



Dear John, I Love Jane: Women Write About Leaving Men for Women

Candace Walsh (Editor) , Laura Andre (Editor) , Lisa Diamond (Foreword)

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The new buzzword in female sexuality is “sexual fluidity”—the idea that for many women, sexual identity can shift over time, often in the direction of same-sex relationships. Examples abound in popular culture, from actress Cynthia Nixon, who left her male partner of 15 years to be with a woman, to writer and comedienne Carol Leifer, who divorced her husband for the same reason.

In a culture increasingly open to accepting this fluidity, *Dear John, I Love Jane* is a timely, fiercely candid exploration of female sexuality and personal choice. The book is comprised of essays written by a broad spectrum of women, including a number of well-known writers and personalities. Their stories are sometimes funny, sometimes painful—but always achingly honest—accounts of leaving a man for a woman, and the consequences of making such a choice.

Arousing, inspiring, bawdy, bold, and heartfelt, *Dear John, I Love Jane* is an engrossing reflection of a new era of female sexuality.

Dear John, I Love Jane: Women Write About Leaving Men for Women Details

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Lisa M. says

I have read this before. I also own a few books on this topic, and wrote a research paper on mixed-orientation marriages in college. I feel like I have some academic knowledge in the field.

As far as I know, this is the most contemporary book on this topic. There are books that were published in the 80s and 90s on it. While American culture is not exactly accepting of homosexuality at this point, it's a lot better than it used to be. This book tells drastically different stories than the others do.

Overall, the writing is good. It can be cheesy at times, though. The stories selected were relatively diverse in plot. Some women discover they are lesbians; the label does not apply to others. Some women stay with their husbands, some don't. Many of the men support the women when they come out.

What this collection lacks is a diversity of backgrounds. It seems that most of the writers are white; more people of color would have been welcomed. Most of the women are middle aged; more older people would have been welcomed. Lastly, very few stories mentioned religion -- fundamental Christianity, and Mormonism. I was disappointed that we didn't get more narratives from different religions. (The aforementioned books are great at diversity; everyone would be able to find themselves reflected in the pages.)

Overall, this book had good narratives that I think a lot of women can relate to (including myself.)

However, I didn't like the attitude of the women who wrote the Foreward, and the introduction. They were very selfish and wrote off past generations of lesbians/lesbian study as irrelevant to them, and thus useless. It was offensive and a turn off.

kory. says

I really thought I was going to love this. I mean, how can a book go wrong when it has that title? Well...

Trigger/content warnings for ableism, homophobia/ lesbophobia; internalized and otherwise, anti-queer hate crimes, anti-queer slurs, biphobia (multisexual ignorance/erasure in general), sexism and misogyny, suicidal ideation, mentions of depression and anxiety, slut shaming, aphobia, transphobic language,

For all the talk about sexual fluidity in the introduction/foreward, this is just a collection of stories about women who thought they were/tried to be straight before realizing/accepting they're gay and women who cheated on their husbands/boyfriends with women. That's really all this is. It's not some much needed exploration of sexual fluidity in women. Adulterous women who go from straight to gay is not the take on sexual fluidity in women that anyone needs or wants.

In the twenty-seven stories, bisexuality is mentioned as a passing thought before settling on gayness,

incorrectly defined as "*equal desire for men and women*", and there's some casual multisexual erasure throughout all stories. Only one woman said she "guesses" she considers herself bisexual, but that "open" is more accurate. There is not a single story in this book from a woman who proudly and firmly identifies as bisexual or pansexual. Not one. The editors received over 100 stories for this book, and you're telling me that not one of them was something other than "I was straight and now I'm gay" and "I had an affair with a woman while married to/dating a man"? One woman said that once she was dating a woman with no men around they could "*go to pride and everything*", which feels very dismissive and invalidating to queer women who are dating men. They do exist and are valid and have every right to be at pride events.

Other than bisexuality being incorrectly defined, one woman says she's attracted to all kinds of people, not just women, but then bitches about how lesbians don't accept her as one of them and says that if the fact that she's married to a woman who she has sex with and kids with isn't "lesbian enough" then nothing will be. And like...that's not how it works. Lesbian doesn't mean a woman living with/married to/having sex with/parenting kids with another woman, it means a woman who is exclusively attracted to women. And going off that woman's *own description* of her attraction a page before she whines about mean lesbians not accepting her, she isn't a lesbian?

Another woman talks about having told a support group that she doesn't feel gay, she just fell in love with a woman, and the women in the group smiled and said "*we call women like you 'dykelings*" which then made the woman think, "*maybe I just hadn't evolved into a full-fledged dyke yet.*" And while that might've been fine and dandy for her, that kind of narrative is harmful. Not every woman who falls for a woman after having thought they were straight is a lesbian, not every one of those women who insist they aren't gay just haven't realized or accepted their gayness yet. **MULTISEXUALITY EXISTS!** Not. All. Queer. Women. Are. Lesbians.

