

Like many young women, writer Jennifer Baumgardner has had great male lovers—and a few female ones, too. Here, love lessons from her relationships with men and women.



## Why more girls are dating...girls

The first time I kissed a girl I was 23. I had never wondered if I was gay, hadn't spent my teen years confused. But while my popular high school boyfriends (John and Tim) dominated my thoughts, our romances lacked the deep, caring, talk-all-night friendships I had with Seana and Kerri. In college, I became a sort of schizophrenic Women's Studies frat-party girl, dancing at keggers in a miniskirt and a PATRIARCHY SUCKS T-shirt. I slept with my rakish SigEp boyfriend and had intellectual affairs with women (hilarious, addictive Marianne; sensitive, creative Lucia; beautiful, competitive Kate). By the time I graduated and moved to New York City for a magazine job, even I could see that the people I had sex with (men) weren't the people I effortlessly connected to (women).

One night a year into the job, my coworker Anastasia (raven-haired and flirty, the office pet) and I found ourselves nearly sharing a barstool, drunk at 2 A.M. Janis Joplin was on the jukebox, and I beery sang into her ear, "*Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose.*" Then, because I couldn't stand not to, I kissed her.

The kiss was incredible: soft and curious and hot all at once—so good that, in the moment, I didn't stop to ponder what it meant about us, or me. Minutes into this make-out session, I felt a tap

on my shoulder. A woman said, "I don't think this is a safe situation for you," and gestured at the gawking guys surrounding us. Anastasia and I grabbed our handbags and stumbled back to our separate homes, laughing at the spectacle we'd made. The next morning I lay in my bed worrying, but not about whether I was gay. First came more typical post-first-kiss anxieties: Did she like me back? Could our friendship last if we dated? And if it could and we did, it finally hit me, did that mean that I wasn't straight anymore?

# 69%

of straight young women polled by *Glamour* have kissed another woman on the lips.

### FIGURING OUT THE REAL ME

The short answer to that question: yes. As we spent more time together (and more of it sober), I couldn't deny the fact that I was falling in love with Anastasia. Over the next three years, as we dated, she gave me the chance to be the real Jennifer in bed—unself-conscious, goofy, unafraid to say "I love you." (She also gave me my first orgasms.) With men, I'd always hidden my shyness by vamping it up. I'd wear black lingerie and act haughty. But with Anastasia, it seemed ridiculous to use my feminine wiles (she knew the tricks!). She wanted the real me. For the first time, I wanted to give it.

That said, the sex wasn't instantly great. As attracted as we were to each other, we fumbled a lot. My time with Anastasia taught me that when things aren't completely clicking in bed,

▶▶ **LOVE QUICKIE** Is it a woman thing? About 60% of bisexuals (ages 18–44) are female.

it's crucial to admit it. In the end, we couldn't do that, and eventually we broke up.

And then I fell for Steven. A witty writer, he was seemingly my perfect match: a man who shared my love of Burt Bacharach, Bob Fosse and Sandra Bernhard. Unlike other boyfriends, he was mature and sophisticated. After three years with a woman, the genuine Jennifer was ready for him—and ready to realize: When it comes to love, I look both ways.

**BISEXUALITY:  
SO COMMON NOW**

It began to emerge that while I wasn't straight, I wasn't a lesbian either: I'm not alone, thank God. I've had to keep my jaw from hitting the floor as friend after straight-seeming friend has told me that she's dated women too. Add to my personal list a bevy of female characters on hit TV shows (*Buffy*, *The OC*, *Sex and the City*); the fact that about one fifth of women dating on *nerve.com* seek "either"; and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that only 86 percent of women ages 18 to 44 are attracted exclusively to men. Suddenly the world is *filled* with women who feel like I do.

