

# How Long Has Bisexuality Been Around?

**F**or as long as there have been humans, there have been humans who were attracted to multiple genders. In every phase of history, every civilization, every part of the world has been chock-full with people who today might identify as bi/pan/queer/etc. The same is true for gay men, lesbians, trans, non-binary, and asexual people, and every other flavour of queerness there is (which is infinite, in my opinion).

There are a few different ways you can approach the vastness of bi history. You can reach back through the archives and find people who had relationships or showed attractions to different genders across their lives and claim them as bi. You can focus only on people who actually identified themselves as bi. You can look into the ways in which bi people have been pathologized and ostracized by others. You can focus just on the many, *many* achievements of bi community groups and organizations.

In true bi fashion, I'm interested in a bit of everything. While I think it can be problematic to anachronistically apply modern labels to figures for whom those identities may not have existed, I also understand the importance of acknowledging the queerness

of our ancestors, icons, and enemies. By that I mean that we can and should acknowledge and shout about historical figures who appeared to be multi-gender attracted, but it's also important to be aware that throughout most of history, queerness was forcibly erased and invisibilized, meaning people may not have fully been able to comprehend or express their own experiences.

People who may appear to us as bi may have actually identified as gay or ace or any number of other identities if they had access to our words and knowledge. If you look back through history, there are countless people who could have fit into multiple of today's identities and there are just as many arguments about which they 'truly' were. I find those arguments to be a waste of time because we can never know, they do nothing but sow seeds of division within our community, and perpetuate the idea that queer identities and experiences can always be neatly separated from each other and don't overlap. In today's world, Sappho, the famous Lesbos poet, may have identified as a lesbian, or bi, or pan, or even something completely different. But she didn't have access to any of those words, and trying to claim her as definitely one or the other deprioritizes all the ways in which our experiences as lesbians or bi or pan women overlap and look like one another. She is an important figure to all women who love women, and that's all that matters to me.

With that in mind, then, this whistle-stop tour of bi history will be comprised of three parts: pre-bi history (i.e. multi-gender attracted people and communities that existed before our understanding of the word 'bisexual'), the emergence of bisexuality as a defined experience and community, and, finally, the bisexual movement from its inception in the '70s until now (I'm writing in 2021, remember).

## **BI THE WAY**

It's important for bi+ people to document our history because otherwise we risk losing records of our community and activism, which not only allows biphobic people to continue to argue that we don't exist, are a new concept, or don't have a community or history, but also means that bi people won't have an awareness of the history of their community and the work of other bi people. Having a sense of history and community can be really important to understanding yourself and I know for myself learning that bi+ people have existed for as long as anything else and have made significant contributions as activists to the LGBTQ+ community was really important.

It can be difficult to find information about historical people who had relationships with or attraction to people of the same and different gender because historians and researchers only see heterosexual and gay/lesbian identities as an option. There can also be a misconception that it's anachronistic to identify people who had relationships with or experienced attraction to people of the same and different genders as part of bisexual+ history, and that it detracts from gay and lesbian history – however I feel very strongly that we have a right to acknowledge our community's heritage and that it only adds to the wider LGBTQ+ heritage.

I really expected more people to feel like my research was kind of 'treading on the toes' of gay and lesbian history and initially I felt a little defensive about what I was doing. I've gradually realized that maintaining a positive, inclusive space with the @bihistory Instagram, workshops, and the archive collection itself has had the same positive energy returned to it, and I've had many people reach out

and give feedback to say that it's helped them feel more comfortable in their identities and given them a sense of heritage which is really important.

Mel Reeves, bi+ historian

## Proto-bisexuality

Mary Wollstonecraft is often called a 'proto-feminist', because whilst she was dedicated women's rights activist, feminism as a political movement or defined ideology/framework had not yet been established at the time of her writing. 'Bisexuality' as concept and identity has a specific context; it relies on a certain understanding of gender, attraction (see Chapters 1 and 2), and sexuality. Our concept of bisexuality began to emerge in the late 1800s, alongside society's understanding (or, misunderstanding might be more accurate) of hetero- and homosexuality. But this didn't stop people from desiring, loving, and fucking people of all different genders!

