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ARTS & LITERATURE

FILM & TV

PEOPLE

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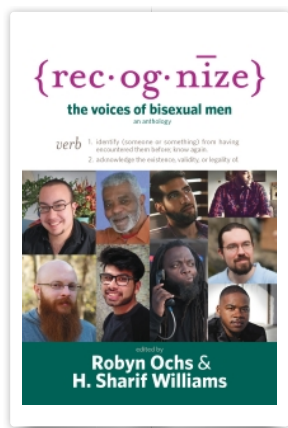
YOU ARE AT: Home » Arts & Literature » A Review of Recognize: The Voices of Bisexual Men

A Review of Recognize: The Voices of Bisexual Men

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BY AJ. WALKLEY

ARTS & LITERATURE



For many in society at-large, and the LGBT+ community as well, the idea of the male bisexual remains a myth. Despite a plethora of evidence to the contrary in the form of scientific studies and reports, as well as interviews and some (select) media portrayals, the misconception that a man who claims to be bisexual is either gay, straight or confused persists. While female bisexuals often encounter similar stigma, it remains the case that it is the bisexual man who has to proclaim and defend his bisexuality most of all. One of the best ways to counter this and help dispel these ideas is through personal storytelling. This is true for the LGT+ components of the LGBT+ community as well – once you know that you know a bisexual man, it becomes much harder to deny the existence of bisexual men, making REC*OG*NIZE: The Voices of Bisexual Men – an Anthology, edited by Robyn Ochs and H. Sharif Williams (Dr. Herukhuti), all the more important.

The stories shared in REC*OG*NIZE have been separated by topic:

- ✓ Identity
- ✓ Challenging Labels
- ✓ Liminality
- ✓ Institutions
- ✓ Anger, Angst and Critique
- ✓ Bodies and Embodiment
- ✓ Religion and Spirituality
- ✓ Traveling
- ✓ Relationships

All told, over 60 writers and artists are given a stage in this collection, and that stage is beautifully diverse. The nationalities, ethnicities, religions, gender identities and experiences given voice here are as varied as each author – furthering the truth that everyone's bisexuality is unique to the individual, boxes and labels are for cereal, and the sexual spectrum is as broad as humanity is multiplied. Once humanity as a whole can understand that spectrum, recognition and acceptance can be had.

In the preface, Williams lays out the importance of recognition, “an unfolding and continuous process that requires us to remember the parts of ourselves that we have lost, forgotten or had silenced.” To be recognized, we must let our voices and our histories be heard. REC*OG*NIZE certainly accomplishes just that.

I found myself highlighting aspects of nearly every story, essay, poem, song or combination thereof included in this anthology, either recognizing similar stories to my own or friends' lives; calls to action for the bisexual community and greater society; and times when I empathized with the author's experience, even if it was one I've never had or never could have based on my own worldly perspective. A few excerpts that spoke to me as a fellow bisexual, and simply a fellow human, included the following:

- ✓ “I look with jealousy at the lesbian couple down our block. They're accepted as another family in the area,

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congratulated and celebrated during Pride week. They are something solid, and I am not.” – Anonymous, “i am”

- ✓ “Once I began to seek self-affirming experiences, I no longer needed society’s permission to be myself.” – Rodney McGruder Brown, “say it loud, i’m a black bisexual male and i’m proud”
- ✓ “And why shouldn’t there be as many sexualities, as many ways to love, as there are humans, or stars in the sky?” – Ron J. Suresha, “genderfuzz, or, how i learned to stop worrying and love bisexuality”
- ✓ “It’s essential to know we’re not alone.” – Gregory Linden Smith, “why it matters”
- ✓ “Whether we admit it or not, hate it or not, we label ourselves in order to build bridges. But the bricks from which bridges are made can also be used to construct walls.” – Ian Wilson, “labels”
- ✓ “We would most likely be perceived as straight walking down the road, but that’s a matter of perception. Sexuality is not always what it appears to be.” – Justin Adkins, “wonder”
- ✓ “Just as I know many straight and gay people are bewildered by the way I desire all genders, I have trouble understanding why anyone would use gender as a criterion to reject pleasure and intimacy with an interesting person.” – Silenus Zarkoff, “my kind of bi”

I will never be a black man, or a trans* man, or a cis man; I will never know what it feels like to be a religious man, a holy book’s messages seeming to counter my very soul; I will never live in Australia, Chile, India or Spain as a bisexual man; I will never know what it means to be a bisexual man in the 1980s amidst the AIDS scare at its height. But I do know what it means to be a bisexual person, and with that similarity alone, I connected with every single voice in this anthology. In that way I know just how wonderful a portrayal of so many from the bisexual community this collection is, and how important that it is a published part of our community’s canon. This book is essential for those looking for a life experience similar to their own, just the same as it is essential for those who still, after all these years, maintain a question about the existence of male bisexuality.

As a bisexual activist myself, and a white, cisgender female one at that, I will cling to this beautiful collection of work moving forward, helping give voice and understanding to bisexual men in all of their varied forms in my own talks. So often I find bi* men in such spaces who are looking for guidance, or simply assurance that they are not alone. I have struggled in these situations to provide advice when I cannot relate personally to their experience; now, however, my fellow activists and I have a thoroughly impressive anthology to recommend them and to excerpt from.

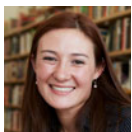
As Ochs writes in “understanding biphobia” at the end of the anthology, “Due to bisexual invisibility and the paucity of bisexual role models or bisexual community, most bisexuals develop and maintain our bisexual identities in isolation.” However, with works like this one, and more bisexuals raising their voices to be counted, it is my hope and the hope of many in the community that those in isolation will grow fewer and fewer as we stand up in greater numbers. Only the tip of the bisexual iceberg has emerged and there are so many more beautiful lives beneath, waiting to surface.

*REC*OG*NIZE: The Voices of Bisexual Men – an Anthology* should be on everyone’s to-read list.

SHARE.



ABOUT AUTHOR



A.J. WALKLEY



A.J. Walkley earned a B.A. in literature from Dickinson College in 2007 before heading into the U.S. Peace Corps as a health volunteer in Malawi, Africa. Upon her return to the States, she became a United Nations correspondent and freelance writer working out of New York City. Walkley has three novels to her name: *Choice* (2009), *Queer Greer* (2012) and *Vuto* (2013). She currently resides in Phoenix, Arizona and is working on a novel based on the life of a Texas inmate she believes to be wrongfully incarcerated.

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