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Sincere But Suspect: Perceptions of Bisexual Women's Authentic Expression in the Dating Context

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Abstract
Bisexual women balance competing sets of gender norms and many adapt their behavior and dress according to the gender of the person they are dating, part of a practice known as bisexual display. The current research explores the consequences bisexual displays have on evaluations of bisexual women's authenticity in the dating context. In Study 1 ($N = 137$), participants evaluated a bisexual woman as less authentic, trustworthy, and likable when she was described as behaving and dressing differently on dates with men and women. In Study 2 ($N = 378$), we aimed to replicate Study 1 with more ecologically valid stimuli and extend the research to assess influences on romantic desirability. When dating profiles were presented to straight men, a bisexual woman was evaluated as less authentic when her profiles reflected a bisexual display, but not as less trustworthy, likable, or romantically desirable. The current research provides insight into how bisexual women, in an effort to combat traditional gender norms and authentically embrace their sexual identity, may be seen as less authentic in the dating context.

Keywords Bisexuality · Authenticity · Gender norms · Sexuality · Dating · Sexual orientation

Introduction

Bisexuality refers to an identity characterized by romantic and sexual attraction toward more than one gender, and colloquially, it means being attracted to both men and women (Ervin et al., 2023). The last few decades have seen increased social dialogue about the legitimacy of bisexuality as a sexual orientation and the consequences of what it means to identify as bisexual. This interest in bisexuality was spurred in part by the gay civil rights movement, which, in the USA and Canada, started in the late 1960s and continued until the mid-1980s, and helped advance cultural awareness and acceptance of diverse sexual identities (Altman, 1993; Klesse, 2011; Stanley, 1983). Nevertheless, because bisexual people cannot readily be categorized as either straight or gay, their sexuality is viewed as less legitimate than monosexual people's (i.e., people who experience attraction to only one gender; Israel & Mohr, 2004). Similar to gay men and lesbian women, bisexual people have had to bear the weight of misconceptions, stereotypes, and stigmatization surrounding their sexual identity as a result of deviating from heterosexual societal norms (Anderson & McCormack, 2016; Dyar et al., 2017; Israel & Mohr, 2004; Ochs, 1996).

Stereotypic Perceptions of Bisexuality

Researchers who study biphobia, which can be defined as negative attitudes toward bisexuality (Klesse, 2011), found bisexual people are viewed more negatively than other stigmatized groups, including gay men, lesbian women, and various religious and ethnic minorities (Dodge et al., 2016; Herek, 2002). Out of all the stigmatized groups Herek assessed, only injecting drug users were viewed more negatively than bisexual men and women. They are also viewed as undesirable romantic partners, with straight people preferring to date other straight people, gay men preferring to date other gay men, and lesbian women preferring to date other lesbian women (Ess et al., 2023; Feinstein et al., 2014).

Many misconceptions and stereotypes about bisexual people involve perceptions of their dating habits and sexual behavior. For example, bisexual people are stereotyped as being more sexually promiscuous, sexually irresponsible, and less interested in maintaining monogamous relationships than non-bisexual people (Anderson & McCormack, 2016; Dyar et al., 2017; Israel & Mohr, 2004; Sarno et al., 2020).

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These stereotypes come from the erroneous assumption that bisexual people desire multiple romantic partners at the same time and that they cannot be satisfied with only one (Friedman et al., 2014; Udis-Kessler, 1990). Bisexual individuals' attraction to multiple genders often leads to misconceptions that they are excessively sexually active or fixated on sex (Anderson & McCormack, 2016; Eliason, 2001). They are also stereotyped as being more likely to cheat on their significant other (Friedman et al., 2014; Israel & Mohr, 2004; Rust, 1996; Spaulding & Peplau, 1997). These beliefs contribute to the notion that they are less trustworthy as romantic partners than people of other sexual orientations (Mohr & Rochlen, 1999; Ochs, 1996).

Along with being stereotyped as less trustworthy, and central to the current studies, bisexual people are frequently perceived as inauthentic compared to monosexual people (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013; Anderson & McCormack, 2016; Israel & Mohr, 2004). Authenticity is culturally bound, but in North America, it primarily has to do with individuals' behaviors reflecting their true self (Kashima et al., 2004; Kernis & Goldman, 2006). Authentic people in Western cultures are believed to be genuine and uninfluenced by external factors (Cross et al., 2003; Nisbett et al., 2001). Authenticity is valued as a positive trait, and those whose behavior fluctuates across situations, or are perceived as being disingenuous, are seen as inauthentic (Kashima et al., 2004; Kernis & Goldman, 2006). Bisexual people might be stereotyped as inauthentic for several reasons (Israel & Mohr, 2004). For instance, there are beliefs that bisexual people are just gay or lesbian people who have not yet come to terms with their sexuality. Those who believe this argue that bisexual people do not have the courage to fully come out or that they enjoy having the benefits of heterosexual privilege that they would lose if they identified as gay or lesbian, and believe their behaviors are not coming from a place of authentic expression (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013; Dyar et al., 2017; Fox, 1991; Friedman et al., 2014; Ochs, 1996; Rust, 1993). Another belief is that bisexual people are simply confused about their sexual identity or romantic preferences. People who endorse this believe bisexual people cannot be as genuine as monosexual people who are thought to be "sure" about their sexuality (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013; Bronn, 2001; Eliason, 2001; Zinik, 1985). These negative stereotypes about bisexual people's authenticity and trustworthiness contribute to their devaluation as romantic partners relative to non-bisexual people (Ess et al., 2023; Feinstein et al., 2014).

The connection between evaluations of authenticity, trustworthiness, and likability is not reserved to bisexual people (Krumhuber et al., 2007; Rivera et al., 2025). Although these constructs often overlap—a person evaluated as authentic is frequently viewed as trustworthy and likable—the constructs themselves are distinct. Authenticity focuses on the genuineness and alignment between inner values and outward behavior (Kashima et al., 2004; Kernis & Goldman, 2006). Likability is rooted in affective, often surface-level, appeal, and similarity. Trustworthiness is the assessment of reliability, integrity, and intent to communicate truthfully. Accordingly, we assessed all these variables when examining evaluations of bisexual women's authenticity to gain a holistic picture of social evaluations surrounding authenticity. In Study 2, we also included measures of romantic desirability because we were interested in its connection to these variables.

