



B-Girl

Activist Robyn Ochs' new book gives voice to bisexual men

For more than three decades, Robyn Ochs has been on a mission to spotlight the B in LGBT.

Certainly the increased visibility of bisexuals, like gay, lesbian and trans folks, has led to greater acceptance than in the early '80s when Ochs launched the Boston Bisexual Women's Network, now the longest-running such group in the world, and for which Ochs edits the newsletter *Biwomen Quarterly* from her Jamaica Plain home.

But as strides continue to be made, misconceptions about bisexuality endure.

"I believe bisexual men remain the most misunderstood. Bi women are trivialized and sexualized; it's a function of not taking women seriously. But many still deny that bisexual men even exist. And bi men are seen as more threatening," says Ochs.

Ochs and H. Sharif Williams teamed to edit the new anthology *Recognize*:

The Voices of Bisexual Men, recently published by the Bisexual Resource Center, founded in Boston in 1985 by a group of bi activists and now one of the oldest national bi-specific organizations. The book follows up on Ochs' last work, the anthology *Getting Bi: Voices of Bisexuals Around the World*, in which bisexual men and women from 42 countries told their stories. In the new volume, men from all walks of life and all corners of the globe

share their experiences with identifying as bisexual at some point in their lives. Since Ochs and Williams aim to educate, *Recognize* also includes a list of references and resources.

But it's the personal stories, essays and poetry that make the book so compelling. And for Ochs, that's the point.

"I'm a firm believer in the power of telling our stories. Social change comes about through legislative action but also by changing hearts and minds," says Ochs, whose longtime activism makes her a frequent speaker on college campuses. She also serves on the board of directors of MassEquality and the Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Youth. "My work is based on the idea that human beings are intersectional. Each of us has multiple identities: age, geographic location, gender identity, race, and more, with each of our identities affecting how we experience the others. Therefore, multiple stories are required to help us begin to understand any given identity."

A priority from the start was that the widest possible range of individuals would be represented in the book, says Ochs, noting that there are contributions from men ages 20 to 77, many of them men of color, and including those who identify as queer or trans.

Ochs has identified as bi privately since 1976 and publicly since 1982. On May 17, 2004, the first day it was legal to do so, she married Peg Preble. There's no contradiction or confusion there for Ochs, who sees sexuality on a continuum



Co-authors Robyn Ochs and H. Sharif Williams PHOTO EllynRuthstrom

that, for some people, changes throughout one’s lifetime. Bisexuals are routinely sexualized — there’s the stigma that they are more sexual than their straight or gay counterparts, she says. “I still only have one body and 24 hours in my day. I’ve chosen to be in a monogamous relationship. Of course, some bisexuals are polyamorous, as are some gays, lesbians and straight people,” she says.

The image of the closeted bisexual man who live a double life — reinforced by many politicians, for instance — provokes more sympathy than judgement from Ochs. “The fact is that we live in a heterosexist culture and there are enormous penalties for embracing same-gender

attraction. So people cope in different ways,” she says.

“I feel sympathetic toward those who are afraid. There are real reasons to be afraid just as there are great reasons to come out. The reality is that coming out is more dangerous for some than for others ... [People] can lose their families, their jobs, their communities — these are high costs.”

That’s the reason that *Recognize* is important and why Ochs promotes the book on her speaking engagements and in local and national media.

“My hope is that books like this will help people find much needed reflections of their own experiences and ultimately empower them to feel less alone,” says Ochs. [x]



RECEIVE 10% OFF YOUR POST-NUPTIAL BRUNCH*

Contact our Wedding Specialist

617.806.4125 | catering.cambridge@sonesta.com



ROYAL SONESTA
BOSTON

40 Edwin Land Boulevard | Cambridge, MA, 02142
617.806.4200 | Sonesta.com/Boston

* Excludes ArtBar and restaurant dante.