#BiVisibilityDay: Meet these bold activists fighting against invisi(bi)lity

Blog, Inclusion and Equality, Bisexual

To mark Bi Visibility Day 2021, we hear from seven bi activists from across Europe and Central Asia about debunking myths, their hopes for the future, and their place within LGBTI communities.

Rachael Moore: “Inclusion and application of intersectionality in everything I do is essential.”

Rachael is the co-founder of Rainbow Nation Brussels. She’s based in Belgium.

How did you get into bi activism?

I originally started my activism in youth empowerment and sexual health. I also volunteered in local kitchens for the homeless. Initially I just wanted to see change but I also knew I couldn't wait, so I decided to take matters into my own hands!

What's your current goal, as an activist?

My current goal(s) — yes of course I have multiple — as an activist are the same always. I want bisexuality to be visible but I also want to make sure that everything I do comes from an intersectional approach. So, yes for the visibility of bisexuality, but it's also multi-layered as I'm not just bisexual, I'm also a Black woman from a working class background who has a disability. SO for me the inclusion and application of intersectionality in everything I do is essential.

What is the biggest myth about bisexuality?

That we are all polyamorous. I think this is just a continuation of the "bisexual people are unable to choose and are therefore untrustworthy" myth. Bisexual people are super diverse. We are not all polyamorous. Some are monogamous. Some are asexual. Some can be polyamorous, like myself. But the most important thing is that people actively debunk/deconstruct these myths when confronted with them.

> At the end of the day the main questions are, 'do we really want an inclusive world?' and 'what are we willing to do to get it?'
>
> Rachael Moore

What can LG people personally do to make sure that bi people are fully included in the movement and society at large?

LG people need to actively think about who is in their communities. Bisexual people have always been present, this is nothing new. But LG people need to actively fight against the ongoing biphobia and bierasure that happens in their activities and events. They need to have those difficult conversations and counter any type of biphobic rhetoric.

If we want to move forward then they must also lead by example. They must also understand that if they truly want to be allies, they will have to allow bisexual communities access to their (physical) spaces and this may include them vacating the space in order for it to remain safe. At the end of the day the main questions are, 'do we really want an inclusive world?' and 'what are we willing to do to get it?'.

What's your message for Bi Visibility Day?

My message is to my beautiful bisexual community, be kind to yourself and to others. The world can sometimes seem like a hard place to be in, but know that there is strength in community, so please find yours!

Diana Arseneva: "Be courageous, let's not doubt ourselves and not internalise external harms that pain us."

Diana is the executive director of Labrys. She's based in Kyrgyzstan.

How did you get into bi activism?

In Kyrgyzstan, I was doing bi-activism rather than getting involved in the community. At some point, I realised that bisexual people are not part of the LGBT agenda in Kyrgyzstan again and again — by that time I had been working at Labrys for three years. Then, on Trans Visibility Day 2017, which was already celebrated by our organisation together with LGBT people and allies, I invited my colleagues to organise Bi Visibility Day. We held the first event dedicated to the visibility of bisexual people, in partnership with an LGBT bar, where we took our time to talk about the stereotypes and lived realities of bisexual people in Kyrgyzstan and beyond.

More broadly, I managed to get acquainted first with Russian bi-activists, and then, at one of the ILGA-Europe conferences with bi-people from different parts of the world — it was, and it is, wonderful!

What's your current goal, as an activist?

Today we are preparing for the fifth Bi Visibility Day for the Kyrgyz LGBT community, to talk about the needs, difficulties and expectations at the moment. We have found dozens of tools to speak: mini-performances, movie screenings with discussions, support groups for LB women — wherever there is an opportunity to fight prejudice and provide support to the community.

From the very beginning the goal has remained to be a part of the community for real, and not just ‘on paper’.

I think there is no need to count people in the LGBT community and movement as more or less important. But I also understand that there are those who are louder, and there are those who are quieter. What it is important is that time and other resources are distributed more equally and fairly and that everyone can speak without being disrespected.