The ancient world was full of practices and people who we would perhaps now label as bisexual. In ancient Greece, it was not uncommon for free men to have relationships with women and younger men. Interestingly, this became a more common – or at least a more open – part of life after Greece became a city-state. Eva Cantarella writes in *Bisexuality in the Ancient World*:

After Sappho, in Greece, love between women was no longer the subject of poetry. How could it have been any different, when one considers that with the strengthening of the bonds of citizenship, women had been relegated to a reproductive role, excluded from all forms for education, and consequently from

the use of language? In the centuries of the city-state, female homosexuality disappeared a socially visible and significant custom. And at the same time, male homosexuality came out, as a manner of speaking. (2002, p.4)

It should be noted here that Eva uses 'homosexual' to refer to any and all same-sex/gender desire or relationships, which strikes me as a bit ironic in a book about bisexuality.

The practice of men having relationships with younger men was known as 'pederasty', and it is arguable that pederasty was more common than bisexuality, as boys were seen as having a status closer to women than to men, meaning men engaging with younger *boys* was not seen as on par with engaging sexually with other *men*. It's important to note that many of these relationships would have been predatory, and even considered paedophilia today.

Around a similar time, bisexuality was also seemingly in vogue in another Mediterranean climate; in ancient Rome, it was considered permissible for a freeborn man to have sex with men and women, provided he always took the penetrative role. This seems to have been the ancient Roman version of 'no-homo'ing their relationships with other men, in the same way that today we see frat boys claim that sucking each other off isn't 'gay' because it was part of an initiation.

It is interesting to see how in both these cultures the binary applied to sexuality was not gender but rather penetrating/being penetrated as a way of determining who was the active/strong/dominant party or the passive/weak/submissive participant in a way that we still see applied to gender roles today (see Chapter 2 for a deeper exploration of this). Same shit, different centuries.

Some notable Greco-Romans who dabbled in multi-gender flings include Socrates, the Greek philosopher, who was married

to a 'difficult woman' but had an eye for beautiful boys, especially his student Alcibiades, and Julius Caesar, who, despite being married, bedded both Cleopatra and King Nicomedes.

Ancient Japan also saw its fair share of bisexuality and homosexuality among Buddhist monks, with many stories of same-sex love affairs appearing in countless literary works. Monks were also the first people to rationalize pederasty in Japan.

The violent spread of Christian morality during the Dark Ages meant any hint of queerness and gender nonconformity has been erased and suppressed in the pages of history and possibly at the time too. But nothing can or will ever stamp it out, and multi-gender attracted people continue to love and exist.

One of my favourite examples is playwright William Shakespeare, who, long before becoming the bane of every school child's life, was writing sonnets for his paramours of varying genders and infusing his plays with tales of gender-bending and queer love. Willy Shake is also one of my favourite examples of bi erasure, as one theory posits that 'he' was actually several people writing under the same pseudonym, so the sonnets written for women were by men and vice versa.

There were several other notable people who showed bisexual behaviour before 'bi' became the identity as we know it today, including (but certainly not limited to): Michelangelo, Casanova, Marie Antoinette, Lord Byron, Hans Christian Anderson, Alexander Hamilton, Virginia Woolf, Marlene Dietrich, Eleanor Roosevelt, Greta Garbo, Billie Holiday, Josephine Baker, Frida Kahlo, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Aleister Crowley, Colette, Francis Bacon, Tallulah Bankhead, Tamara de Lempicka, Mary Wollstonecraft, and many, many, many others.

