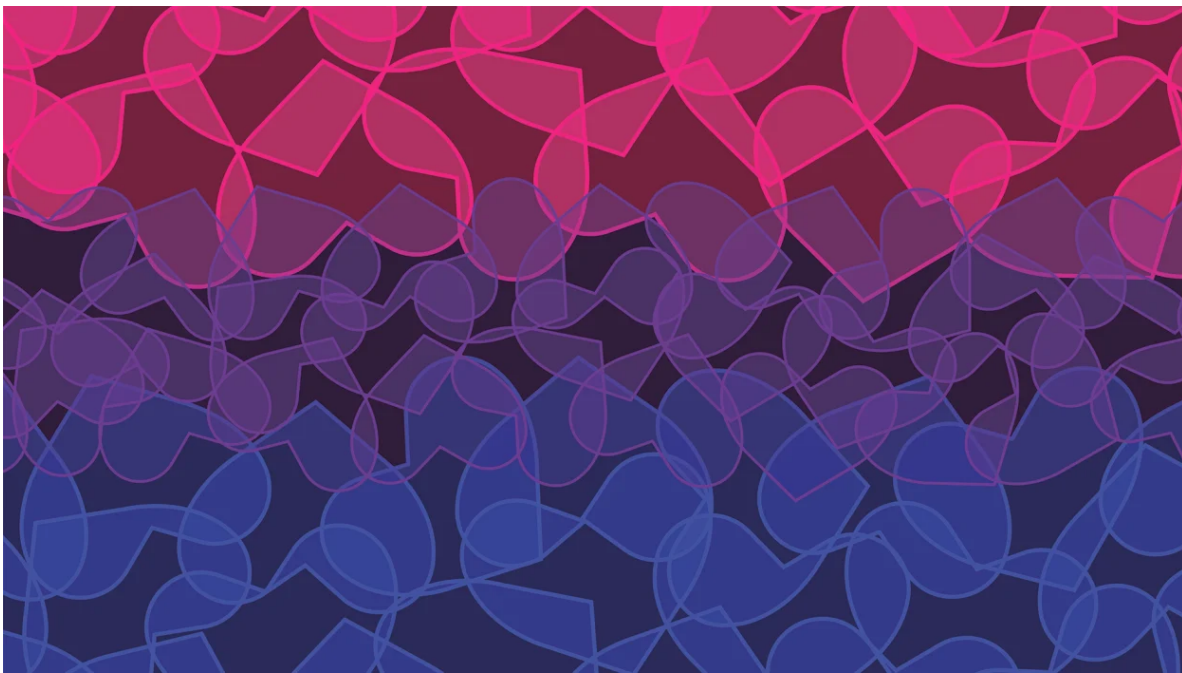


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I'm a bisexual woman and I don't know how to date non-queer men

Lois Shearing

8–10 minutes



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Dating non-queer men as a queer woman can feel like stepping onto a dancefloor without knowing the routine.

In the same way there isn't a social script for how women date women (hence [the useless lesbian meme](#)), there also isn't any guidance for how multi-gender attracted (bi+) women can date men in a way that honours our queerness.

That's not because bi+ women dating men are less queer than

those who aren't/don't, but because it can be more difficult to navigate patriarchal gender roles and heteronormative relationship ideals within different-gender relationships. Debora Hayes, a bi person who presents as a woman, tells me, "Gender roles are very bothersome in relationships with cis hetero men. I feel pigeonholed and limited as a person."

Because of this, some bi+ women have chosen to actively exclude non-queer (anyone who is straight, cis, and [allosexual](#), also known as allocishet) men from their dating pool, and turned to bi4bi (only dating other bi people) or bi4queer (only dating other queer people) dating styles. Emily Metcalfe, who identifies as bi and demisexual, finds that non-queer people are unable to understand her queer activism, which can make dating difficult. Now, she mainly chooses to date within the community. "I find I'm less likely to have to deal with stereotypes and generally find the people I'm interested in from within our community have a better understanding and use of consent language," she says.

Bisexual activist, author, and educator Robyn Ochs suggests that [bi feminism](#) may offer a starting point for navigating relationships as a bi+ woman. It provides a framework for navigating biphobia through a feminist lens. Unlike [lesbian feminism](#), which argues that women should forgo relationships with men entirely in order to bypass the patriarchy and find liberation in loving other women, bi feminism proposes holding men to the same — or higher — standards as those we have for our female partners.

It puts forward the idea that women decenter the gender of one's partner and focuses on autonomy. "I made a personal commitment to hold men and women to the same standards in relationships. [...] I decided that I would not settle for less from men, while

realizing that it means that I may be categorically eliminating most men as potential partners. So be it," writes Ochs.

