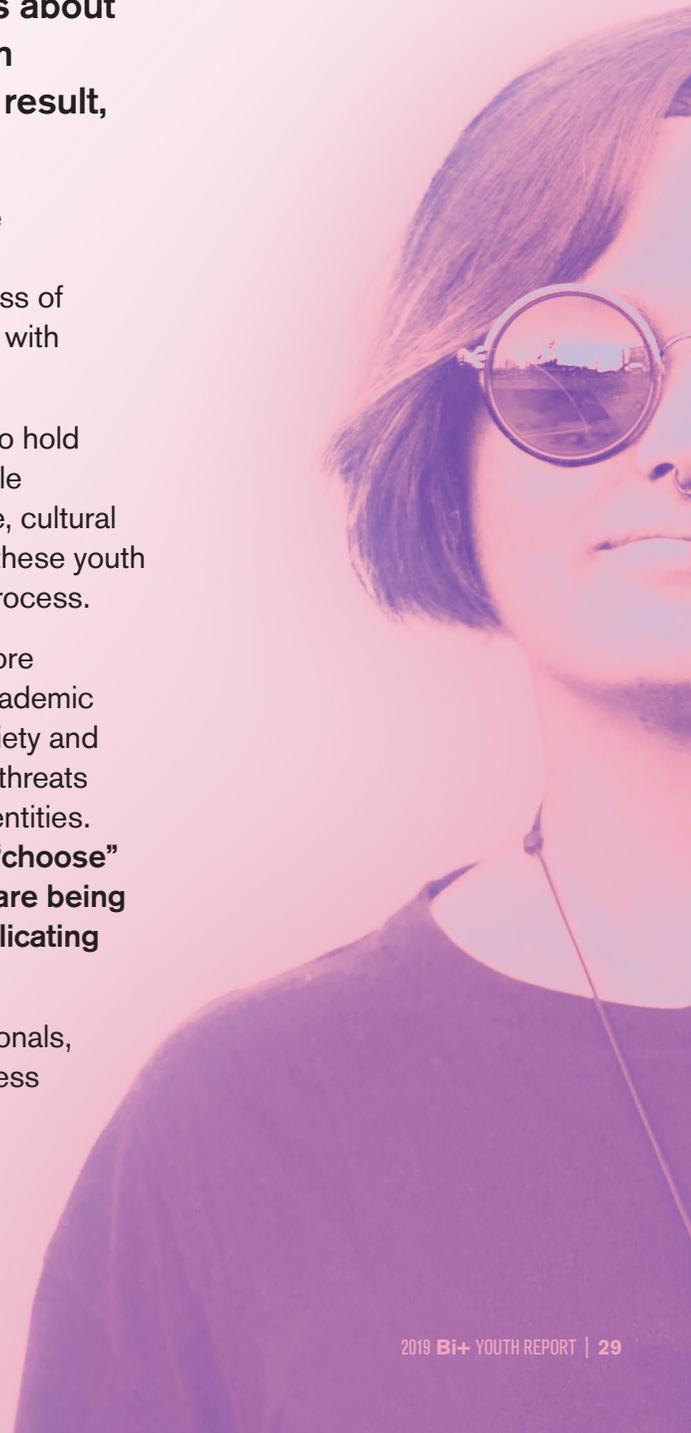
This exclusion and invisibility can pose challenges to the bi+ community and can make coming out complicated. But coming out can also be wonderful, relieving the stress of having to hide and giving people the chance to connect with others in the bi+ community.

Every coming out story is unique, and bi+ youth may also hold multiple and intersecting identities. While holding multiple identities can be an immense source of power and pride, cultural norms, religious identities and family dynamics can pull these youth in different directions as they navigate the coming out process.

Studies show that LGBTQ youth who live openly are more likely to experience positive outcomes such as better academic performance, higher self-esteem, and lower rates of anxiety and depression.⁷ However, for too many youth, the very real threats to their safety prevent them from fully disclosing their identities. In addition, **many bi+ people are told that they must “choose” either a straight or gay/lesbian identity, or that they are being greedy in liking more than one gender, further complicating the coming out journey of bi+ people.**

As parents, allies, educators and youth-serving professionals, we have a responsibility to ensure that all youth, regardless of their sexual orientations, are able to live authentically and thrive.