Whereas all bisexual people contend with the aforementioned aspects of biphobia, they also face gender-specific issues. In the USA, bisexual women are viewed more positively than bisexual men (Dodge et al., 2016; Helms & Waters, 2016). Perceiver gender is also important: Men tend to be less accepting, especially against bisexual men (Dodge et al., 2016; Yost & Thomas, 2012). Gendered perceptions can also depend on the sexual orientation of the person evaluating them (Herek, 2002). Straight men viewed bisexual and gay men more negatively than bisexual women and lesbian women, whereas straight women generally viewed bisexual people more negatively than gay and lesbian people. It is possible that straight men's fetishization of bisexual and lesbian women can explain this observed pattern of results, albeit through the tainted lens of sexual objectification (Eliason, 2001; Israel & Mohr, 2004). Many bisexual women have experiences, whereby straight men objectify and eroticize them because of their bisexuality, so although straight men might evaluate bisexual women more positively than they would bisexual men, that does not mean these seemingly positive stereotypes protect bisexual women from negative outcomes (DeCapua, 2017; Yost & Thomas, 2012). Indeed, they are often at risk of great harm, with research evincing that bisexual cisgender women experience high levels of stigmatization, minority stress, and a risk of poor mental and physical health (Bostwick et al., 2010; Dyar & London, 2018; Katz-Wise et al., 2017). When recounting threatening experiences at the hands of straight men, bisexual women report more sexual threats, whereas bisexual men report more physical threats to their safety (Hequembourg & Brallier, 2009).

Because straight men's attraction to bisexual women is often shaped by processes of objectification and fetishization, we determined that it would be inappropriate to compare their romantic desirability ratings with those of other sexual identity groups (e.g., lesbian women, bisexual men, bisexual women). Additionally, recruiting sufficient numbers of participants from each of these groups for adequately powered analyses posed substantial practical challenges. For these reasons, in Study 2, we restricted our sample to straight men, which allowed us to examine romantic desirability as a dependent variable in a sample without potential confounding influences that would complicate interpretation in a more heterogeneous sample.

Bi-Invisibility

Bisexual people must also contend with bisexual invisibility. Also known as bi-erasure, or as it is hereafter referred to, bi-invisibility, is the tendency for the existence and legitimacy of bisexuality to be denied or go unrecognized (Hartman, 2013; Morgenroth et al., 2022). This diminishes bisexual people's ability to feel authentically seen and respected on the grounds of their sexuality compared to non-bisexual people, because their sexuality is questioned, denied, and viewed as illegitimate (Diamond et al., 2017). Despite comprising approximately 50% of non-heterosexual and gender diverse people, they are often not accepted by their peers (Monro, 2020; Mulick & Wright 2002; UCLA, 2011). This is at least partly because bisexual people are perceived by some as being disingenuous about their sexual identity, and us/them boundaries that gays and lesbians draw between themselves and straight people for security can exclude bisexual people (Burleson, 2014; Hemmings, 2013; Ochs, 1996). Lesbian and gay spaces have attempted to secure their group identities, as well as political aspirations, by accepting a position in binary contrast to heterosexuality. Bisexual people become marked as invalid members of "the cause" because of their perceived proximity to heterosexuality. This inference comes from beliefs that bisexual people are just gay or lesbian people who have not come to terms with their sexuality yet, or who are still trying to reap the benefits of heterosexuality, and adds to the exclusion they face (Armstrong, 1995; Israel & Mohr, 2004; Kaplan, 1995). Such beliefs further illegitimize bisexuality and, in turn, make bisexual people feel unwelcomed by non-heterosexual or gender diverse people compared to gay or lesbian people. A consequence of experiencing bi-invisibility, on account of having their identities questioned or denied by both straight and gay/lesbian people, is bisexual individuals' lower sense of well-being (Cheryan & Monin, 2005; Garr-Schultz & Gardner, 2019; Maimon et al., 2021).

Bi-invisibility affects people differently in that bisexual women are read as straight, whereas bisexual men are read as gay (McGorray & Petsko, 2024; Morgenroth et al., 2022). Bisexual women are perceived as straight women who will revert to their "real" sexual orientation after a temporary phase of bisexuality, and their same-sex behaviors are seen as bids for seeking attention (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013; Lanutti & Deenes, 2012; McGorray & Petsko, 2024). Conversely, bisexual men are believed to be more attracted to men than they are to women, and their bisexuality is likely to be doubted in favor of beliefs that they are truly gay, but have not yet realized or accepted it (Mize & Manago, 2018). In both cases, their reported sexuality is doubted in favor of a monosexual orientation, contributing to the erasure of their bisexuality.

Bisexual people also have a difficult time being seen as their authentic selves when engaged in monogamous relationships because they may be assumed to be either straight or gay/lesbian depending on the gender of their romantic partner. Non-bisexual people may never experience this problem because their sexuality is always evident in monogamous relationships. However, for bisexual people to combat this invisibility and feel authentically seen and respected in a relationship, they must choose between coping with the invisibility or actively asserting their sexual identity (Hartman-Linck, 2014; Kwok et al., 2020; Roberts et al., 2015).

Dating Norms and Authenticity

Research on how experiencing bi-invisibility relates to bisexual people's feelings of authenticity indicates that a key issue for bisexual men and women alike has to do with how gender norms affect their romantic relationships (Kwok et al., 2020; Siegel & Meunier, 2019). Expectations about traditional gender roles can limit bisexual people's ability to express themselves authentically in romantic relationships. Recent research provides rich accounts of how bisexual people navigate gender norms that often conflict depending on the gender of their romantic partner (Hartman-Linck, 2014; Kwok et al., 2020; Siegel & Meunier, 2019). Further underscoring the problems with bi-invisibility, conforming to gender norms gives bisexual people less of an opportunity to express their identity. Thus, bisexual people often decide between actively asserting their identity and accepting that their sexuality will not be obviously recognized by others (Davila et al., 2019, 2021; Roberts et al., 2015).