## The emergence of bi identities

As we discussed in Chapter 3, the word ‘bisexual’ was first used to describe people we might now describe as intersex before becoming used to describe people who have relationships with ‘both sexes’ at around the turn of the 20th century and then being popularized (not necessarily in positive or helpful ways) by sexologists and writers Freud, Kinsey, and Klein. For a while there was a flurry of activity in the sexologist world, attempting to prove – or more aptly disprove – the existence of multi-gender attraction and desire, but it was still minute compared to studies and theories into hetero- and homosexuality. ‘When we began our investigation ten years ago, almost nothing was known about bisexuality. Even today, we are struck by the virtual absence of research on people attracted erotically to people of both sexes especially in light of research that suggests that bisexuality is fairly widespread,’ wrote Weinberg, Pryor, and Williams in 1994, at the beginning of their fascinating multi-year study of bisexual lives in San Francisco. Sadly, not much has changed.

Meanwhile, multi-gender attracted people were hard at work toiling in the ranks of gay liberation, and queer and lesbian rights movements. Some were out as bi, whether proudly, reluctantly, or apologetically, whereas others didn’t or couldn’t label their sexuality and some identified as gay or lesbian either due to political pressure, or confusion, or many other reasons, before coming out as bi once the bi movement gained momentum.

One such figure was Stephen Donaldson, aka Donny the Punk (born Robert Anthony Martin Jr, he adopted the pseudonym to avoid embarrassing his father with his gay antics and in honour of the first man he loved, who was called Donald). In 1966, inspired by friends of his then-boyfriend, Donny founded the Student Homophile League at Columbia University, where

he was studying. The group went on to become America's first student gay rights group and the first known LGBT students' movement. The chartering of the group caused quite a media storm and brought a lot of unfavourable attention to Columbia University and Donny. In the course of the two years after its inception and being chartered, Donny had fallen in love with a woman named Judith Jones and began identifying as bisexual.

In 1969, activist Brenda Howard organized the Christopher Street Liberation Day March a month after the riots at the Stonewall Inn and another a year later to mark the anniversary, and luckily for us, and the tradition stuck. So Brenda, a polymorous bisexual Jewish kinkster, who eventually married a man, became known as the Mother of Pride. She was a prolific organiser. Before the Christopher Street Liberation Day March, she was a founding chairperson of the Gay Activists Alliance. She was arrested multiple times throughout the '80s and '90s for protesting and organized many events for the leather community.

Ten years later, ABilly Jones-Hennin, another bisexual, was creating the DC-Baltimore Coalition of Black Gays (now known as the DC Coalition) before going on to found the first national African American gay activist group, The National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays. He was an active member of organizing the March on Washington for Gay and Lesbian Rights in 1979. ABilly played a vital role in fighting for the inclusion of African Americans in the early gay liberation movement and ensuring that the issues and concerns black Americans were included in the AIDS activism of the time.

There are so many more. In every chapter of every gay liberation group, in every lesbian feminist circle, in every gay students' alliance, in every protest, reading circle, and gay and lesbian support centre, we were there. We were raising funds, we were organizing new chapters and sitting on subcommittees,



we were getting arrested, we were manning hotlines, and we were bringing snacks to meetings. Our names may have gone unwritten or misidentified, but make no doubt about it: we were everywhere.

## The bi movement

At the beginning of the '70s, some of the bi people working their butts off for the gay and lesbian rights movement started to get a bit sick and tired of all the biphobia they were enduring while doing it. Some of it was overt and some of it was a subtle dismissal of multi-gender attracted people's experiences and issues, but all of it got under their skin.

At the beginning of the '70s, Donny the Punk had just been thrown out of the Navy for sleeping with men. He had entered the service after leaving the gay liberation movement due to the biphobia he'd encountered. 'As a bisexual no longer feeling comfortable in the gay liberation movement, I found myself in June, 1972, attending the annual Friends (Quakers) General conference in Ithaca, New York; its theme for the year was "Where Should Friends Be Pioneering Now?"' wrote Donny in a reflective essay which appears in *Bisexual Politics: Theories, Queries, and Visions* (Donaldson 1995, p.34). He found himself presenting a wildly impromptu workshop about bisexuality, which led to the creation of the Ithaca Statement on Bisexuality. 'The statement, which may have been the first public declaration of the bisexual movement, was printed in the Friends Journal (the FGC monthly), and the Advocate (thus announcing the bi consciousness to the gay world)' (p.34). Donny died of AIDS-related illnesses a year after the publication of the essay.