Bi feminism is also about holding ourselves to the same standards in relationships, regardless of our partner's gender. Of course, the roles we play and the different aspects of personality that we bring to a relationship can change from person to person (you might find doing more organisation for dates if this is something your partner struggles with, for example), but bi feminism encourages examining whether these aspects of ourselves are being influenced by patriarchal ideals rather than our own wants and desires.

This can be difficult in practice, especially if your partner is less enthusiastic. It can involve a lot of false starts, weeding out red flags, and most importantly, requires you to have a strong sense of self outside of any relationship.

Mashable After Dark

Hannah, a bisexual woman, who's mostly had relationships with men, has experienced this difficulty in dating. "I'm a feminist and always express my views openly, I have definitely been in contact with some men who hated that on Tinder, but I got pretty good at detecting those attitudes and throwing those men away," she says. "I'm currently in a four-year monogamous relationship with a cis het man and he definitely respects me and doesn't expect me to fulfil some traditional gender role."

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Despite this, queer women who date men — but bi women in

particular — are often accused of 'going back to men' by dating them, regardless of our dating history. The logic here is easy to follow — we are raised in a (cis)heteronormative society that bombards us with messages from birth that heterosexuality is the only valid option, and that cis men's pleasure is the essence of all sexual and romantic relationships. Therefore, dating men after having dated other genders is seen as defaulting to the norm. On top of this, bisexuality is still seen a phase which we will grow out of when we eventually '[pick a side](#).' (The idea of 'going back to men' also assumes that all bi+ women are cis, ignoring the experiences of bi+ trans women.)

Many of us internalise this and may over-empathise our attraction to men without realising it. [Compulsory heterosexuality](#) also plays a role in our dating life — we may settle for men in order to please our families, fit in, or just to silence that nagging internal feeling that there's something wrong with us for being attracted to women. To combat this, bi feminism is also part of a liberatory framework which seeks to show that same-gender relationships are just as — or sometimes even more — healthy, loving, long-term and beneficial, as different-gender ones.

While bi feminism advocates for holding allocishet men to the same standards as women and people of other genders, it's also imperative that the framework supports intersectionality, inclusivity, and equitability. Relationships with women aren't going to be intrinsically better than those with men or non-binary people. Bi feminism can also mean holding ourselves and our female partners to the same standard as male partners. This is particularly important given the [rates of intimate partner violence and abuse within same-gender relationships](#). Bi feminism must

hold all relationships and behaviour to the same standards, regardless of the genders within them.

Although things are improving, the idea that bi women are too much of a flight risk for other women to date is still a hurtful [stereotype within women-loving-women \(WLW\) community](#). Many lesbians (and gay men) still believe the stereotype that all bi people are more attracted to men. A study published in the journal *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity* called this the [androcentric desire hypothesis](#) and suggests it may be the cause of some biphobic sentiments.

Bi+ women are seen as "returning" to the societal benefits that relationships with men offer and thus are shackled by heteronormativity and patriarchy — but this theory doesn't exactly hold up in reality. Firstly, bi women face [higher rates of intimate partner violence](#) than both gay and straight women, with these rates increasing for women who are out to their partner. On top of this, bi women also experience [more mental health issues than gay and straight women](#) due to double discrimination and isolation from both hetero and homosexual communities.

It's also far from true that men are the starting point for all queer women. Even before all the progress we've made in regards to queer liberation, which has allowed people to understand themselves and come out at a younger age, there's always been women who've never dated men. After all, as problematic as it is, the term '[Gold Star Lesbian](#)' has been around for decades. How can you go back to a place you've never been?

These biphobic stereotypes further influence bi women's dating preferences. Sam Locke, a bi woman says that internalised

biphobia around not feeling "[queer enough](#)" or fear of fetishisation from cishet men has put her off dating them. "I also aware that bi women are heavily fetishized, and it's always a concern that at some point, a cishet man I'm involved with might try to leverage my bisexuality for their personal desires or fantasies," she explains.

While bi people need to contend with erasure and fetishisation, the identity itself still opens up more opportunities to experience different kinds of intimacy and love. Poet Juno Jordan described bisexuality as freedom, an assessment that I wholeheartedly endorsed in my book, [Bi the Way](#). But while bisexuality may give us the freedom to love people of any gender, we are still fighting for freedom from patriarchy, homophobia, and monosexism that limits our dating choices in practice.

Until that time, bi+ feminism is just one of the ways we can navigate dating in a way that honours our queerness.

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