Gender norms are informed by heterosexual dating roles (Eagly, 2013) and affect bisexual people when dating. For example, when bisexual men date women, there is perceived societal pressure to conform to traditional masculine gender stereotypes of strength, assertiveness, dominance, self-reliance, and emotional restraint when self-presenting and behaving (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). These norms affect what traits and behaviors people believe a potential partner will find attractive, as well as inform how they act, dress, and engage in sexual scripts when dating (Masters et al., 2013; Schudson et al., 2018; Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Siegel and Meunier (2019) interviewed 203 bisexual men ($M_{age} = 36.90$) from the New York City area who were partnered with women and had not disclosed their same-sex behaviors to their partners. The authors examined how gender norms shaped these men's satisfaction within their intimate relationships with women. These interviews showed how gender norms can lead to a decreased sense of autonomy. Many of the men reported feeling limited by and dissatisfied with norms, although many ultimately conformed to them. For example, many of these men reported taking the more dominant and assertive role when dating women, which they perceived to be the more demanding role during sex. However, when with men, they

felt like they could relax more because there was someone else in the relationship who could take charge. These feelings were often accompanied by discomfort taking on a passive role when engaging in sex with women. Additionally, the men reported thinking that their partners expected different things out of the relationship depending on their gender, which influenced their behavior. With women, they expected their partners to desire more emotional intimacy in the relationship, while with men, they expected their partners to be mainly interested in sexual gratification. As a result of these different relationship expectations, these men often felt more emotionally cared for in their relationships with women, and many turned to relationships with men only for the sexual dimension of a relationship (although several found that their relationships with men were quite emotionally intimate). Overall, the men felt their authentic sexual expression was restricted by the presence of societal pressure to conform to different norms in their relationships.

Bisexual women face pressure to conform to traditional feminine gender stereotypes of being submissive, gentle, emotionally sensitive, modest, and nurturing when dating men (Liben & Bigler, 2002). Kwok et al. (2020; see also Hartman-Linck, 2014) interviewed an ethnically diverse sample of 12 behaviorally bisexual, cisgender women ($M_{age} = 32$) about relationship expectations when dating men and women. Most women reported that dating men versus women came with different expectations and roles to fulfill. For example, they expected women to communicate their feelings more easily and forwardly than men because of stereotypes that women are more comfortable with emotional expression. As a result, they did not expect men to open up as easily or be emotionally expressive, and often gave men more time and space to communicate their thoughts and feelings. Many of the participants believed that, when dating a man, they should be protected physically by their partner and assume a more submissive role in their relationship. Feeling pressure to conform to a more traditionally feminine role when dating a man was commonly reported in the interviews, so too was feeling free from this expectation when dating a woman. Many women purposely resisted these normative, gendered expectations within their relationships, and those who chose to explicitly resist did so out of a desire to combat bi-invisibility and most authentically express themselves on the grounds of their sexuality.

Bisexual Displays

Bisexual displays are a practice through which bisexual people, most often women, authentically express themselves on the grounds of their sexual identity. The terms originated from research by Hartman-Linck, who conducted focus group interviews with 14 self-identified bisexual women about their dating experiences (Hartman, 2013; Hartman-Linck, 2014). Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 47, with the majority (8 participants) in the 25–35-year-old range. Most participants were White, college educated, and middle class. One identified as African American, one as Asian American, one as Indigenous/Native American, and one as multiracial. The women reported dressing purposefully masculine when dating men in an attempt not to be read as a straight couple, wearing pins and badges to display their bisexual identity, and engaging in activism surrounding their sexual identity in efforts to make their bisexuality visible. Even something as simple as projecting different attitudes qualified as a bisexual display for many women. For example, displaying assertiveness and confidence to play on gendered norms dictating that women should often be passive and agreeable. Additionally, some reported decorating their apartments with erotic pictures of bodies, rainbow quilts, or having a shelf in their living space stocked with queer books, so that people who entered their home could pick up on cues to their sexuality. Overall, they employed a variety of strategies to be seen as visibly bisexual across contexts, including in their relationships with men and women, and that feeling true to oneself and being authentically bisexual explained their desire to engage in bisexual displays. Often, their bisexual displays were misinterpreted by others, but the participants found it important to engage in such displays regardless because of what it meant for themselves and their feelings of authenticity.

In the same vein, many bisexual women adopt a more masculine gender expression when dating men or a more feminine gender expression when dating women to disrupt assumptions about their identity and authentically embrace their sexual identity (Daly et al., 2018; Davila et al., 2019, 2021). They use appearance markers that could be perceived as lesbian or butch, like cutting their hair short and wearing more androgynous clothing when dating men, so not to be perceived as straight. When dating women, they may be more likely to present themselves as feminine by growing out their hair and nails, dressing more traditionally feminine, or wearing more makeup, to disrupt assumptions that they might be lesbian rather than bisexual. There is evidence that bisexual women and gender minorities are more likely to engage in these displays that reject normative dating behavior than bisexual men, both when they are with a partner or when they are single (Davila et al., 2019, 2021). Although not all bisexual women engage in these strategies to combat bi-invisibility, it does seem to be a common theme within the literature regarding bisexual women's behavior (Daly et al., 2018; Davila et al., 2019, 2021; Hartman, 2013; Hartman-Linck, 2014; Kwok et al., 2020).

As mentioned before, these behavioral displays are highly personalized. The strategies detailed above are not an exhaustive list, nor are they applicable to every bisexual woman who engages in a bisexual display. Each person's display is different, dependent on what features resonate with them, as well

as how comfortable and safe they feel acting, dressing, and displaying themselves across environments and in front of different people. For example, environments that are socially safe and affirming of a bisexual woman's identity may allow her to express a bisexual display more comfortably and have it accurately interpreted, or "clocked," by others. The result is that there are myriad ways that people choose to engage in bisexual displays in order to feel authentic, with no display being more or less valid than someone else's.

Bicultural Authenticity

Although the focus of the current work is in bisexual people, there are parallels within the context of biculturalism. Bicultural people (individuals who identify with more than one culture) are stereotyped as being untrustworthy and confused about their identity (Albuja et al., 2018; Mohr & Rochlen, 1999; Ochs, 1996). They often adjust their behavior according to their cultural and social environments to express themselves authentically (LaFromboise et al., 1993). West et al. (2021) investigated whether engaging in this behavior, called frame-switching, would undermine bicultural people's authenticity in the dating context, because embracing both sides of their cultural identity might cause them to be perceived as acting inconsistently. Compared to a target who did not engage in frame-switching behavior, a target who frame-switched was perceived as less authentic, trustworthy, and romantically desirable.

