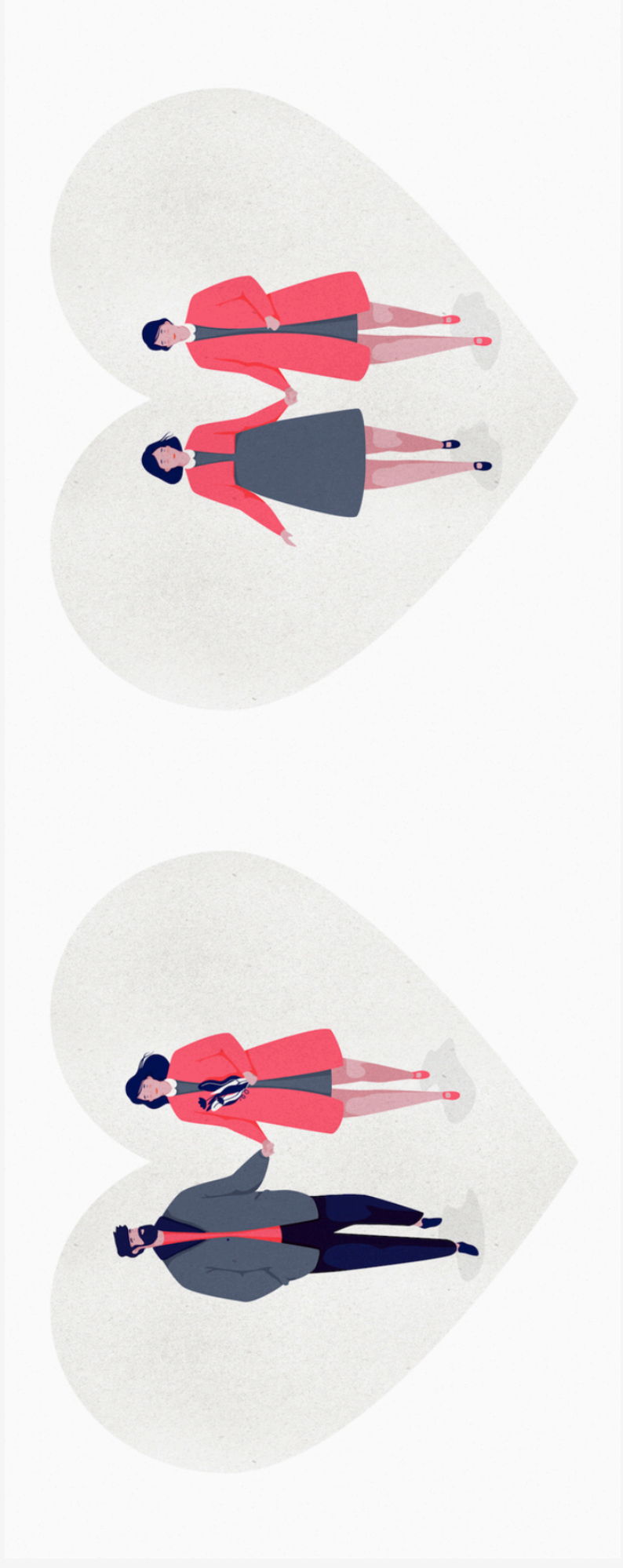


YOU

Too Queer for Straight Spaces, Too Straight for Queer Spaces: The Ballad of Bisexual Dating

BY: KYLIE SPARKS 06 JAN 2018



“Hey baby, should I wear this flannel with the overalls or this shirt?”

I hold up both shirts. We’re about to go meet up with some friends on the eastside during Pride.

“I like that flannel, honey. You should wear it.”

My partner is wearing a ball cap, T-shirt and jeans, a typical outfit of his.

Yes, his.

I publicly came out as bisexual almost two years ago after being extremely closeted while playing queer characters on TV and kissing girls in bars under the veil of “I’m drunk! I’m just curious! I’m straight!” In reality I just didn’t have the vocabulary that I’m attracted to multiple genders. My partner of two years on the other hand, is a straight, cisgender man.

