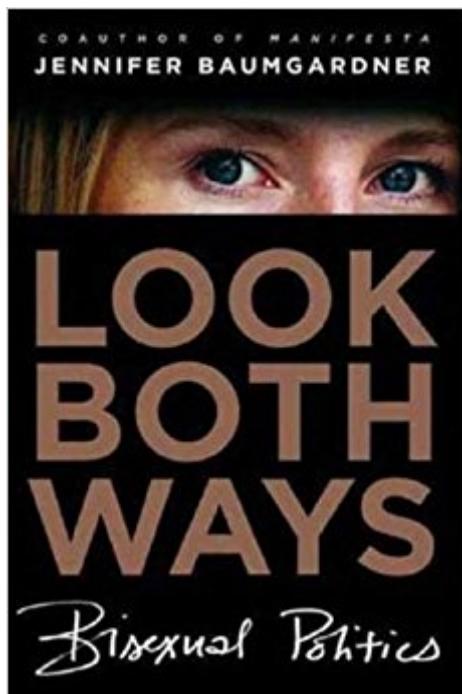


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Look Both Ways: Bisexual Politics



Synopsis

For the acclaimed author and activist Jennifer Baumgardner, bisexuality has always been more than the "sexual non-preference of the '90s." In *Look Both Ways*, Baumgardner takes a close look at the growing visibility of gay and bisexual characters, performers, and issues on the national cultural stage. Despite the prevalence of bisexuality among Generation X and Y women, she finds that it continues to be marginalized by both gay and straight cultures, and dismissed either as a phase or a cop-out. With intimacy and humor, Baumgardner discusses her own experience as a bisexual, and the struggle she's undergone to reconcile the privilege she's garnered as a woman who is perceived as straight and the empowerment and satisfaction she's derived from her relationships with women. Part memoir, part pop-culture study, *Look Both Ways* connects the prominent dots of a bisexual community (Alix Kates Shulman, Ani DiFranco, Rebecca Walker, and, of course, Anne Heche) that Baumgardner argues have bridged feminist aims with those of the gay rights movement. *Look Both Ways* is a compelling and current study in bisexual lives lived secretly and openly, and an exploration of the lessons learned by writers, artists, and activists who have refused the either/or paradigm defended by both gay and straight communities.

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Customer Reviews

Sad she's speaking for us bisexuals. Pretentious author with immature writing style. Spend your money elsewhere.

By far the most interesting, most readable and most satisfying exploration of bisexuality I've read, and certainly the most interesting book on the intersection of bisexuality and feminism ever written. Baumgardner is young, and of a different generation, but her thoughts and experiences are completely in line with my own, and so of course I embrace them as brilliantly insightful. The connections to feminism are fascinating, though she gives short shrift to male bisexuality. That said, her insights are fascinating and her weaving of personal anecdote with a more global and maturing political awareness is well worth reading. This book belongs on the bookshelf of every one interested in human sexuality, and especially those active in the Queer community. A remarkable book.

A pretentious book written by a pretentious, pseudo-feminist, hipster wannabe who wrote of the stereotypical, designer bi women she claimed not to be one of. Yet, she is exactly that, a name dropping hipster wannabe who has no idea how shallow her writing is. Bisexuality is just that, a sexuality, the same for men as it is for women. It is not a political statement or ideology, its an identity, and while sexuality can be complicated, the idea of bisexuality is pretty simple. Baumgardner tries to make it more complicated than it is all the while quoting Ani DiFranco lyrics ad nauseum like some lovesick teenager.

My brain, heart, and groin were all excited by this totally absorbing book, which contains both a personal account of the author's romantic history -- chiefly four main love interests (bi woman, straight guy, 5-star lesbian musician, and straight guy who fathered her child but does not live with her) --and a brilliant inquiry into sexuality and larger issues of personal identity. Jennifer has interviewed many leading writers, artists, and musicians about their choices and we come to see that increasingly, at least for women, the old labels - straight, gay, and bi -- are irrelevant given that so many have jumped back and forth between same-sex and opposite-sex liaisons. Whether it's bedroom dynamics, sexual politics, influences from the workplace or campus or evolving gay-tolerant cultural influences -- the reasons underlying who women are bedding today are

incredibly complicated and worthy of profound self-examination, which she has done brilliantly. What makes the book even more arousing is that the author -- as is apparent from the jacket cover and from a live reading I attended -- is a smoking hot beauty, who must have vastly more-than-average sexual-partner options; but once you're but a few pages into this book, you will find -- as the old adage goes about the brain being the primary erotic organ -- that it's the author's penetrating prose more than anything else that has irresistably won you over and charmed you into hanging onto her every word. Note that the book is almost exclusively focused on female sexuality, but any man will benefit from learning about women and wondering how applicable Jennifer's inquiry is to men of all sexual proclivities. A tour de force.