Current Work

Considering these constraints on individuals' ability to be recognized as authentic, many bisexual individuals' authentic expression may clash with cultural norms that define authenticity in terms of behavioral consistency. Thus, the primary goal of the current research was to examine how perceptions of bisexual people are affected by engaging in a bisexual display that resists normative dating behavior in the dating context (e.g., by behaving and dressing one way with men and another way with women). Similar to bicultural individuals who are perceived as less authentic when trying to embrace both sides of their cultural identity, bisexual people must navigate gender norms and stereotypes that shift depending on the sexual identity of the person they are dating. This work focuses on evaluations of bisexual cisgender women because, compared to bisexual cisgender men, bisexual cisgender women have had less energy and resources dedicated to studying their experiences and stigmatization. This is because concerns around HIV transmission in men have motivated much of the funding for understanding the experiences of and health outcomes for bisexuality (Storr, 1999). Additionally, bisexual women are more likely than bisexual men to engage in bisexual displays to make their sexual identities visible (Davila et al., 2019, 2021; Hartman, 2013). Across two studies, we examined how bisexual women were evaluated in terms of their authenticity, trustworthiness, likability, and romantic desirability when they either engaged in a bisexual display in the dating context or did not.

Research Question 1: Are bisexual women perceived as less authentic, trustworthy, and likable in the dating context when they engage in a bisexual display (e.g., dressing and acting more traditionally feminine on dates with women, and less traditionally feminine on dates with men), compared to when they behave consistently across dates, or when only background information is provided about them? We formulated a priori confirmatory hypotheses that participants who read vignettes (Study 1) or viewed mock dating profiles (Study 2) would rate a bisexual woman target as less authentic, trustworthy, likable, and romantically desirable when she resists normative dating behavior and engages in a bisexual display, compared to when she acts the same with men and women, or when only background information is provided about her.

Research Question 2 (Exploratory): Are bisexual women perceived as more authentic, trustworthy, likable, and romantically desirable in the dating context when they adhere to normative dating behavior (e.g., dressing more traditionally feminine with men, wearing pride-based attire with women) compared to when they engage in a bisexual display (e.g., dressing more traditionally feminine with women, wearing pride-based attire with men)? Multiple outcomes seem plausible. Conformity to norms can promote self-authenticity when people value the group and its norms, and integrate social norms into their ideal self (Tajfel, 2010; Turner et al., 1994; Wood et al., 1997). However, breaking norms can also promote authenticity (Clarke & Spence, 2013; Hartman-Linck, 2014; Kwok et al., 2020; Roberts et al., 2015). In the current work, perceptions of authenticity may depend on how much straight men who are rating bisexual women value the relevant group norms. Because of these competing hypotheses, the second research question is more exploratory in nature.

Study 1

Method

Participants

Participants ($N = 192$) were recruited via a university undergraduate participant pool. To be eligible, participants had to be enrolled in an introductory psychology course and were compensated with course credit for their participation. For

the power analysis ($\alpha = .05$), we chose the most analogous study in the literature by West et al. (2021) studying bicultural individuals. Because their effect size ($\eta_p^2 = .56$) was quite large, we conservatively oversampled the recommended number of participants (12) to achieve 80% power. After excluding data from participants who did not consent, did not complete the full survey, or provided duplicate responses (35 participants), and from those who failed manipulation checks (20 participants), 137 participants were left for analysis. Sensitivity analysis revealed the current sample size had 80% power to detect effect sizes as small as $d = 0.54$. Participants self-identified as racially diverse (11.68% East Asian, 10.95% Southeast Asian, 21.90% South Asian, 8.03% Black, 26.28% White, 5.84% Latino, 4.38% Biracial, 1.46% preferred not to say, 9.49% preferred to specify [mostly Middle Eastern and Arab]) undergraduate students ($M_{age} = 20.72$, $SD = 3.56$). Participants mostly self-identified as women (21.90% men, 72.99% women, 2.19% non-binary, 2.19% preferred not to say, 0.73% preferred to specify [one gender-fluid]) and straight (2.19% asexual, 8.03% bisexual, 78.83% straight, 0.73% gay, 1.46% lesbian, 3.65% pansexual, 2.92% queer, 2.19% preferred not to say).

Procedure

Participants were recruited for a study examining perceptions of people in the dating world. In a between-subjects design, participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions following their informed consent. Participants in each condition read background information about a bisexual woman named Rachel and then, depending on the condition they were in, a vignette about her dating behavior (see Online Supplemental Materials: https://osf.io/jez4y/overview?view_only=8303435ebd0c4721b8a94bfb5a798c6b). Participants in the switching condition ($N = 43$) read a vignette describing a bisexual woman engaging in a bisexual display and rejecting normative dating behavior (e.g., dressing less stereotypically feminine on dates with men, more stereotypically feminine on dates with women). It explicitly stated she acts differently when on dates with men and women. In the no-switching condition ($N = 48$), the vignette described a bisexual woman who does not change her behavior when going on dates with a man versus a woman. Finally, participants in the neutral condition ($N = 46$) did not read a vignette about Rachel's dating behavior and only read the same background information that all participants received. They then provided ratings of how authentic, trustworthy, and likable they deemed her. At the end, they provided demographic information about themselves, were debriefed about the true purpose of the experiment, and were informed about appropriate mitigation strategies (see Supplemental Materials).

Measures

Authenticity

An adapted four-item measure of subjective authenticity (English & Chen, 2011; $\alpha = .94$) was used to assess participants' perceptions of the target's authenticity on a 7-point Likert scale. For example, "Rachel expresses her true feelings and attitudes when interacting with others" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

Likability

An adapted eight-item measure of likability was used to assess how likable participants deemed the target on a 7-point Likert scale (West et al., 2021; $\alpha = .88$ [one item was removed for irrelevance to the dating context and the reliability coefficient increased to $\alpha = .91$]). For example, "I would like spending time or hanging out with someone like Rachel" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

Trustworthiness

A single, face-valid item measured how trustworthy participants perceived the target (West et al., 2021). The item read: "Overall, I think Rachel is a trustworthy person" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

Results

Authenticity, trustworthiness, and likability were assessed for normality and homogeneity of variance. Likability violated the assumption of homogeneity of variance, as indicated by Levene's test, $F(2, 134) = 3.15$, $p = .046$. Accordingly, a Welch's ANOVA was conducted for likability to account for the unequal variances across conditions, and a Games–Howell test was conducted for post hoc comparisons. Shapiro–Wilk tests indicated that trustworthiness ($W = .98$, $p = .002$) and likability ($W = .97$, $p = .022$) significantly deviated from normality, whereas authenticity did not ($W = .99$, $p = .327$). However, because one-way ANOVAs are generally robust to moderate deviations from normality, and the observed departures were minor, these violations were not considered problematic.

