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[Robyn Ochs: Als Bi Begrijp ik Mezelf](#) Zij aan Zij Magazine, the Netherlands, November 2009

ENGLISH TRANSLATION Robyn Ochs "Bisexuality is about how I understand myself"

Robyn Ochs (51) is a pithy, always busy lady. This American bi-activist, teacher, speaker and author presented recently in Amsterdam the second edition of her book [Getting Bi: Voices of Bisexuals Around the World](#). In this book mainly other bisexuals, besides Robyn, tell their stories. Because according to Robyn there is great power in sharing our stories.

Tell us something more about Getting Bi. What inspired you to create such a book in the first place?

I am a firm believer in the power of storytelling. Sharing our stories with others is the key to understanding other people – and ourselves. My co-editor Sarah Rowley and I invited people to talk about their lives. Our goal was to get the broadest representation possible in terms of nationality, age, class, religion, experience and perspective. This was not to be an academic book, but rather a book by a wide variety of people for a wide variety of people. We did our best to spread the word – easier to do in some parts of the world than in others – and we were delighted when essays and poems began to come in. The new second edition of Getting Bi has authors from 42 different countries.

That sounds pretty broad indeed. But does there still need to be more understanding about bisexuality these days?

There is still a great deal of misunderstanding about bisexuality. People think that we don't exist, that we can't commit to a relationship, that we're not to be trusted. What can we do? Speak up, challenge people who make sweeping generalizations to be more thoughtful, tell our stories. Ask people to treat others with the same respect with which they would like to be treated.

In the book you state that 'bisexuality' can have various meanings for people. What does it mean to you personally? Many people think primarily about sex when they hear about bisexuality. They think that bisexuals are people who have sex with men and women. But my definition is somewhat different. I call myself bisexual because I acknowledge that I have the potential to be attracted – romantically and/or sexually – to people of more than one sex, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree. And that I can, but that I don't have to. I identified as bisexual for five years before ever having sexual experience with another woman. How did I know? I knew. When you are attracted to someone, you know. And now I've been with Peg for 13 years and have not been with a man in almost 20 years. But I see myself as bisexual now as I ever was. My bisexuality is not about current behavior, it's about how I understand myself.

"I will always need to speak my truth"

Can you, based on the book, draw conclusions about differences between different countries and cultures when it comes to being bi?

There are many differences between cultures that are a result of different understandings of sexuality, of gender roles, of the nature and purpose of relationships (e.g., arranged marriages v. marriages based on love), and on legal and cultural rules surrounding homosexuality. Some of these differences are apparent in the book. But this is a book of individual perspectives, and I would hesitate to draw sweeping conclusions. I prefer to let the writers and readers work that out between themselves.

In the United States people in many states still fight for the so-called marriage equality, so that people of the same sex can get married. I understand that you and Peg were one of the first female couples to do so?

Indeed. Peg and I had the good fortune to live in the first US state to obtain marriage equality. We were married on May 17, 2004, on the first hour of the first day it was possible to do so. We were the first couple married in Brookline, Massachusetts, and one of the first couples legally married in the United States. That must have been a very special experience! It sure was! The first time I ever met a married same-sex couple was in Rotterdam in 2001 for an international conference on bisexuality. They were friends of a friend. We had dinner together, and they shared their wedding photos. I remember being filled with emotion, and wanting to pinch them to make sure they were real! The unimaginable had happened. Something changed within me that evening.

When it became legal to marry in Massachusetts, I wanted to get married with my life partner as a way to provide us with legal protection and also as a powerful political and symbolic statement. But it turned out to be so much more than that. What we experienced that day was unexpected. Strangers waved to us from cars and public buses. A complete stranger ran up to us and gave us a bouquet of flowers. So many of our heterosexual neighbors stopped by to offer their congratulations. A street artist gave us a painting, saying "Congratulations. Let this be your first wedding gift." There was so much love, so much support. And we realized that we had never expected to feel that. And it felt great!

One of your messages you promote is that sexuality exists on a continuum. Do you think that people who are used to thinking in binaries – like hetero/homo – are ready for such a message?

To me, if something is true, it doesn't matter if the world is ready for it. I still need to speak my truth. As anthropologist Margaret Mead said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." And I don't expect to reach the entire world. Rather, I reach as many people as I am able, given the resources available to me. I spend much of my time working with university and secondary school students, and with community groups. And there I feel that I do make a difference. And I imagine that people who read Getting Bi or who come to one of my programs will have conversations with their friends and relatives, starting a chain reaction that will impact many people. That's what I am doing this all for. I really love my work.

You can order *Getting Bi* on www.biresource.net.

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