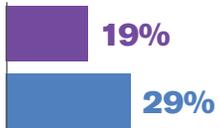
⁷ Russell, S. & Fish, J.N., (2016) Mental Health in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Youth. Annual Review of Clinical Psychology, 12, 465-487.



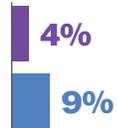
% of youth that report they are “out” to their:



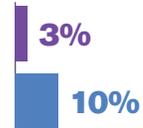
Parents or family



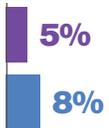
Teachers or adults at school



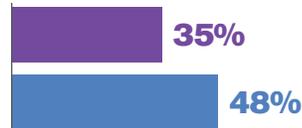
Athletic coaches



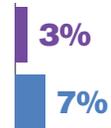
Doctors or healthcare providers



Siblings



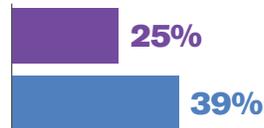
Grandparents or extended family



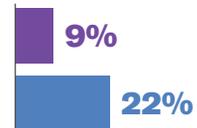
LGBTQ friends



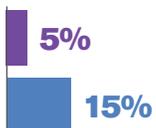
Non-LGBTQ friends



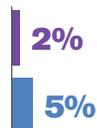
Classmates at school



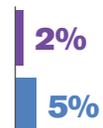
Coworkers



Religious community



Strangers or new acquaintances



“Generally, being out is difficult. Coming out to an adult you don’t know at all is even harder. I, personally, find it hard to come out to people until I’m comfortable around them. Also, it can be difficult to talk about LGBTQ issues with someone who isn’t LGBTQ and doesn’t understand the issues themselves.”

“I feel unable to share my sexual orientation because I often hear that bisexual people need ‘to just pick one,’ and I, as a young woman, am often sexualized for liking girls as well as boys.”



What You Can Do

Every adult can play a role in changing the landscape for bi+ youth. Often, small but impactful actions can reinforce inclusive, supportive and loving environments in homes, schools and communities.

Things you can do to support bi+ young people:

Elevate bi+ narratives.

In schools and community settings, it is imperative to highlight the experiences of bi+ people of all races, ages and genders. Bi+ young people in our research cite struggling to find relatable role models. Highlighting a variety of narratives can make this representation more accessible while combating stigma and misconceptions about bi+ people more broadly.

Expand opportunities and resources for parents of bi+ youth to become better advocates for their children.

Develop culturally-appropriate LGBTQ resources that center the experiences of bi+ people, including educational materials, support groups, community centers and others. Too often, resources for LGBTQ people and their families are centered on gay/lesbian narratives, which may neglect or unintentionally exclude the experiences of bi+ people. Listen to the experiences of bi+ people and families, and acknowledge and uplift their advocacy work, while continuing to use your resources as a supportive platform.

Don't erase bi+ communities when discussing LGBTQ issues.

LGBTQ issues are often reduced to LGT issues.

Work to understand the differences between gay/lesbian issues and bi+ issues. Recognize that biphobia comes from both within and outside of the larger LGBTQ community, and be an ally in both of these spaces. Bi+ communities have unique needs that may be different from those of LGT communities.

Educate yourself and others about bi+ issues.

It is important to continually learn and grow in your allyship by seeking out learning opportunities about bi+ identities and communities. Read bi+ resources, consume bi+ media, and use this information to call out biphobia and bisexual erasure when you see or hear it. Work to actively dispel negative stereotypes of bi+ people and let youth know that you are actively supportive of the bi+ community.

Let youth define themselves.

When talking to youth about their sexuality, it is important to use and reflect the language used by youth. Go beyond talking about gay and lesbian relationships and use terms like bisexual, queer, questioning, pansexual and fluid. Let youth talk to you and tell you the terms they use. Also, be inclusive of terms related to gender identity, such as transgender, genderfluid and genderqueer. By hearing this language used, bi+ youth can hear that their identities are legitimate and respected.

To best support bi+ youth, it is imperative to address anti-LGBTQ attitudes, racism, transphobia and other systems of oppression that present undue challenges to their well-being. Youth-serving professionals, parents, school staff, policy-makers and community members can find more tips in HRC's [2018 LGBTQ Youth Report](#) that, as always, should be viewed through an intersectional lens.



