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Finding Your Place in the World of Lesbian Loneliness

Gabriella Robinson, Opinion Contributor

I glanced at the clock last Sunday while walking to the farmers market to grab some groceries before heading to the art museum for a date. I took a deep breath and let the bundle of nerves calm down, thinking to myself that this is the fastest way to wipe my feelings aside and move on from someone else. I took my phone out to look at my grocery list when I saw a text. My intuition was right; my date canceled on me.

Texting my friend to inform her of the news, a wave of frustration comes over me. I've been in the same dating pattern for almost four years now: finally finding someone I connect well with, letting my guard down and getting heartbroken. As a lesbian, I can't help but feel alone. The truth is, I am one of the many lesbians who feel the strain of love addictions and fast relationships.

Relationships suck. It is hard not to lose hope when you're trapped in the same love cycle. While people regardless of sexual orientation feel loneliness, lesbians are a different breed. We often get ourselves in relationships too fast. It quickly turns sour, which is why most of our first few relationships are really toxic.

For much of my early queer development, I longed to be with someone. Still, I felt emotionally on a different level than many of my romantic interests. The pandemic strained personal development in the relationships of many queer women due to a lack of socialization, making small flings feel like once in a blue moon. I didn't want to give up hope in other people because I didn't want to give up hope in myself.

Last winter, I was chatting with one of my gay friends and told him that I had recently started seeing someone but had doubts that she wanted to be in a relationship. The subject of breakups and loneliness came up. He told me something I had never thought about: queer individuals often discover themselves later in life, so the relationship-learning process is stunted until they are older. Many heterosexuals begin dating in middle and high school and have pretty intense and toxic relationships. Since queers have to go through the extra steps to self-identify, come out and then learn how to date, a relationship between lesbians in college is at a high school level.

Lesbian relationships move fast. "U-hauling" is a true and common stereotype that a lesbian couple would move in together after the third date and need to buy a U-Haul. It's common to go on extremely long first dates and feel emotional speeds in lesbian relationships. Psychologist Lauren Costine calls rapid dating in lesbian relationships the "urge to merge." My longest date was about ten minutes shy of 24 hours, which was cut short by a doctor's appointment. I've always felt like a date has gone well if it's long and intense, since both individuals feel a deep connection.

"The mirage of closeness that the couple creates is deceptive and misleading. Nevertheless, many lesbians find it extremely addictive," Costine said. "The urge to merge is so powerful that the reality of what creates and sustains real intimacy is lost or overridden by the fantasy of love."

Regardless of sexual orientation, women are raised to believe that the key to happiness is to be in a romantic relationship depending on someone else for emotional support and love. Costine explains that with cisgender lesbians specifically, women have the ability to produce the same hormones that drastically intensify emotions when together.

The U-hauling period does eventually end, either in heartbreak or a leveling-out of the relationship. My queer cousin Lauren explained to me her perspective on these types of relationships.

“I was just so excited to be with a new person and to get to know the details of their life, to then realize it’s not gonna work.” The added hardships of the pandemic have made it even more difficult to meet queer women. Lauren said, “It sucks looking for connections too, I wanted this to happen, and I know it’s not easy.”

After being stood up last week, I called my friends Senora and MC, two U-hauling lesbians who formerly dated one another. “It’s hard to determine true feelings and can be too early to tell for a long time. You lose that perspective when you throw yourself so heavy into things,” Senora told me, “there is a lot to say about taking things slowly.”

The most challenging, but healthiest, way of dating, according to Costine, is a method called “Sober Dating.” Sober dating sets boundaries going into relationships so you are left not throwing your feelings into a situation. Sober dating enables you to see if something is either a temporary match or meant to be. For example, starting with getting coffee before going on a dinner date or texting only to configure logistics of the date.

Learning how to be alone also helps change your perspective on needing versus wanting a relationship. “It’s radical acceptance.” Senora said. “Being lonely isn’t always a bad thing, but desperation for a relationship does not mean you should be in a relationship. It means you are trying to fill something in your life.”

When placed in the world of lesbian dating, it’s hard to hold back your feelings for someone new. However, finding comfort in loneliness is the first step to navigating self-acceptance and love in this crazy world. MC added, “Loneliness is just as complex as happiness or love; you can sit in the emotion of loneliness and be okay.”