Many I've met agree that bisexuality teaches you to expect just a bit more of your relationships than you otherwise would. "I think that after you have been with women, there are a lot of men that you would never settle for," Liza Featherstone, a married writer who used to date women, once told me. "On just the most obvious level, you would never be with a man who wouldn't go down on you," she said, flatly. "And you wouldn't be with a man who couldn't talk about his feelings." (Or, if you're me, you wouldn't stay with him for long.) The good and bad news, for me, is that my expectations of any partner have gotten higher and higher. Each relationship teaches me to want more from the next.

**BACK WITH A MAN**

Sex with Steven, like so much with Steven, was blessedly direct. He would tell me exactly what he wanted, when he wanted it, and he encouraged me to do the same. That, in some ways, was a nice change from dating women. Once when Steven came over to my house to pick something up, I answered the door wearing a man's blue shirt, a pair of Levi's (probably his) and high-heeled boots. "That's how I'd dress you, if I could dress you," he said. I'd forgotten just how much I loved being objectified.

Steven made me see how much I enjoyed never having to *ask* a guy to rip my clothes off—but he was also moody, critical and detached. Having dated Anastasia (who had done things like brush my hair

for me), I felt like a doormat, and longed to pull the rug out from under him. One day he gave me a CD of Dionne Warwick singing Burt Bacharach: the perfect gift. I was stunned. How could he know me so well, but refuse to learn the names of any of my friends? He tried to explain: "I guess I'm emotionally unavailable right now." The relationship was like living in Seattle. The sun would occasionally shine and I'd make too much of it because I was starved for light. But generally it rained.

**WHAT'S  
WITH GIRLS  
KISSING  
IN BARS?**



It's so common it's become a party trick: Straight girls kissing to turn on the boys. Recently Miss USA reportedly hooked up with Miss Teen USA, and two of *The Real World Denver* girls made out in the hot tub—on the first episode! A *Glamour* poll of self-described "straight" young women found that 69 percent have kissed a woman on the lips, and 50 percent have done it for show (not because they had romantic feelings). What's the deal? Are we kinkier? Bored by men? Or just on a power trip? Abby, 29, of New York City, thinks it's the latter. "In college, my guy friends offered me and a friend \$50 to kiss," she says. "We did it because we couldn't believe it was worth that much to them. Ah boys, so dumb!"

**THE BEST OF BOTH**

Next I met Amy. An activist and musician, she was even more magnetic and successful than Steven and as passionate and good at connecting as Anastasia. With her I found a new confidence—in bed and out—that stemmed directly from how appreciated I felt. She pushed me professionally and supported me emotionally for five years... until I met Gordon.

Amy, intense and sexy, taught me a lot in bed. Thanks to her, I finally knew how to have fun and provide fun, at least with women. My first night with Gordon, though, I had a block. He was my first guy in ages, and I couldn't remember what I was "supposed" to do. It had been years since I'd been around a penis, and his looked bizarrely large. "Um, your penis is really

big," I said. He glanced at me to see whether this was a rehearsed remark and replied, "It's not, actually." "Oh." I paused, then smiled. "I don't really know what I'm doing." It was one of the most genuine sexual moments I've ever had. If I'd only dated men, I'm not sure I could have been that frank.

**AN IMPOSSIBLE CHOICE?**

Everyone always asks me: "Will you end up with a man or a woman?" It's true that a lot of bisexual women go on to marry men. (In one study, University of Utah psychologist Lisa Diamond, Ph.D., followed 89 nonheterosexual young women and found that a quarter no longer identified as lesbian or bisexual five years later.) All I can say is, I'm single now, and more satisfied than ever. Two years ago, just after Gordon and I broke up, I gave birth to our son, Skuli. My life is as rich and complete as I'd ever hoped. Recently I've dated men, and to be honest, I can picture myself in a lifelong relationship with a man pretty easily (*very* easily if that man is Beck). But looking both ways has taught me to be picky. Gender aside, I want the right *person*—and I'm willing to wait for him. Or her. ©

*Jennifer Baumgardner is the author of the new book Look Both Ways, from which this essay is adapted.*