Respondent Profile

Gender (select all that apply)

	N Values
Cisgender	5,690
Transgender boy	818
Transgender girl	102
Non-binary+	2,371

N = 8,981

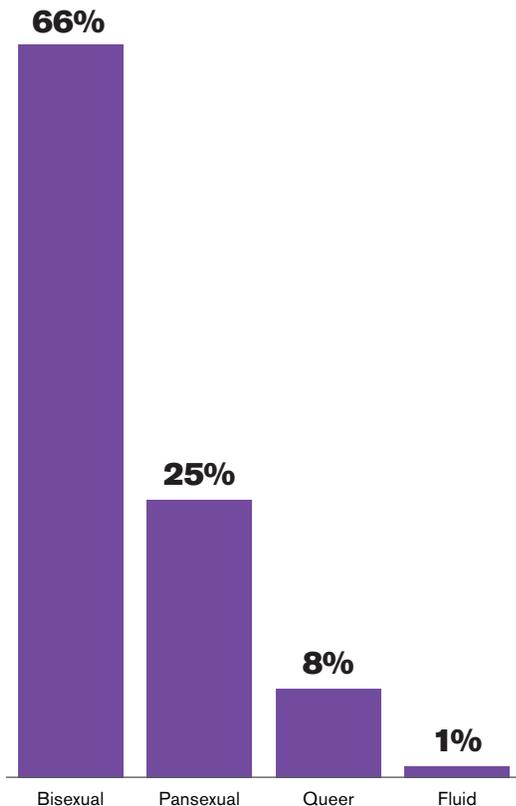
Note: Cisgender, transgender boy and transgender girl numbers are a combination of self-identification and concordance with sex assigned at birth. N values may add up to more than 8,981 as some respondents self-identify with more than one answer choice provided.

“Non-binary+” includes genderqueer or gender non-conforming youth, and write-ins such as agender, androgynous, bigender, confused/ don't know, demigender, genderfluid/flux, questioning, not listed and more.