Turning first to authenticity, a one-way ANOVA revealed that participants evaluated Rachel as significantly different across conditions, $F(2, 134) = 50.06$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .43$ (Fig. 1). Post hoc comparisons using Tukey's HSD indicated that participants rated Rachel as less authentic in the switching condition ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 1.23$) compared to the

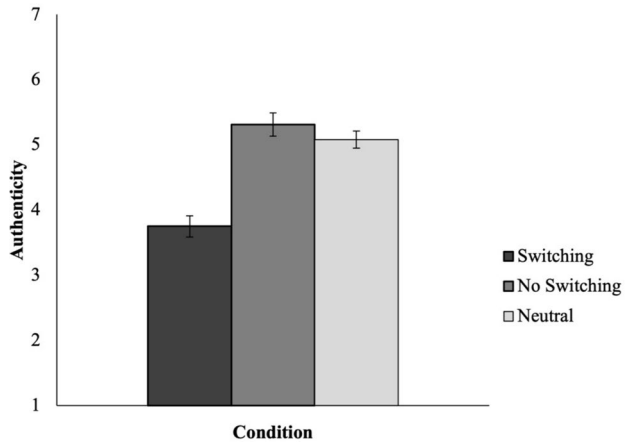

Fig. 1 Participants' evaluations of authenticity by condition. Note: Error bars represent standard errors of the mean

no-switching condition ($M = 5.79$, $SD = 1.00$), $p < .001$, $d = 1.91$, and compared to the neutral condition ($M = 5.08$, $SD = 0.90$), $p < .001$, $d = 1.34$. Participants also evaluated Rachel as more authentic in the no-switching condition compared to the neutral condition, $p < .01$, $d = 0.76$ (Fig. 1).

We used a Welch's one-way ANOVA to examine participant's likability evaluations because variance was not homogenous across conditions. This test showed that participants evaluated Rachel as significantly different in terms of likability across conditions, $F(2, 87.4) = 4.48$, $p = .014$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$. Post hoc comparisons with the Games–Howell test, used because of the Welch's ANOVA, indicated participants viewed Rachel as less likable in the switching condition ($M = 4.70$, $SD = 1.32$) compared to the no-switching condition ($M = 5.43$, $SD = 0.97$), $p = .015$, $d = 0.62$. Participants did not differ in evaluations of likability between the switching condition and the neutral condition ($M = 5.12$, $SD = 0.87$), $p = .160$, $d = 0.37$. nor between the no-switching condition and the neutral condition, $p = .285$, $d = 0.33$.

For trustworthiness, a one-way ANOVA revealed that participants evaluated Rachel as significantly different across conditions, $F(2, 134) = 9.50$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .12$. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated participants viewed Rachel as less trustworthy in the switching condition ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.38$) compared to the no-switching condition ($M = 5.05$, $SD = 1.08$), $p < .001$, $d = 0.85$, and compared to the neutral condition ($M = 4.72$, $SD = 1.11$), $p < .01$, $d = 0.59$. There was no difference between ratings in no-switching and neutral conditions, $p = .414$, $d = 0.30$.

Participant ratings of authenticity and trustworthiness were positively correlated with each other, $r(135) = .62$, $p < .001$, as were ratings of authenticity and likability, $r(135) = .58$, $p < .001$, and likability and trustworthiness, $r(135) = .70$, $p < .001$.

Discussion

Results supported our primary hypothesis. Specifically, participants rated a bisexual woman as less authentic, trustworthy, and likable in the dating context when she was described as engaging in a bisexual display than when her behavior was described as consistent or when only background information was provided about her.

Study 2

Method

Study 2 sought to replicate and extend the primary findings of Study 1. To provide participants with a more ecologically valid context for evaluating a bisexual woman's authenticity, trustworthiness, likability, and romantic desirability, Study 2 used mock online dating profiles instead of written vignettes. Additionally, because Study 2 added a measure of romantic desirability, we specifically recruited self-identified straight men. Third, it was unclear whether Study 1's results were due to something specific about a bisexual display, or if other inconsistent dating behavior would elicit similar results. For this reason, we added an additional condition where the target switches but does so while adhering to more normative dating behavior (e.g., by dressing more stereotypically feminine when interacting with men in the dating realm, embracing LGBTQ+ identity with pride-based attire when interacting with women). Comparing evaluations of this condition to the bisexual display condition allows us to test whether inconsistent behavior in general is viewed as inauthentic, or if there is something specific about a bisexual display that signals inauthenticity. We also included two control conditions wherein the woman's profiles reflect consistent behavior and dress. The first depicts the target embracing her LGBTQ+ identity, and the second depicts her dressing more stereotypically feminine. This allowed us to test whether the simple emphasis of her LGBTQ+ identity would drive effects compared to if the target did not emphasize her LGBTQ+ identity.

Participants

Straight men participants living in the USA ($N = 461$) were recruited via CloudResearch, an online participant recruitment system (Hartman et al., 2023). Again, for the power analysis ($\alpha = .05$), we conservatively oversampled based on the effect size ($\eta_p^2 = .32$) recommended for 80% power obtained in research by West et al. (2021). After excluding data from participants who did not consent, did not complete

the full survey, or provided duplicate responses (15 participants), and from those who failed manipulation checks (67 participants), 378 participants were left for analysis. Sensitivity analysis revealed that the current sample size had 80% power to detect effect sizes as small as $d = 0.344$. Participants all self-identified as straight men on CloudResearch ($M_{age} = 36.52$, $SD = 11.87$), and mostly White (0.53% Indigenous, 4.23% East Asian, 4.50% Southeast Asian, 4.50% South Asian, 11.64% Black, 60.85% White, 9.52% Latino, 3.12% Biracial, 0.53% preferred not to say, 0.53% preferred to specify [Middle Eastern]).