> The most popular and frustrating myth is about convenience and privilege. This turns bisexual people into allies of the LGBT community rather than full members.
>
> Diana Arseneva

What is the biggest myth about bisexuality?

The most popular and frustrating myth is about convenience and privilege. This turns bisexual people into allies of the LGBT community rather than full members. But the worst thing is that it leads to the fact that the vulnerabilities of bisexual people are considered unimportant and frivolous. It leads to the same consequence of lesbophobia and homophobia — beating, problems with family and friends due to rejection and phobias, bullying at school or work, harrassement domestic violence, disgust and mistrust from partners, normalising disrespect, and neglect of identities, experiences and contributions of bisexual people to the LGBT movement.

What can LG people personally do to make sure that bi people are fully included in the LGBTI movement and society at large?

Listen and hear, respect and accept people who are not like you. Unfortunately, LGBT people are surrounded by monosexism no less than cis hetero people.

What’s your message for Bi Visibility Day?

Stay together, share useful information and interesting insights that will help you understand yourself more easily and be honest. Be courageous, let’s not doubt ourselves and not internalise external harms that pain us.

Paula Cerescu: “Reinforcing stereotypes is the barrier that stops us from living our best lives.”

Paula is the coordinator of the LGBT Community Programme at GENDERDOC-M. She's based in Moldova.

How did you get into bi activism?

Since the establishment of GENDERDOC-M Information Centre in 1998 in Moldova, I am the first staff member who openly identifies as bisexual. In a context where there are unfavorable conditions for having separate activist movements and instead a common LGBTQI+ discourse prevails, since Moldova is a very small country with unstable political situation and a huge discriminatory religious influence — one's existence as an openly bi+ person is an act of activism in itself.

I knew that I was bisexual when I was a teenager and I have been at peace with it from the beginning. The only problem I face in connection with my identity is the biphobia that our society is full of, mainly coming from a lack of sexual education and all of the shame arising from that. When I started to notice that and began volunteering for GENDERDOC-M, I got indirectly involved in bi activism. Later, when I began coordinating the LGBT Community Development Programme, I started to organise activities for Bi Visibility Day. In 2020, a bisexual flag was raised for the first time in the courtyard of the organisation.

What's your current goal, as an activist?

What I mainly focus on in my work as a bi activist and Programme Coordinator is community building and empowerment. This work should be done in parallel with advocacy focused on raising awareness in society. In Moldova, there's a lack of visibility of LGBTQI+ people as a whole, but bisexual, transgender and intersex people are some of the most invisible groups. The key needs we have right now, I believe, are a consolidation among bi+ people in order to feel a sense of unity, and a safe space to share our experiences within the larger community.

This is a tricky one, since there are so many misconceptions within this bigger group.

> Trust our experiences, so we don’t have to painstakingly justify ourselves and explain our existence.
>
> Paula Cerescu

What is the biggest myth about bisexuality?

I believe the most dangerous one is that bisexuality is “just a phase”, as it brings the most erasure of this part of our personalities. I’ve heard this too many times from both cisgender heterosexual people and LG people, as bisexual people are “covering their gayness” behind the bi label because that’s an easier way to come out. These misconceptions are harmful to bisexual people’s mental and physical health, as studies show. There’s no shame in rediscovering your sexuality, as it may be fluid and you don’t owe anyone explanations.

What can LG people personally do to make sure that bi people are fully included in the movement and society at large?

As it is our job to speak for ourselves, as bi+ people, the main thing I think we need is having a safe space within the community to deal with the struggles we face in society at large. Reinforcing stereotypes is the barrier that stops us from living our best lives, without the fear of encountering slut-shaming, erasure and neglect.

What’s your message for Bi Visibility Day?