While coming out has been a proverbial weight off my shoulders, navigating queer and straight spaces while dating a dude is a challenge and can be mentally exhausting.

When we first started dating and I came out to my partner the first time I was completely honest about my sexuality with someone I was dating more than five seconds his reaction was “Yeah, I knew. Wanna get pizza?” Later, he asked me questions about the queer media I watch and read and what my favorite clothing store was (Wildfang, obviously), so I knew he was incredibly supportive.

While he is my primary partner, he also knows that I think girls and femmes are really great and also a fan of ethical non-monogamy, and we have our own rules in our relationship for pursuing other partners. When our first Pride together came around, he inquired about the activities I was going to—Dyke Day, party hopping in West Hollywood, gay bars on East Side—and asked, “Can I come to the parade?”

A lot of us bi folk who are dating straight people have the never-ending question: What's protocol on bringing our partners to queer spaces? We've had on-going Twitter conversations and multiple discussions at brunch, and we still are left with the "depends on the situation." There's a lot of biphobia surrounding bi folks with straight partners, as our relationships are deemed "straight-Passing." My queer friends know and love my boyfriend and know his allyship-centering queer safe spaces on queer people and staying in his lane of privilege—but I'm not gonna lie: in queer spaces, I'm hesitant to kiss him or hold his hand because we get the "Okay, Who Brought The Straights?" looks, even if I am severely flagging.

When I am alone in queer spaces, there's absolutely no question from others that my queerness is valid (hell, half the time in public I'm wearing my jean jacket with enough queer flair to be a one-person pride parade) but when I'm asked if I'm in a relationship, I immediately begin to use gender-neutral terms and pronouns. I say "partner" for fear my queerness will get erased. The moment I say "boyfriend," I see a mix of confusion and disappointment come over the stranger, almost like I just let everyone down. I can literally have a neon BISEXUAL! sign flashing above my head, be draped in a bi flag, and say "HEY I JUST MADE OUT WITH THAT GIRL OVER THERE, WHICH YOU SAW," but because of using the word "boyfriend," to many, my queerness is gone,

and that honestly sucks.

The Straights don't know how to work with me either, though.

Growing up in Oklahoma, the goal was to find a husband, get married, have kids, be a housewife with Chiclet teeth smiles and Miss America Pageant hair. That's great if that's your thing, but I am not any of those things.

Whenever my boyfriend and I are in straight spaces, I am left with a choice—I can either present my queerness on a platter by going super hard on my gender expression of tomboy femme and androgyny so people know I'm definitely not straight, or as I can, "tone down the gay a bit" and erase myself before anyone else does.

The choice varies from scenario to scenario and how many damns I give about the situation. In straight spaces, my sexuality almost never gets mentioned unless I correct someone and I almost ALWAYS use "boyfriend" and masculine pronouns. I'm not part of one of those heteronormative Instagram couples engaging with the "desired" aesthetic, draping my arm around my man's midsection while apple picking or going on a hayride or hanging out at a summer barbecue. Still, I tend to engage in behavior more to fit into the space even though I'm secretly whispering "God, straight people are wild." It's a whole different ball game, like

“boyfriend” and masculine pronouns. I’m not part of one of those heteronormative Instagram couples engaging with the “desired” aesthetic, draping my arm around my man’s midsection while apple picking or going on a hayride or hanging out at a summer barbecue. Still, I tend to engage in behavior more to fit into the space even though I’m secretly whispering “God, straight people are wild.” It’s a whole different ball game, like Chess but for navigating the straights.

In a way, being bi and dating a straight man is like acting—in order to fit certain spaces, I put on a costume and I play a role of either the Queer Supreme or The Cool Straight-Passing Girl, and I’m usually just tired. I just want to kiss my boyfriend in a gay bar with my queer family while also talking to really pretty girls. I want to go on double dates with my straight friends and talk about queer things and issues that matter to me without getting the eyes glassing over of “Oh there she goes—up to some gay shit again.”

I know my queerness and my sexuality in my relationship are valid, it’s time everyone else caught up to that idea, too.

Image via Getty

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