Procedure

Participants were recruited for a study examining perceptions of people in the dating world. Using a between-subjects design, participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions following their informed consent. Participants in all conditions read that the study was interested in how the interface of a dating app affects perceptions of the app users (see Online Supplemental Materials for instructions and stimuli: https://osf.io/jez4y/overview?view_only=8303435ebd0c4721b8a94bfb5a798c6b). We told participants that this app uniquely allows users to create multiple profiles depending on the sexual orientation of those they are seeking. Thus, a bisexual user could make one profile page directed toward men and a separate page directed toward women, and these profiles could have the same or different pictures and bio information. Then, participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions and viewed the dating profiles of a bisexual woman on this app. Participants in the bisexual display condition ($N = 90$) viewed profiles showing a bisexual woman engaging in a bisexual display. In her profile directed at women, she wears a dress and does not highlight her LGBTQ+ identity. Conversely, in her profile directed at men, she emphasizes her bisexuality by wearing a pride flag and mentioning her involvement in LGBTQ+ activism. Her tone also differs between the profiles, being slightly more assertive in the bio directed toward men. Participants in the normative behavior condition ($N = 97$) viewed profiles showing a bisexual woman adhering to more normative dating behavior in her profiles directed toward men and women. She wears more feminine clothing in her profile directed toward men, while in her profile directed toward women, she wears a pride flag around her and mentions her LGBTQ+ activism. These profiles mirror the bisexual display condition but swap the gender they are directed toward. Participants in the feminine control condition ($N = 93$) viewed profiles showing a bisexual woman whose information and pictures emphasized traditional femininity, regardless of whether the profiles were directed toward men or women. She wears a dress in both profiles and her bioinformation is consistent. Finally, participants in the LGBTQ+ control condition ($N = 98$) viewed profiles showing a bisexual woman whose profile information and pictures heavily emphasized her bisexual identity (e.g., a pride flag wrapped around herself, emphasizing LGBTQ+ activism in her bio) regardless of whether the profiles were directed toward men or women. Participants then provided ratings of how authentic, trustworthy, likable, and romantically desirable they deemed the target. At the end, they provided demographic information about themselves, were debriefed about the true purpose of the experiment, and were informed about appropriate mitigation strategies (see Supplemental Materials).

Measures

Authenticity, Likability, and Trustworthiness

We used the same measures as in Study 1.

Romantic Desirability

Interpersonal Attraction A four-item measure assessed participants' ratings of interpersonal attraction toward the target (Alves, 2018: $\alpha = .94$). For example, "How interesting do you find Rachel?" (1 = *not at all,* 7 = *extremely*).

Dating Interest A two-item measure assessed how interested participants would be in dating the target (West et al., 2021: $\alpha = .95$). For example, "Rachel seems like someone I would be open to dating" (1 = *strongly agree,* 7 = *strongly disagree*).

Dating Intentions A three-item measure assessed how likely participants would be to engage in three dating behaviors with the target, imagining they had come across her dating profile outside of the study (West et al., 2021: $\alpha = .93$). For example, how likely they would be to respond to a message if the target sent them one (1 = *strongly disagree,* 7 = *strongly agree*).

Dating Endorsement A dating endorsement measure assessed how likely participants would be to recommend the target to a friend as a dating partner (1 = *no,* 2 = *doubtful,* 3 = *maybe*, 4 = *probably*, 5 = *yes*; Rycyna et al., 2009).

Results

Authenticity, trustworthiness, likability, and measures of romantic desirability were assessed for normality and homogeneity of variance. Authenticity violated the assumption of homogeneity of variance, as indicated by Levene's test, $F(3, 374) = 9.01$, $p < .001$. Accordingly, a Welch's ANOVA was conducted for authenticity to account for the unequal variances across conditions, and a Games–Howell test was

conducted for post hoc comparisons. Shapiro–Wilk tests indicated that all dependent variables significantly deviated from normality: authenticity ($W = .98$, $p < .001$); likability ($W = .95$, $p < .001$); trustworthiness ($W = .96$, $p < .001$); interpersonal attraction ($W = .96$, $p < .001$); dating interest ($W = .94$, $p < .001$); dating intentions ($W = .94$, $p < .001$); and dating endorsement ($W = .95$, $p < .001$). However, because one-way ANOVAs are robust to moderate deviations from normality and the observed departures were mild, these violations were not considered problematic.

We turned first to authenticity. Variance in participants' authenticity evaluations was not homogeneous across conditions, so a Welch's one-way ANOVA was used. This test revealed that participants evaluated Rachel as significantly different in terms of authenticity across conditions, $F(3, 204) = 4.48$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .23$ (Fig. 2; descriptive statistics reported in Table 1). A Games–Howell post hoc test indicated that evaluations of Rachel's authenticity in the bisexual display condition ($M = 4.48$, $SD = 1.56$) were significantly lower compared to the feminine control condition ($M = 5.56$, $SD = 1.07$), $p < .001$, $d = .81$, and compared to the LGBTQ control condition ($M = 5.82$, $SD = 1.04$), $p < .001$, $d = 1.01$ (Fig. 2). Evaluations of her authenticity in the normative behavior condition ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 1.35$) were also significantly lower compared to the feminine control condition, $p < .001$, $d = 1.10$, and LGBTQ control condition, $p < .001$, $d = 1.33$ (Fig. 2). Authenticity ratings did not differ between the feminine control and LGBTQ control conditions, $p = .319$, $d = 0.25$, nor between the bisexual display and normative behavior conditions, $p = .624$, $d = 0.17$.

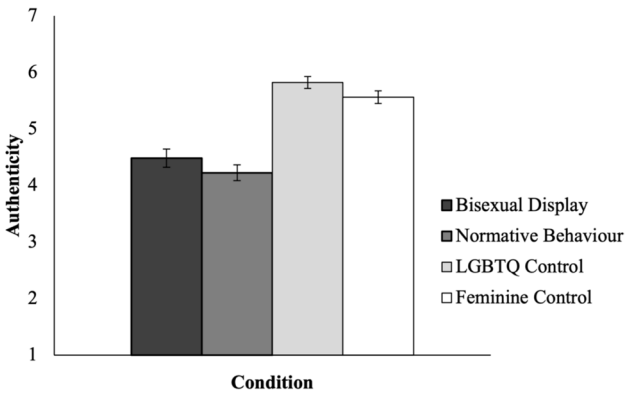

Fig. 2 Straight men's evaluations of authenticity by condition. Note: Error bars represent standard errors of the mean

For trustworthiness, a one-way ANOVA revealed that participants evaluated Rachel differently across conditions, $F(3, 374) = 3.36$, $p = .019$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. Post hoc comparisons using Tukey's HSD test indicated participants viewed Rachel as less trustworthy in the normative behavior condition ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 1.29$) when compared to the LGBTQ control condition ($M = 5.06$, $SD = 1.43$), $p = .050$, $d = 0.38$.