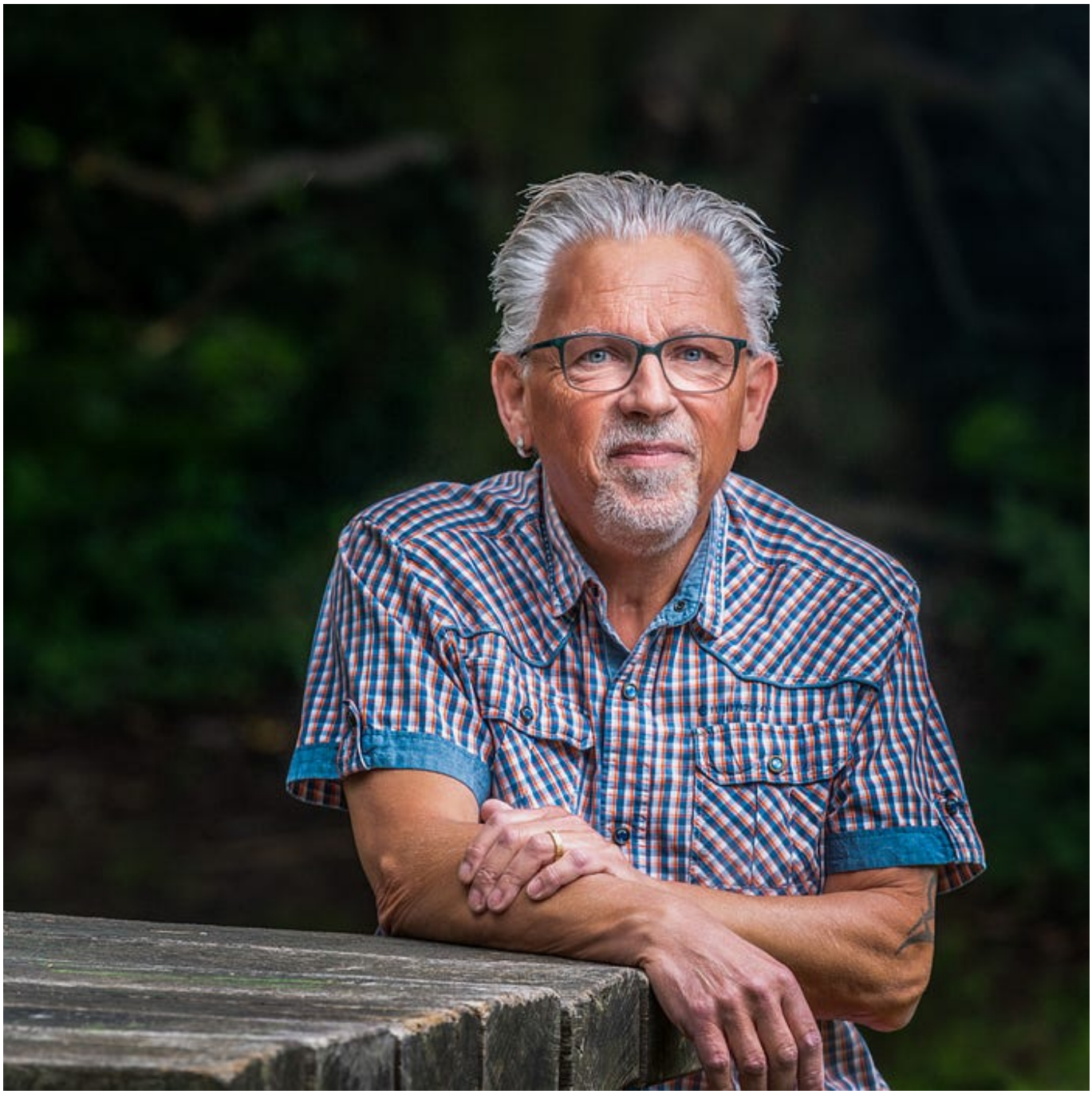
Listen to us, instead of reinforcing existing stereotypes.