In 1972, the same year as the Ithaca Statement on Bisexuality

was published, the National Bisexual Liberation Group formed in New York, possibly the first bi-specific organization. They began circulating the first bisexual newsletter, *The Bisexual Expression*, to over 5500 subscribers across the US.

Bi groups and communities proliferated in the US in the '70s. The year 1975 saw the formation of the Bi Forum in the US, followed in 1976 by the San Francisco Bisexual Community Center opening its doors for the first time. It went on to become the longest surviving community centre for bi+ people and the epicentre of much of the bi movement's advancement. It counted among its founders and volunteers such titans of the bi movement including Brenda Howard and Lani Ka'ahumanu. In a history of the Bay Area Bi+ and Pan Network, Lani explains:

The groundbreaking, volunteer-run San Francisco Bisexual Center opened its doors on Hayes Street in 1976, offering support groups, counselling services, social events and a newsletter, and publicly aligned itself with the gay movement. In March 1983, as the reality of 'gay cancer' dawned, a small band of out bi activists within the lesbian and gay communities founded BiPOL, the first bisexual political action group in the USA. At the forefront of early sex-positive HIV / AIDS awareness and education programs, bi men and women were a driving force in what was to become the San Francisco Model. With the greater stigmatization of bisexuality and the increasing involvement of bi activists in HIV / AIDS prevention work, and bisexual men getting sick and dying the Center was drained of the volunteer energy necessary to keep it open, and shut its doors in 1984. (Ka'ahumanu and White 2002)

In order to help gain visibility for the group and to encourage others to join, Lani pulled possibly my favourite stunt in bi

history and ran for Vice President of the United States in 1984. The plan was hatched by another BiPOL founder Alan Rockway, who suggested Lani would make the most media-bait candidate because of her backstory as a heterosexual housewife who came out as gay and then later came out as bi. On the day of the Democratic National Convention (DNC), where Lani was hoping to address the convention and, more importantly, the television cameras, gay and lesbian Democrats had organized a march but told the bi group explicitly that they weren't welcome. However, the gay and lesbian Democrats forgot to provide any drinks, so attendants ended up flocking to BiPOLs pre-DNC rally, which was handing out ice water on that very hot day. 'It was important visibility. Even if it sounds completely silly, at the time there was nothing about bisexuality except the negative piece that we're spreading HIV/AIDS. If we're out there talking about more funding for AIDS, the Equal Rights Amendment or recognizing lesbian, gay and bisexual families, it addresses the issues,' Lani told KQED in 2020 (Voynovskaya 2020).

The 1980s were arguably the most important decade in LGBT-QIA+ history. 'The first bisexual organizations outside the United States developed in Europe in the 1980s. The London Bisexual Group was created by men involved in the anti-sexist men's movement in 1981. Bisexual organizations subsequently began in the Netherlands (1983), Scotland (1984), and West Germany (1984). The Netherlands group, the Dutch National Bi Network, is the oldest continuing bisexual organization in the world,' notes activist and writer Brett Genny Beemyn (2014, p.2) in a pamphlet on the bi+ movement. Although there were most certainly queer groups and groups that addressed the needs of bisexual people beyond America and the West before this, they just might not have made it into the West's official version of queer history.

This was also the decade when the AIDS crisis reached a

fever pitch, leading to a wave of hypervisibility for queer people. History and discourse around AIDS and the AIDS crisis often focuses on gay men, but all members of the queer community were deeply affected, as were several other vulnerable and minority groups, including sex workers and drug addicts. The bi community was both deeply affected by and heavily involved in action against the AIDS crisis. Alexei Guren, the bisexual founder of Gay Teen Task Force (now PrideLines) in Florida, co-founded the Health Crisis Network in 1983 in order to provide a response to the growing crises. Meanwhile, bi activists Dr David Lourea and Cynthia Slater were offering safer-sex workshops in bath houses and kink clubs in San Francisco. In 1985, Cynthia started the first Women's HIV/AIDS Information Switchboard. She died only four years later of AIDS-related illnesses.