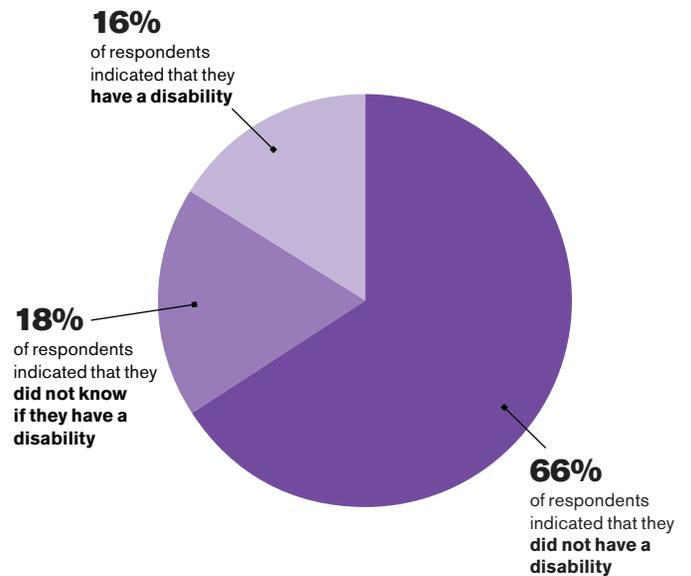


of respondents are gender-expansive

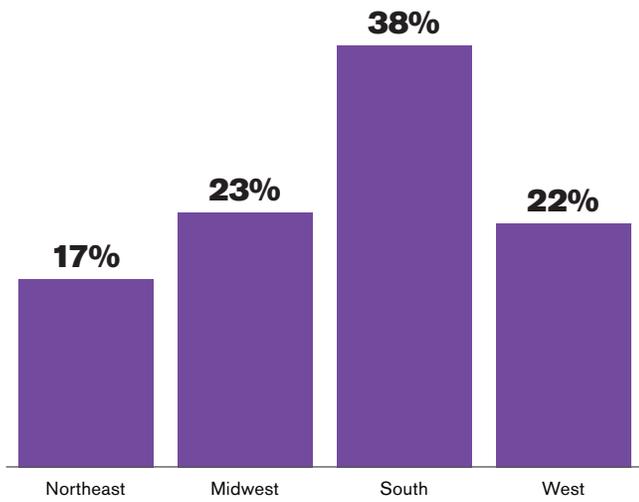
Sexual Orientation



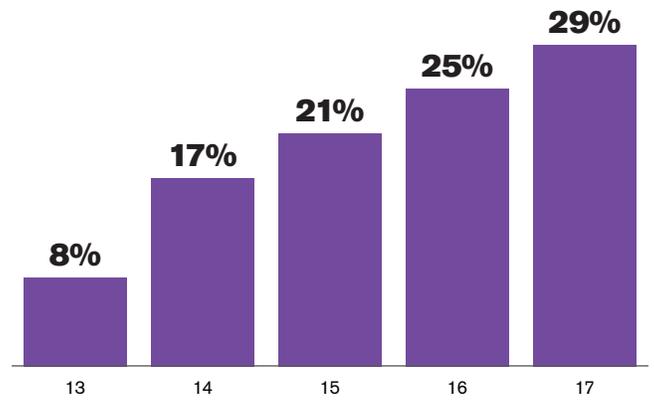
Ability



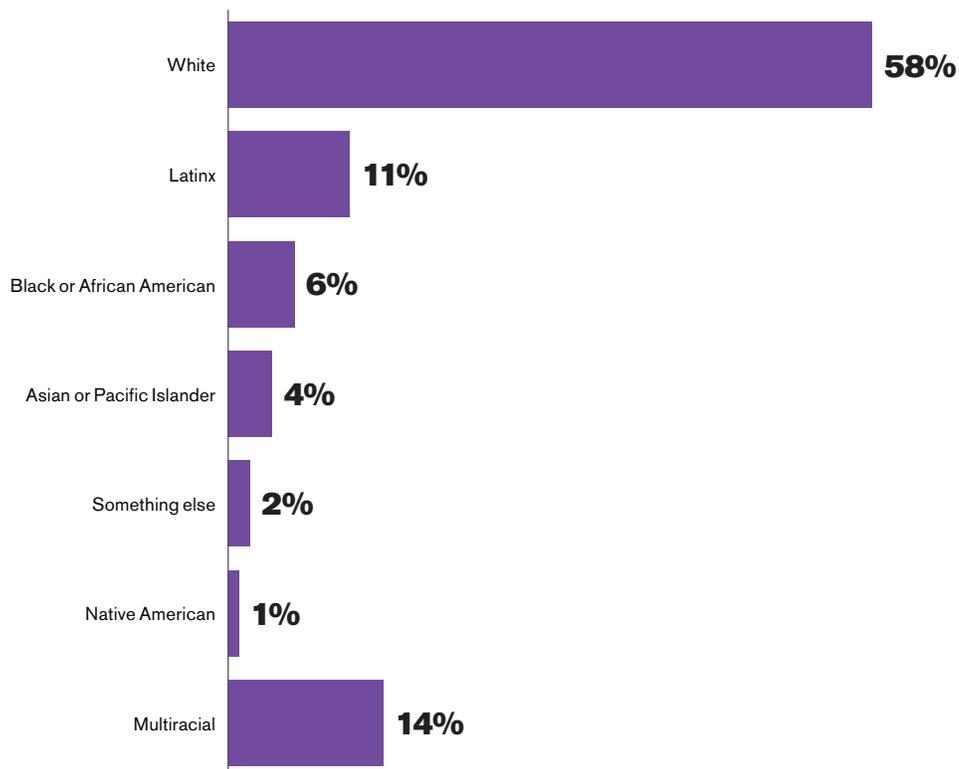
Location



Age



Ethnoracial Identity



Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding



Human Rights Campaign Foundation

The Human Rights Campaign Foundation improves the lives of LGBTQ people by working to increase understanding and encourage the adoption of LGBTQ-inclusive policies and practices. Through our programs and projects, we are enhancing the lived experiences of LGBTQ people and their families, as we change hearts and minds across America and around the globe.

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Visit hrc.org/bisexual to find resources that bi+ children, families and other youth-serving professionals need to support one another in their journeys.



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