Trust our experiences, so we don’t have to painstakingly justify ourselves and explain our existence.

Stop biphobic “jokes” and comments when they persist in casual discussions or public statements.

Include us in public discourses when you have the power to do that.

Leopold Lindelauff: “Show yourself; don’t be ashamed, you are not alone.”



Leopold is the coordinator of bi+ group ertussenin, chairperson of Regenbooghuis Limburg and member of çavaria bi+ working group. He's based in Belgium. © David Degelin

How did you get into bi activism?

When I lived in Maastricht, the Netherlands, there were no bi+ communities nearby so I would have to travel to the region of Amsterdam to meet other bisexuals. In that period I couldn't afford it moneywise and also because of my mental health I wasn't able to travel that far. After I met my current partner and wife Mia in 2012, my mental health boosted. Even before I moved from the Netherlands to Belgium, I became a regular volunteer in the Rainbowhouse in Hasselt. In 2013, I started *ertussenin* (inbetween) a bi+ community in the Rainbowhouse. Why? Because no one

else did, and we need bi+ communities.

What's your current goal, as an activist?

Bi+ people need recognition, they need to know that others are like them. That's exactly what I had missed in my life. After meeting and talking to a young bisexual woman, the first bisexual living person I ever met, I knew that I was worth living while being the person I am. And I also knew that someone needs to be present to show society that we DO exist. Because no one else did, also not in Belgium, I took the liberty to B that person.

What is the biggest myth about bisexuality?

There is more research needed about the (lack of) wellbeing of bi+ people. There are still too many people who don't feel well, who are thinking about suicide or even decide to step out of their lives. So more knowledge about that (lack of) wellbeing would be able to show the world, policy makers especially, that it's time to take action. We need to sensitise our society to our existence, so bi+ people can feel safe, accepted, appreciated and respected. When they do, their mental health will rise and they will be able and more willing to show themselves to the world.

During BCurious, on September 18 this year, I experienced again the importance for bi+ people to meet each other, to talk to one another, share experiences, doubts, questions and answers. People who visit this annual event, and other meeting moments for bi+ people, often arrive with a lot of doubts and questions. Most of the time, they leave with answers and less doubts, feeling a lot better and able to take the next steps necessary to explore their sexuality and to integrate it in their lives.

> Let's enjoy Bi Visibility Day all together! We all have more similarities than differences; let's bond.
>
> Leopold Lindelauff

What can LG people personally do to make sure that bi people are fully included in the movement and society at large?

When I first heard the stories from bi+ women who told me about not being accepted in a lesbian group or community, and when bi+ men told me the same about gay groups and communities, I was flabbergasted. How is it possible that people from a similar "subculture", who had to fight to gain their rights, are able to discriminate and exclude others? It can be that easy: accept, respect and appreciate us. Treat others as you would yourself. And be an ally for our community. We are all part of the same rainbow community.

What's your message for Bi Visibility Day?

It's still necessary to show the world that bi+ people DO exist. It's also still necessary that the world knows that it's not a phase but an independent sexual orientation. And that people are born that way, that it's not a choice they made. There are too many untrue stories out there about our community. We need role models all over the media, who are accepted like gay and lesbian people. Therefore Bi Visibility Day is important for the Bi+ community and also for society as a whole.

To members of our community I would say: "Show yourself, don't be ashamed, you are not alone, on the contrary we are many." To society I'd say: "Open your eyes and let go your bias. Talk with us and not about us. We are all human beings with our differences, everybody is unique. Accept, appreciate and respect us. Let us be allies for each other."

Let's enjoy Bi Visibility Day all together! We all have more similarities than differences; let's bond.

Cherine Mathot: “Love yourself enough to never hold back in showing who you are, and don’t be silenced into being someone you are not.”

Cherine is community manager for the investigative programme Tegenlicht broadcast on VPRO. She’s based in The Netherlands.

How did you get into bi activism?