This is a very sincere well-written and thought out personal story, which can give support and affirmation to women who feel bogged down and misrepresented by identity politics. It is insightful and truthful, and lends honest help to women who aren't sure how to evaluate their sexual lives or inclinations. I'm glad I read it--it can't help but make you feel better about yourself.

Funny and insightful, Baumgardner does a great job setting up the characters and story in a way that is easy to follow. Great as a bedtime read because if you doze off and forget the last couple pages you read, you really aren't missing any huge plot details.

You may recognize Jennifer Baumgardner, the co-author of "Manifesta." "Manifesta" was great, a basic and in-depth feminist, well, manifesta for young women of the early 00's. I highly recommend it as a primer. And then "Look Both Ways: Bisexual Politics" by Jennifer Baumgardner caught my eye at the library. [...] I've noticed that the vast majority of nonfiction I read can be divided into two categories: purely objective information and subjective semi-autobiography. Sadly, these two writing styles can be divided between the sexes. Women authors almost always include personal anecdotes and opinions in their nonfiction, while men are more likely to just write the evidence and analysis. "Look Both Ways" really takes the cake - Baumgardner appears to have interviewed only women akin to her class, background, profession, gender expression and urban location. Their stories intermingle with her own - this is not hard journalism, this is a blog. Which is fine! But don't write a 227 page blog of one's opinions and pass it off as "women's studies"! And then there are all the issues in the book itself. At first, I schlepped through this book to find a few gems of actual information; about halfway through, it became a page-turning hurricane of shock. Many of the "drawbacks" of bisexuality she describes can be remedied by having a spine. A brain wouldn't hurt

either. On page 32, Baumgardner explains her relationship with a man, Steven, and cheating on him with a woman, Amy. She states in very clear terms that her relationship with Steven was just what she always wanted BECAUSE of her relationship with Amy. By stretching her relationship wants and needs across two people, she was better able to appreciate them both. So what does she do? Dumps Steven! And here I'm stomping on the book, screaming "try polyamory, stupid! POLYAMORY!" Alas, the option of non-monogamy isn't mentioned at all in the entire book. Page 141: "Women are entering into relationships with men with gay expectations, but they don't know how to actualize those expectations or, sometimes, even acknowledge them. It's part of the paradox of feminism, of feminism's unfinished revolution: women expect equality from their relationships, but not from men." If a woman is in a relationship with a man and she doesn't communicate her expectations she bears the responsibility of her disappointment. And expecting equality in relationships but not from men? Is Baumgardner writing about thinking adults here? She seems to have a pretty low opinion on men in general, but this makes women look contradictory and weak as well. Page 143, Baumgardner writes about the appeal of a bisexual/lesbian girlfriend to men. The first reason for this, apparently, queer (a term mentioned once in the book) women lack the neediness of straight women. The author herself proved that false: she was very needy in her relationships. The second reason is that a man, who's CLEARLY commitment-phobic, knows that he won't have to commit to a queer woman. This is just insulting to everyone. And the final reason is that queer women tend to be more independent - actually, I really have no argument here. You've read my blog, this isn't news. Those are all the specific snippets I have lined up. Overall, "Look Both Ways" is insulting. It insults men by calling them inherently misogynistic, emotionally dense, commitment-phobic and insecure. It insults women by calling them needily dependent, always looking for "The One", childlike, and stupid enough to date one of those Neanderthal men while expecting something more syrupy. To be sure, PLENTY of people who fulfill these stereotypes exist - these Breeders (not a sexuality-specific term) are the bane of my existence. Baumgardner's worldview is so small that these may very well be the only gender roles she knows. How a 40something, bisexual, feminist journalist in NYC could emulate Carrie Bradshaw so well is beyond me. And it's additionally insulting to pick up a book bearing the subtitle "Bisexual Politics" and to discover "My Repeated Bisexual Mistakes." The one real drawback to bisexuality mentioned in this book is that one's sexuality is perceived as reliant on one's partner. "Oh you're straight now" when dating a man, "oh you're a lesbian now" when dating a woman. So many people don't see bisexuality as a real sexual orientation because their own minds change it based on changing partners. Baumgardner explains this problem...and then implies that the bisexual person feels some

kind of guilt?!?!? Guilt for other people's inability to conceptualize fluidity?!? Guilt for not living up to some bisexual role, which apparently doesn't exist because Baumgardner isn't aware of polyamory?!?

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