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Breaking down the myths about male bisexuality

BY STEVE LEE



H. Sharif Williams and Robyn Ochs

The Bisexual Resource Center and most bisexual people would agree that there is a great deal of misinformation about bisexual people, and particularly about bisexual men. This is due, in part, to a shortage of opportunities to hear bisexual people speak for themselves.

Now a new book, co-edited by Robyn Ochs and H. Sharif Williams, makes a significant contribution to the literature available about and by bisexual men and expands our understanding of how bisexuality is lived by men across race, class, gender, age and nationality.

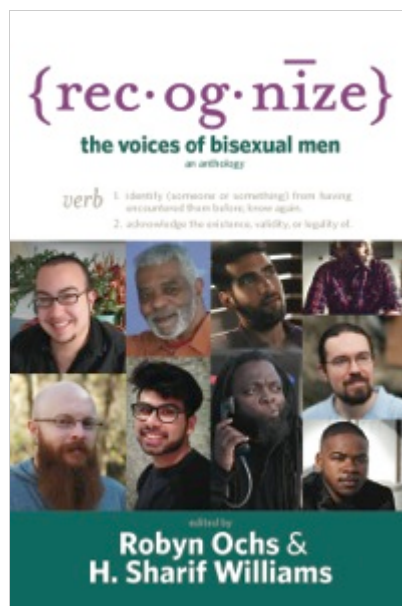
Recognize – The Voices of Bisexual Men: an anthology is a collection of short fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, personal narratives, critical essays and visual art that features the voices and stories of 61 cisgender and transgender bisexual, pansexual, polysexual and fluid men from the United States, Canada, Chile, India, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Ranging in age from 20 to 77, the writers grapple with issues including coming out, finding support and/or community, love and relationships, the interactions between their sexual identities and other identities.

Co-editor Robyn Ochs is an educator and activist who identifies as bisexual. She crisscrosses the United States speaking at colleges and universities, to youth and community groups, to religious and workplace audiences and repeatedly bears witness to the pain experienced by bisexual people and their loved ones as a result of the staggering level of ignorance and misinformation about bisexuality. Ochs is a strong believer in the power of sharing our stories, “There is affirmation in

the telling, and by reading the stories of others we learn that there is nothing wrong with us and that we are not alone,” states Ochs. “Finding community – even if it is found within the pages of a book – is both healing and empowering.”

Co-editor H. Sharif Williams (Dr. Herukhuti) is an activist, researcher and artist and founder of the Center for Culture, Sexuality and Spirituality. He became a sex educator and researcher in order to contribute to the understanding of marginalized and oppressed people and to give voice to aspects of sex and sexuality that are usually unspoken. Williams believes this is an important book for lesbians, gays and heterosexuals because it provides them with examples of bisexual male personhood from the perspective of bisexual men. “If you want to know what it means to be a bisexual man, what bisexual men look like, how bisexual men experience love and life, then let them tell you through the pages of this anthology in their own voices,” affirms Williams. “I hope the anthology will be a source of healing and transformation for other bisexual men, that it touches those tender places within each of us and calls us to step into the power of embracing ourselves in all our complexities.”

The 300-page anthology includes personal non-fiction essays, fiction, photographic images, poetry and resources relevant to bi men. The stories shared have all been separated by topic: identity; challenging labels; liminality; institutions; angst, anger and critique; bodies and embodiment; religion and spirituality; traveling and relationships.



San Diego LGBT Weekly reached out to Ochs and Williams to understand what motivated them to put this book together. Ochs sees the book as a much needed resource for an area that suffers from a paucity of reference material. “There are not nearly enough resources available,” confirmed Ochs. “People with identities that are non-binary or non-monosexual are simply not seen enough, and men are even more underrepresented, even among bisexuals.”

“The book is for men of all ages beginning to question their sexualities or opening themselves up to new sexual possibilities in their lives,” said Ochs. “It is for educators of sex and sexuality to use with their students; for bi folks who want a resource to share with their friends and loved ones; and for bi men who want to see more diverse examples of their lives.”

Both Ochs and Williams hope that the book fulfills a wide range of needs, in a way that is non-binary and inclusive of *all* men who identify as neither gay nor straight.

Understanding of bisexuality starts with the acknowledgement that it exists and that male bisexuals are living and loving in this world. “Many of the leading, prominent texts on bisexual identity have been authored or edited by bisexual women and fewer than half of the voices within existing all-gender anthologies are those of men,” said Williams. “This need is perhaps even more urgent for non-binary or non-monosexual men of color. Many gay men of African descent have been moved by anthologies like *In the Life* and *Brother to Brother* but no similar anthology has spoken to the needs of bi men of color.”

Ochs believes that non-binary or non-monosexual men are a population under stress. “The negative stereotypes facing this population are legion, and indeed the very fact of their existence is challenged,” said Ochs. “This book will serve for some as a life preserver, and for others as a

survival guide.”

Reviewing *Recognize* for *Bi Magazine*, author A.J. Walkley wrote, “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.”

Recognize – The Voices of Bisexual Men: an anthology can be ordered online from the Bisexual Resource Center (biresource.net/recognize_bimensbook.shtml) and Amazon as well as through your local bookstore.

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