Looking back, I’ve been an activist in my personal life since I came out as bi+. I noticed that people around me didn’t immediately understand what being bi+ means and wanted to place me in a box, either being a lesbian, not having met the ‘right’ man* yet, or just wanting the best of two worlds. It did not feel right to have to defend my feelings as being sincere, and when I was young it felt safer to go along with the story that I identified as a lesbian.

Later on, when my self-confidence grew, I dared to speak up and tell people I fall in love with a person. Also, when being in a relationship with a woman*, I no longer tolerate people telling me this means I am actually a lesbian. I believe my choices and lifestyle are my own and that the way I identify myself, is what others should respect as being the ‘truth’ of who I am.

My parents were not accepting when I came out to them. It led to a difficult period in my life. However, by being persistent in showing and telling them ‘this is me’, they slowly began to understand their own fears and prejudices. By explaining them what it means to be bi+ and showing I was not changing to ‘fit’ in their view of what they thought I should be, they eventually became accepting.

It took quite a few years, but now they are fully supportive. It made me realise and believe that people are able to change. During my work for COC the Netherlands, I also worked together with colleagues to raise more awareness for the bi+ community. There are still quite a few barriers to break down when it comes to fully accepting and

including bi+ people, even within the LGBTQIA+ community and society at large. Certainly, when someone is in a relationship with the opposite sex is considered as in a ‘straight’ relationship and not as fully committed to the LGBTQIA+ community.

> How a person chooses to live their life does not determine the way they identify themselves.
>
> Cherine Mathot

What’s your current goal, as an activist?

My current goal is to stay visible and to speak my truth more often. I believe it is very worthwhile to start conversations where I can share my experiences, to help people reflect upon their own biases/prejudices and, in a respectful way, help them learn about other perspectives. Also, I hope that by doing so, others are also encouraged and inspired to live their life in an authentic manner and to not be defined by anyone other than themselves. I really hope, in my idealistic mind, this will (even in small ways) contribute to a more ‘open’ way of thinking and communicating with each other, will be passed onto the next generation.

Lastly, as a bi+ person many times it felt as standing between two different worlds, and not truly belonging anywhere. I strongly feel that we as a LGBTQIA+ community can play a very important role in bringing those worlds closer together.

What is the biggest myth about bisexuality?

That the past or current relationship status of a bi+ person defines their identity. How a person chooses to live their life does not determine the way they identify themselves.

What can LG people personally do to make sure that bi people are fully included in the movement and society at large?

In my opinion, it is our responsibility as a LGBTIQIA+ community to not recreate the experiences and challenges we ourselves had in our process of becoming who we are. Instead, give a warm and loving welcome and safe place to bi+ people and connect with them based on our shared experiences and values. We’ve all been through challenging times in our lives and want to be fully seen and accepted for who we are, this is not different for bi+ people. We all need a home and people around us who make us feel loved.

Take time to reflect on your own biases/prejudices and really listen to how the person experiences their identity as bi+. Everyone experiences this differently, at different stages in their lives. So also realise that when a bi+ person is dating or in a relationship with a woman* and later on with a man*, this does not mean this person has changed in terms of their identity as bi+. Show respect to the way bi* people identify themselves, include and accept bi+ people for who they really are.

Lastly, I fully respect, understand and encourage everyone to connect and find safety with the ones or group you identify with. However, I also believe it would be such a great gesture that would really help to create more unity within the community if we were rooting and standing up for each other more. Fully recognising and accepting bi+ people in our community would not only make bi+ people feel safe, seen and included, but also help them to be more visible and have a place in society at large.

What’s your message for Bi Visibility Day?

I feel we, as a LGBTQIA+ community and as a society at large, need to give each people the space and safety to be or develop their authentic selves. We should not judge, but instead give our love and support along the way.

Also, the way people identify themselves can change throughout their lives, so let other people ‘be’.

For those who are also bi+: love yourself enough to never hold back showing who you are, and don’t be silenced into being someone you are not. Tell people your truth and be proud of it!

