

Jamaica Plain's Robyn Ochs Recognized for Bisexual Advocacy

By David Ertischek | May 24, 2017



Marilyn Humphries

Jamaica Plain's Robyn Ochs at the June 25, 2016, North Shore Pride Parade and Festival in Salem, Mass.

A Jamaica Plain resident and activist has recently received several national media recognitions for her work on behalf of bisexuals.



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Robyn Ochs was named one of Teen Vogue's "9 Bisexual Women Who Are Making History." (<http://www.teenvogue.com/gallery/bisexual-women-making-history>). Advocate included her in its "50 States, 50 Heroes" (<http://www.advocate.com/advocate50/2017/5/10/50-states-50-heroes>) lineup. And BuzzFeed also named her one of its "13 incredible bisexual people you need to follow on Instagram." (<https://www.buzzfeed.com/caitlinjinks/bisexual-people-you-need-to-follow>)

Jamaica Plain News asked Ochs to discuss the work that has led to these honors. Her answers are below:

How does it feel to be honored and recognized by Teen Vogue for your work?

It feels great, especially coming from a magazine like Teen Vogue, which has recently gone in very exciting directions and has become a significant voice. I've been a bi and LGBTQ+ activist for about 35 years now, and it's been nearly impossible to get any representation of bisexuality that is not laden with stereotypes. But there's recently been some improved media attention, and this piece -- which featured an interesting cross-section of politicians, community activists, musicians and an Olympic athlete -- is a prime example of that.

Was there a point in your life when you decided you wanted to be a voice for bisexuals? If so, when and why?

I came out as bisexual 40 years ago. I came out in isolation, with no role models, and it was really, really hard. In fact, it took me five years to summon the courage and self-confidence to come out to other people. And it's still challenging to identify publicly as bi. Truth is, I am much more comfortable telling people I'm married to a woman than saying that I identify as bisexual. And that needs to change. I do this work in self defense and also to make sure that other people have a better experience than I had.

Teen Vogue says your definition of bisexuality, called the "Ochs standard," is among the most commonly cited today. What is the Ochs standard?

I call myself bisexual because I acknowledge in myself the potential to be attracted -- romantically and/or sexually -- to people of more than one sex and/or gender -- not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree.

Have you met any of the other eight women who were recognized by Teen Vogue?

I met Governor Kate Brown at the first LGBT reception at the White House back in 2009, and the amazing Andrea Jenkins (from Minneapolis) and I have met several times through our activism. Like me, she's a long-time, dedicated grassroots activist, and I'm excited to see her work acknowledged.

I'm excited at the direction in which we are heading. More and more folks are identifying as bi+, more of us are publicly embracing our identities, and the number of positive representations of non-binary sexualities in the media, among politicians, celebrities, activists and other public figures in the media, and in real life, is starting to rise.

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