The one-way ANOVA for likability was not significant. There were no differences in participants' ratings of Rachel's likability across conditions, $F(3, 374) = 0.623$, $p = .599$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$. Likewise, one-way ANOVAs revealed no significant differences on participants' evaluations of interpersonal attraction, $F(3, 374) = 0.40$, $p = .752$, $\eta_p^2 = .00$; dating intentions, $F(3, 374) = 0.53$, $p = .663$, $\eta_p^2 = .00$; dating interest, $F(3, 374) = 0.60$, $p = .614$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$; or dating endorsement $F(3, 374) = 1.56$, $p = .200$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$, across conditions.

Participant ratings of authenticity and trustworthiness were positively correlated with each other, $r(376) = .65$, as were ratings of authenticity and likability, $r(376) = .54$, and likability and trustworthiness, $r(376) = .79$. Ratings of interpersonal attraction and dating interest, $r(376) = .84$; interpersonal attraction and dating intent, $r(376) = .80$; and dating intent and dating interest were also positively correlated, $r(376) = .89$. For this reason, we created an omnibus measure of romantic desirability that averaged participants' scores on interpersonal attraction, dating intent, and dating interest. A one-way ANOVA revealed no significant differences on participants' evaluations of the omnibus measure of romantic desirability, $F(3, 374) = 0.53$, $p = .662$, $\eta_p^2 = .00$. Ratings of interpersonal attraction and authenticity, $r(376) = .43$; interpersonal attraction and likability, $r(376) = .85$; and interpersonal attraction and trustworthiness were positively

Table 1 Descriptive statistics for Study 2

Outcome variable	Normative behavior—*M* (SD)	Bisexual display—*M* (SD)	LGBTQ control—*M* (SD)	Feminine control—*M* (SD)
Authenticity	4.21 (1.35)	4.48 (1.56)	5.82 (1.04)	5.56 (1.07)
Trustworthiness	4.54 (1.29)	4.59 (1.54)	5.06 (1.43)	4.98 (1.42)
Likability	4.80 (1.12)	4.70 (1.40)	4.95 (1.34)	4.85 (1.26)
Interpersonal attraction	5.36 (1.94)	5.30 (2.32)	5.58 (2.26)	5.56 (2.15)
Dating interest	3.65 (1.77)	3.55 (2.00)	3.85 (1.97)	3.87 (1.92)
Dating intentions	3.99 (1.88)	3.77 (1.94)	4.05 (1.98)	4.11 (1.84)
Dating endorsement	2.91 (1.11)	2.89 (1.28)	3.22 (1.26)	3.04 (1.22)

correlated, $r(376) = .68$. All correlations were significant at the $p < .001$ level.

Discussion

Results partially supported our hypotheses. Straight men rated the woman as less authentic when her dating profiles reflected a bisexual display compared to when her profiles advertised the same pictures and information to men and women. However, the hypothesis that profiles reflecting a bisexual display would also be rated as less likable, trustworthy, and romantically desirable was not supported. We also explored whether a bisexual woman would be evaluated differently depending on the exact nature of her inconsistent behavior profiles. Results from Study 2 showed that straight men evaluated the woman as equally authentic, trustworthy, likable, and romantically desirable when her profiles adhered to normative dating behaviors compared to when they reflected a bisexual display. This suggests that bisexual displays lead bisexual individuals to be perceived as inauthentic, untrustworthy, and unlikable due to their perceived inconsistency across situations, rather than their nonconformity to normative dating behaviors.

General Discussion

Bisexual people are stereotyped as inauthentic, and many engage in bisexual displays to feel authentic while navigating their complex dating environment. Evidence from two studies suggests that bisexual women's displays may cause them to be seen as less authentic. In Study 1, a woman who engaged in a bisexual display was considered least authentic, which was accompanied by decreases in perceived likability and trustworthiness. In Study 2, straight men also evaluated a woman as less authentic when she engaged in a bisexual display, but no less likable, trustworthy, or romantically desirable than bisexual women whose profiles presented consistent information to men and women. Interestingly, in Study 2, a bisexual woman whose profiles adhered to normative dating behaviors, appearing more feminine in profiles directed at men while emphasizing her LGBTQ+ identity in profiles directed at women, was viewed as equally authentic to one engaging in a bisexual display. This suggests that, from the perspective of straight men in the dating context, a woman's bisexual display is perceived as inauthentic primarily due to a lack of consistency in her interactions with men and women.

These findings illustrate an important issue that bisexual women face when attempting to feel seen. Bisexual displays are employed by bisexual women, a group of women who are already stereotyped as inauthentic relative to other sexual identity groups, to feel greater self-authenticity. Feeling authentic is positively tied to well-being and self-esteem (Hartman-Linck, 2014; Wickham, 2013). But if attempts to feel more authentic are actually viewed as signals of inauthenticity, it could be especially damaging for well-being, relationship quality, and romantic satisfaction (Brunell et al., 2010; Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Lutz et al., 2023; Rivera, 2019; Wickham, 2013). These results suggest that bisexual women who interact with straight men in the dating context may not be seen for their most authentic selves. If straight men simply rely on cues that signal consistency across situations to judge authenticity, they face a barrier to understanding how bisexual displays enhance bisexual women's authenticity and personal well-being. This has important implications for bisexual women's relationship quality and satisfaction when dating straight men, as not feeling seen by one's romantic partner can strain relationships (Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Lutz et al., 2023; Wickham, 2013).

Limitations and Future Directions

Limitations of this research can suggest fruitful avenues for future research. Authenticity is bound by cultural understandings of the self (Cross et al., 2003; Nisbett et al., 2001), but our participants only came from the USA and Canada. Individualistic cultures emphasize the importance of consistency for developing an authentic self. People who view their own behavior as consistent across situations report higher well-being and receive positive evaluations from others in individualistic cultures such as the USA, but they are evaluated less positively by members of collectivist cultures such as Korea (Sheldon et al., 1997; Suh, 2002). In collectivist cultures, individuals integrate themselves into social networks by adhering to social norms and positions within society, and the definition of the self is emphasized in terms of one's relation to others (Cross et al., 2003). When interacting with people who hold different relationships to the individual, people's behavior is expected to vary because different social norms and rules apply in different situations. Thus, inconsistency is not only expected, but welcomed. Future research is needed to examine how bisexual displays are evaluated by members of different cultures.