Other bi activists were also heavily involved in the response. For example, Carol Leigh (aka the Scarlet Harlot) was a founding member of ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) in San Francisco, probably the most well-known response group of the AIDS crisis. It would be impossible to list them all here, partly because there were so many and partly because often these activists, their identity, or their work are erased from the pages of history. 'Not only is the bi community not reaping the positive results of all their efforts to the same levels as the gay community, but we are not even acknowledged for our work and commitment, and, quite unbelievably, actually criticized for not being there! Adding insult to injury, the community is simultaneously chastised for not fighting hard enough for bisexual recognition and visibility,' wites author Harrie Farrow (2016) for bi.org on the topic of bi people's part in the gay civil rights movement and the accusation that bi people 'rode on gay men and lesbians' coattails' without actually being a part of the fight.

The '80s was also the decade when the bi+ movement began to proliferate across Europe and the rest of the world. You might have noticed that this history of the bi+ movement has been pretty American-centric so far. There's a few key reasons for that: first, it seems that the first bi groups that did exist were American, as we've seen so far. Secondly is that the history of the LGBTQIA+ movement is pretty American-centric, either because Western culture is in general or because Americans are just better at documenting their history and making it available. I think it's probably a bit of both.

The first BiCon, Britain's oldest bi+ conference, was held in 1984 in London. The theme of the Conference was 'The Politics of Bisexuality', and the attendees tasked themselves with creating a bisexual manifesto. In true bi fashion, they couldn't settle on only one, so they produced two.

'The Second Politics of Bisexuality conference. Booked into London's new Lesbian and Gay Community Centre, the "lesbian sex wars" of the time meant that bisexual groups were banned from the Centre. (Their mere presence would oppress lesbians, apparently.) Other groups banned included anything to do with BDSM,' explains Ian Watters, one of BiCons co-founders, on BiCons website. The conference has found several different homes since then and is one of the world's longest running bi+ conventions.

## **BI THE WAY**

Since I was 12 I have been part of a niche music community, which has meant I have had friends much older than me. One such friend is an incredible whirlwind of a man who has been with the same man since the nineties.

## HOW LONG HAS BISEXUALITY BEEN AROUND?

Considering this and his particular brand of flamboyant, it isn't surprising people generally refer to him as gay.

As a teen, I had the sort of hero-worship crush on him where I just wanted to be around him and listen to his stories whenever I could. I don't remember the context at all, but I so clearly remember when I was about 15 him telling a story about his days in the old London Lesbian and Gay Centre. He so casually talked about how he and a woman he met there dated for a bit and then got shunned from coming back because they were bi.

My feelings in response were such a complex thing. A huge chunk of 'oh wow, he's like me' combined with the downer of 'people like me aren't wanted in the community'. It's been maybe 16 years since he told me this story and I still remember that emotional mix so viscerally.

*Emily January*

During the same time that BiCon was fighting with the Lesbian and Gay Centre to be able to use the venue, a slightly less literal (but not in every case) version of the fight to be allowed and recognized under the rainbow umbrella alongside gay men and lesbians was happening across the Western world. Many bi activists began agitating and advocating for the 'B' to be added to 'LG', but not all bi activists agreed. Some argued that bisexuals should strive to create our own separate community, whereas others felt that being part of the gay and lesbian community was a better or enough of a political vantage point. For example, in her essay 'Why You Must Say "and Bisexual"', Nishanga Bliss writes:

If you look at the Kinsey studies with an inclusive eye, you find

that 40% of the population is behaviorally bisexual. Bisexuals are working to organize these people to create a space for them to finally be safe, to come out in. Add that 40 to the 10% gay and lesbian population and you get 50% queer. If we don't rise up and take power then, when will we? The real fear, expressed in fear of bisexuals, is the fear that we queers have of our own power. (Bliss 1995, p.258)

