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The spectrum of sexuality: Going beyond gay and straight

4–5 minutes

Robyn Ochs, author and bisexual activist, explained the spectrum of sexuality to Auburn students.

Ochs, author of "Getting Bi: Voices of Bisexuals Around the World," said sexual orientation is a spectrum of different identities -- not just straight or gay.

She also said she hopes different gender identities and sexual orientations will become so accepted that they won't even merit discussing.

"I want sexual orientation to change in the same way where it becomes boring and not a big deal, like being left-handed," Ochs said. "I want to get to where sexual orientation is not seen as toxic or dangerous or a threat to the family, just as something that you are."

Ochs spoke on Oct. 9 in Lowder Hall to a group of students.

The activist said in her 38 years of being "out," American society and even LBGT culture has radically changed.

"When I first came out... there was a really strong, rigid code of behavior, and that has changed so much," Ochs said. "I like that."

Ochs said she likes watching the spread of different labels and ways of thinking about sexuality that break from the mold of gay or

straight.

"People are a lot more comfortable with the idea of identity being not as fixed," Ochs said.

She applauded the growing diversity of ideas within the LBGT community and increasing acceptance of LBGT issues within the nation at large.

"When I woke up Monday morning and got on a plane to Detroit, this country had marriage equality in 19 states," Ochs said. "When I got off the plane two hours later, it was legal in 24."

Brandy Smith, diversity coordinator of Student Counseling Services, said she attended the talk to see how it could help improve diversity on campus.

"I think it helps by even having the talk on campus because with regards to sexual orientation and gender identity, we still have a ways to go on our campus," Smith said. "It will help people be more aware."

Megan Reynolds, senior in French, said the event was important to her as a bisexual and member of Spectrum, Auburn's LBGT rights group.

"(Bisexuality) is an identity that's erased more than lesbian and gay identities," Reynolds said. "Gay people and lesbian people are often not accepted, but (their identities) are not words that people misunderstand in the same way people misunderstand bisexuality."

Reynolds said she has encountered people who confuse bisexuality, sexual attraction to men and women, with polyamory. Polyamory is the practice of having multiple sexual partners, all of which consent to the arrangement.

"When I came out to my mother, who's incredibly tolerant and incredibly understanding, she could not process the idea of being

bisexual as something that was separate from a polyamorous identity," Reynolds said. "Since then I've experienced it other times, but that was the most striking because it came from a person who had otherwise been so understanding."

Ochs is a bisexual who celebrated Massachusetts's legalization of gay marriage by marrying her wife within an hour of the law taking effect.

Ochs ended her speech by asking audience members to help spread awareness and understanding of LGBT issues.

"I want to call on every LGBT person, as well as all the straight people in this room to make that happen," Ochs said. "I really want all of us to come together."

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