Bisexual displays are idiosyncratic, but to establish good internal validity, we used only one example of a bisexual display in this research. Specifically, participants learned about a woman who ostensibly chose to present herself as more traditionally feminine in terms of her appearance when interacting with women, and engaged in more assertive communication when interacting with men, in terms of not only providing information about herself but also making her LGBTQ+ identity more visible (Hartman, 2013; Hartman-Linck, 2014). However, these behaviors and choices are not representative of how all bisexual women engage in bisexual displays, nor do they necessarily reflect how bisexual women

interact in veridical dating contexts. Future work needs to examine more diverse representations of bisexual display, as well as to examine how bisexual display influences how authenticity is evaluated in more naturalistic settings.

Results from Study 2 revealed straight men's evaluations of a bisexual woman's romantic desirability did not differ regardless of whether she engaged in a bisexual display, adhered to more normative dating behavior, or remained consistent in her dating profiles seeking men and women. It is possible that the observed pattern comes from the fact that straight people, like gay and lesbian people, prefer to date those who share their sexual orientation (Ess et al., 2023). In this case, bisexual women might be less desirable than straight women, and variations in dating behavior would not have less of an effect on how straight men see them as a potential partner. Additionally, bisexual women are often objectified and fetishized by straight men (DeCapua, 2017; Yost & Thomas, 2012). If straight men are mostly concerned with how bisexual women can fulfill sexual fantasies, then the simple fact that she is bisexual might determine her desirability, and variations in her dating behavior might be irrelevant.

Related, that all participants in Study 2 were straight men is also a notable limitation. It is likely the case that people with different sexual and gender identities would evaluate the bisexual woman in our vignettes differently. Indeed, bisexual people are more interested in dating other bisexual people than straight people are, so variations in how authentic they view a bisexual woman might be more strongly reflected in evaluations of romantic desirability (Ess et al., 2023). Straight men are more likely to endorse heteronormative attitudes (Habarth, 2015), which reflect beliefs that heterosexuality is the most normal, natural, and superior sexual identity (Robinson, 2016). This may have affected their views on bisexual targets and evaluations of authenticity, which should be considered in future research. Also, bisexual people may be more familiar with the concept of a bisexual display, either from seeing other bisexual people or from doing it themselves, and might therefore be less likely to view a bisexual woman as inauthentic for engaging in one. Future work is needed to more inclusively examine participants who might be attracted to women, regardless of how they define their sexual orientation or gender identity.

The bisexual woman used in the mock dating profiles was a White, ostensibly cisgender woman. However, ethnicity and gender identity/presentation affect how people are perceived across a variety of dimensions in the dating context, adding to their experiences of discrimination (Bowleg, 2012; Doan Van et al., 2019; Katz-Wise et al., 2017). There is evidence that transgender and non-binary bisexual individuals face greater discrimination than their cisgender counterparts and that non-White people are more likely to be seen as "exotic" in dating contexts (Katz-Wise et al., 2017; Waring, 2013). Additionally, as shown in work on bicultural individuals (West et al., 2021), the behavior of people who hold two or more ethnic identities is evaluated differently depending on the aspects of their identity they choose to display. Additional research is needed to better understand how the intersection of multiple sociodemographic identities affects perceptions of bisexual people. This could not only include ethnicity and gender identity, but factors like body size and gender as well (Oswald & Matsick, 2023; Oswald et al., 2023).

Additionally, we focused on judgments of a bisexual woman. It would be interesting to see how bisexual people who do not identify as women are evaluated when engaged in bisexual displays. There is evidence that bisexual men and women are perceived differently, and perceptions are also affected by the gender of the perceiver (Herek, 2002; Yost & Thomas, 2012). For example, straight men hold more sexual prejudice toward bisexual men than straight women do, while they hold similar amounts of sexual prejudice toward bisexual women (Yost & Thomas, 2012). Future research could look at bisexual men's displays, as well as the displays of people whose gender identity is outside of the gender binary.

Finally, several design choices were made to maximize internal validity. However, this comes at the cost of slightly reduced external validity. It is likely that individuals learn about bisexual people's behavior in different ways than those presented here. For example, in the context of online dating, there is usually only one profile used to convey information about potential matches. However, we contend that the observed bias and related biases are worth understanding.

Conclusion

This work expands the bisexuality literature by advancing our understanding of how bisexual women are perceived when navigating the dating world. Often, research regarding bisexuality compares bisexual people to gay, lesbian, and/or straight people, which leaves little nuance for how bisexual people are perceived relative to each other when engaging in different dating behaviors. The current work compares bisexual women who engage in a bisexual display against those who do not, thereby providing a richer understanding of how bisexual women's authenticity is evaluated. Although bisexual people face a host of negative stereotypes in dating contexts due to their attraction to multiple genders, they find ways to feel their most authentic. Engaging in bisexual displays enhances bisexual women's feelings of authenticity, and even if their displays are misinterpreted by others, the personal meaning of display matters most for them (Hartman-Linck, 2014). This research offers preliminary evidence that, in navigating the complex dating landscape, bisexual women face a dual challenge within a culture that associates authenticity with consistency in behavior across contexts. They must contend with different social norms when dating men versus women and are further scrutinized for behaviors

that aid their pursuit of authenticity. From bisexual women, we can gain insight into navigating authenticity while facing conflicting pressures and recognize that acting and feeling authentic need not be so rigidly defined (Hammack & Manago, 2025).

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Data Availability De-identified data and Supplemental Online Materials for the studies can be found at https://osf.io/jez4y/overview?view_only=8303435ebd0c4721b8a94bfb5a798c6b.

Code Availability The code used for data analysis is available from the corresponding author upon request.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors report that there are no competing interests to declare.

Ethical Approval Approval was obtained from the Toronto Metropolitan University Ethics Board. The procedures used in this study adhere to the tenets of the Declaration of Helsinki. All mandatory laboratory health and safety procedures have been complied within the course of conducting the experimental work reported in this paper.

Consent to Participate All participants have given informed consent to participate in the research and publish their data.

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