However, in an essay published in the same anthology, *Bisexual Politics: Theories, Queries, and Visions*, Liz A. Highleyman argued that becoming part of the 'LesBiGay' community would erase bi+ specific issues. First she explains:

Many gay/lesbian-identified bisexuals are not seeking inclusion as outsiders, but have long been a part of the gay and lesbian movement (sometimes before they identified as bi, sometimes as closeted bis); to them, the failure of gay men and lesbians to include bisexuals feels like exclusion or expulsion. Many bisexuals seek to take advantage of the size and infra structure of the gay and lesbian movement which many bisexuals helped to build. Within the gay and lesbian movement, bisexual activism is often centered around getting the word 'bisexual' included in group names and statements of purpose. (Highleyman 1995, p.83)

Before arguing:

It seems to me that trying to build a LesBiGay (or LesBiGayTrans) movement is misguided. If we want our issues as bisexuals to be addressed, we should build an independent bisexual movement and work in coalition with others when our concerns coincide. (p.85)

But as the tides of history show, the 'gay and lesbian community' eventually expanded in mainstream consciousness to become the slightly more accurate 'LGBTQIA+ community'. This didn't happen by accident or even easily. Sometimes bi and trans activists found themselves protesting against the very gay and lesbian activists/organisers they had previously protested with! One such example comes from the 1996 Creating Change conference, run by the National Gay and Lesbian task force in America. Bi activist Lorriane Hutchins explains in 'Identities and Place':

Things came to a head at the 1996 conference when the number of discriminatory acts and remarks against bisexuals and transgender people reached such a peak that a Bi/Trans Action at the main plenary on Saturday morning was planned. Before the keynote speeches began, activists took to the stage recounting examples of biphobic and transphobic offenses committed against them during that weekend conference. They asked everyone in the room who identified as bi and/or transgender, and/or who was an ally, to stand up and be counted and to vow to confront biphobic and transphobic actions and attitudes in the future. Although the Bi/Trans Action was not included in the Gay and Lesbian Task Force press release following the conference, they did note that the first significant conversation between bisexual and transgender activists and members of the administration had occurred that weekend. (Hutchins 2019, p.42)

Another watershed moment came during the 1993 March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation, when Lani Ka'ahumanu gave her now infamous, 'It ain't over til the bisexual speaks' speech, as the first openly bi speaker at a March on Washington event. She opened with these words, which I think sum up the struggle for bi visibility beautifully:



I am a token, and a symbol. Today there is no difference. I am the token out bisexual asked to speak, and I am a symbol of how powerful the bisexual pride movement is and how far we have come.

I came here in 1979 for the March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights. I returned in 1987 for the March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights. I stand here today on the stage of the 1993 March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Equal Rights and Liberation. (Ka'ahumanu 1993)

Other changes were less dramatic, although required no less mental fortitude, effort, strength, and courage from the bi activists involved. In many cases it took years for organizations, groups, and events that no doubt had bi people in them from the beginning to change their names to reflect that work. And of course, not all have. For example, Australia's biggest Pride is still called 'Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras', despite, of course, being for many more people than just lesbians and gay men.

By the 1990s, bi groups and events were sprouting up all over the world and suddenly people started noticing. Of course, mainstream society confused them noticing that bi organizations were now a thing with bisexuality having suddenly popped into existence. In 1995 Newsweek published a cover story about bisexuality with the incredulous headline 'Not gay. Not straight. A new sexual identity emerges' (1995 was also the year this particular bisexual emerged from the womb. I like to think the two are related). It includes a lot of hilarious gems as well as some actually insightful quotes and statistics, but I particularly like this paragraph:

After a brief vogue during the sexual revolution...it moved back underground in the 1980s, pushed by fears of AIDS and by gay

identity politics. Nobody knows how many bisexuals there are in the country, or just how bisexuality should be defined. Its existence alone makes many people uncomfortable; it suggests that all sexual identity might be subject to change or expansion, and that we may not ever really be able to fulfill our partners or be fulfilled ourselves.