I believe people can change, so don’t lose hope and stay persistent and determined, not only to engage in meaningful conversations with those who do not yet understand but also to show your true colors. You matter, so take up the space you deserve. The world really does become a brighter place once you allow your own light to shine.

Verity Ritchie: “It’s past time to shake up our view of how the world works!”

Verity is a YouTuber and member of Kvartir collective. They are based in Slovenia.

How did you get into bi activism?

Bi activism for me came from feminism. I was an officer in the Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance at my university and a number of the girls were bi but had all felt alienated from the uni’s Gay and Lesbian Association. So I started a bi meetup group in my living room. We eventually moved to the university and allied with the GLA to become a more inclusive organisation.

I also met Fritz Klein when he came to talk at the school and he signed a copy of *The Bisexual Option* for me. The book helped me see bisexuality as something with radical and academic potential, with its own history to explore and unique relationship to the world.

What's your current goal, as an activist?

I still sometimes host bi meetups in person in my city — this has lessened since the pandemic began, it had been fortnightly before. Our goal is to help bi people feel like there's a space in which they can exist and feel normal. Our meetings vary from fun creative workshops to discussions about the politics and history of bisexuality. We also have a bi zine we publish once or twice a year, catering specifically to the local community.

I'm also a YouTuber, which isn't necessarily activism, but I often aim to create accessible content about bisexuality and help people understand the complexities of it as an orientation as well as construct a cohesive narrative about our history, which I think helps people feel validated.

> People seem to think bisexuals are half gay and trans people are double gay. Where does that leave me? No idea! But I'm okay with that!
>
> Verity

What is the biggest myth about bisexuality?

One major misconception is that we're sort of "gay-lite". People seem to think bisexuals are half gay and trans people are double gay. Where does that leave me? No idea! But I'm okay with that!

I think people are a lot quicker to frame everything within the gay/straight binary, when there are other axes to consider; bisexual/monosexual obviously being another. It's past time to shake up our view of how the world works!

What can LG people personally do to make sure that bi people are fully included in the movement and society at large?

Defend us to your biphobic friends. I've been in the room when gay men and lesbians joke about bisexuals as some pathetic "other" and it's a horrible experience. On the other hand, any time I see a gay man or lesbian stick up for bisexuals, it fills me with an unspeakable joy!

What's your message for Bi Visibility Day?

You are woven into the fabric of society and humanity. And don't forget that this day was originally about celebrating bisexuality rather than visibility! It doesn't have to be for others, it can be for you!

Stefan Šparavalo: "The LGBTI movement has to be more vocally supportive for bisexuals."

Stefan is fundraising coordinator for Da Se Zna! He's based in Serbia.

How did you get into bi activism?

I got engaged when I came out. This was my second coming out, as firstly I came out as a gay person. The latter coming out was harder, as I have encountered biphobia on 'both' sides — from straight people and from the queer community. It was a long road, but as I empowered myself, I decided to leverage that for the sake of the others.

What's your current goal, as an activist?

I do not have a goal carved in stone. I want to speak up as much as I can on the issues bi people are facing on various levels. Primarily, I want to wipe out biphobia and bi-erasure within our own community.

> Just go on an average dating app and state you are a bi — the backlash you will face is our sad reality.
>
> **Stefan Šparavalo**

What is the biggest myth about bisexuality?

Biggest one? That we do not exist at all, LOL!

What can LG people personally do to make sure that bi people are fully included in the movement and society at large?

Well, they can stop questioning our identities in the first place so we don't feel forced to explain how EXACTLY we realised we are bi, but to simply come as we are. The movement has to be more vocally supportive of bisexuals. Just go on an average dating app and state you are a bi — the backlash you will often face is our sad reality.

What's your message for Bi Visibility Day?

If you want to come out as a bi, I encourage you to do it first and foremost within your safest spaces. Go step by step. And if you are not ready, it is okay.