## **Pink on top**

As a tribute to the bi movement's achievements and to help gain visibility and a sense community, activist Michael Page create the bisexual flag in 1998. Michael was inspired by the so-called 'bi-angles': blue and pink triangles, with a purple overlay. The flag is a simple design of three stripes: pink, purple, and blue. The pink stripe represents same-gender attraction, the blue different-gender attraction and the purple in the middle represents the two states coming together as bisexuality, in a ratio of 2.1.2. The pink stripe is always at the top. The flag was unveiled by Michael on the now defunct bicafe.com, on the site's first anniversary. 'The key to understanding the symbolism in the Bi Pride Flag is to know that the purple pixels of color blend unnoticeably into both the pink and blue, just as in the "real world" where most bi people blend unnoticeably into both the gay/lesbian and straight communities,' Michael wrote in his announcement post (Baxter-Williams 2015).

Since then the flag has flourished all over the world as a rallying point, a symbol of hope and pride and community. It is free for everyone to use, and Michael specifically released it to the public without copyright or licensed for that reason. 'We wanted to let the larger world know that we were here, we're proud, and we demanded respect,' Wendy Curry, then president

of BiNet USA, told Biscuit in 2015. ‘The flag, unlike our pins and even t-shirts, was something we could rally behind as we demanded equality. It gave us a sense of power and strength, something that was lacking before’ (Baxter-Williams 2015).

In 2020, BiNet USA, the group responsible for bi-cafe.com, tried to claim that they had copyright of the flag, as Michael was a volunteer for them when he created it, and he was inspired by conversations with other volunteers. They planned on charging licensing fees for people and organizations to use the flag. This did not go down with the online bi community.

Michael Page also helped inspire Monica Helms, the creator of the trans flag. ‘He and I were talking and he said, “You know, the trans community could use a flag,”’ she told Gay City News in 2019 (Tracy 2019).

Since the ’90s, the global bisexual community has been plugging away at our fight for visibility, for recognition, for equal rights and opportunities. Along the way there have been some huge wins, and some big losses. ‘It was all about that, but also community-building. So signposting and trying to build the community, and also trying to make the community look as big as it is, because it appears so much smaller than it is,’ Libby Baxter-Williams told me when I ask what issues the bi community was focusing on in the early 2000s, when she first stumbled into activism. She continues:

It was the idea that the community had lasted, had already existed for a long time. It felt old, but also was really full of quite young people in their early twenties. That doesn’t really mesh, but that’s how it was. It felt like it had been around forever, which it had, because I date it to the beginning of the ’80s when BiCon first started. It felt so radical and so political just to be in a majority bi space.

In 2018, I worked with Libby and a group of other activists to get the first ever Bi Pride Float into the London Pride parade. At that point, Pride in London had been going for 47 years and had never had a bi float. The First Bi Pride Float initiative, as we so imaginatively named it, was in response to a cock up in 2016, when Pride in London forgot to have any bi groups even marching in the entire parade, and reacted pretty badly when activists pointed out that this wasn't okay. The float was an amazing experience and, touch wood, in the year since the now defunct activist group, the London Bi Pandas picked up the slack and had another bi float, but it was an important reminder that the bi community still has to fight for our visibility and inclusion.

In September of 2019, the charity Bi Pride UK hosted the UK's first ever Bi Pride (as the name might suggest). I was lucky enough to be able to attend and speak on the community panel about bi+ organizing. It was an amazing experience to spend the day surrounded by my people and too just how numerous we are; within the first hour of opening the doors, there was a queue looping around the hall and down the street!

So bi people have always been around, even when they didn't have a label for their feelings or desires, even when they were erased from public life by heteronormativity, or even when they were made invisible within the queer liberation. Now, the bi community is becoming more and more visible every day and finding new ways to connect and push back against the issues we face. Over the next few chapters, we'll explore what those issues are as well as what the bi community looks like now.