Along with the completely binary view of sexuality, this book is very allocis. One woman mentions how a woman she knew dated "*a genderqueer*" which is about as much non-binary people are acknowledged in this book, and is also poorly worded. There are no trans women, and the term "*transgendered*" is used. The book is very focused on sexual attraction and sex. A lot of "I've never had sex with a woman so I don't know for sure" and "now that I've had sex with a woman, I'm 100% gay" and "I enjoyed sex with men so there was no reason to think I was gay" and similar things like that throughout the stories. And a lot of conflating romantic and sexual attraction, and equating behavior to identity. And I think maybe one or two women mention being women of color in their stories. So, this isn't a very diverse collection of stories, by any means.

There's a lot of stereotypes. The women repeat things like, "well in hindsight, obviously I was gay because I had a certain style and liked certain music!" as if anything but your attraction determines your sexuality. A lot of stereotypical depictions of lesbians.

There's a lot of harmful ideas about being queer in this book. Such as one's queerness being "*theoretical*" if they haven't been with someone of the same gender, having to "*earn*" the use of queer labels, sexuality being a preference or choice, the gold star lesbian narrative was expressed as a positive thing, straight passing privilege being a legitimate thing, queer being the opposite of straight, it being "*rare*" to encounter queerphobia on levels such as parents disowning queer kids, and according to this book queer women can either identify as lesbians or not want a label at all.

It just doesn't feel groundbreaking, which the introduction/foreward hyped it up to be. I'm not going to give it some slack considering it was published in 2010, because that's saying queer women who aren't allocis lesbians have to wait their turn to be acknowledged, and that's just not how it works. A collection of essays written by a very similar group of allocis lesbians about cheating on their male partners and talking about

bisexuality as a passing thought or state of limbo before accepting your gayness as opposed to a legitimate whole sexuality, if acknowledging it at all, is not groundbreaking in any sense, in any year, whatsoever. Queer women who are not allocis lesbians existed when this book was published, so there is no reason for them to not be included.

Other things I didn't like:

- "*Friend zone*" and "*more than friends*"
- "*Straight/lesbian relationship*" and "*lesbian/straight family*" and "*straight sex*"
- "*Sex was meant to cement relationships*"
- "*It was not okay to make racist jokes, but it was acceptable to make jokes where the punch line had to do with people being gay.*"
- "*She identifies as a woman, as a lesbian, but I don't think of her in gendered terms.*"
- One woman describes how she relentlessly pursued her current wife by ignoring her when she said she wasn't interested until she gave in which is fucking gross and toxic.
- "Heterosexual privilege" is mentioned SO MANY TIMES in this book that it makes me wonder if the editors forced it into nearly every story or made it a requirement for having your story featured. I don't really believe so many women who have such a barely there grasp on being queer sit around thinking about heterosexual privilege, whether it's in hindsight or not. It just feels forced. And often misused, as queer women dating men are said to have it, and like...that's not how it works. A queer woman dating a man doesn't have "heterosexual privilege" because she isn't heterosexual.

So, yeah. Big old nope nope nope.

Alex says

Dear John, I Love Jane was eye-opening but left quite a bit of pain to be desired. Forgive the possibly sadomasochistic oxymoron, as pain rarely falls under the category of desirable. Nevertheless, the book lacks the naturally suggested heartache — even destruction — in the stories of women leaving behind devoted partners and choosing lovers of a completely different orientation, often in addition to leaving children and established families.

Despite the assumed tragedy in such stories, most of the anthology seemed to repeat the same one-sided anecdote of the sexually unsatisfied, arguably inexperienced women who married too young before finding new love — not necessarily just novel love — with a cast of interesting female characters. It would have been a more thorough picture of their experiences though, to include the men's stories, the husbands' stories. The dissolution of a family, especially one with young children or adult children, is not a thing to ignore. Yet I found it sorely untouched in this selection. Some of the pain of lost love, the inconvenience of dissolving a heavily financial and codependent arrangement like marriage, certainly dusts the pages. But not enough.

Certainly, the coming-of-age inherent in coming out as an older adult, rather than as an adolescent, rings with personal discovery, the beauty of being born again and finding identity. That's really what this book was about. It does a fantastic job of painting striking, even erotic images of female bi- and homosexuality. But the deeper significance of finding that self-actualization *amid* family crisis was completely left out. It would be great to someday see a version of this anthology from male writers whose partners left their married families for a different sexuality.

Miri says

I loved this. It was so affirming.

My one little quibble is that one of the authors refers to herself proudly as a "gold star lesbian" (for those not in the know, it's a somewhat self-aggrandizing term used by lesbians who have never in their lives had sex/relationships with men). Considering that this is a book about *women who leave men for other women*, which is a demographic that's often shamed and shunned by these so-called "gold star lesbians," the use of that term seems really out of place in this book and I think the editors should've either edited it, or included a different essay instead (they mention that they had way more submissions than they could accept). But that was one small crappy paragraph out of a whole book of amazing essays.

Marlene says

"I won't insult my past self by saying I was in denial or confused. I am a textbook example of the fluidity of sexuality." - From the book. I'm someone who was surprised to discover that I fell in love with and desired women. It has been an equally surprising discovery to recognize and admit to myself that I also desire and fall in love with men. I loathe labels but I constantly find myself searching for the right one. So, it was refreshing to read this book of stories on what really amounts to fluidity along this spectrum: women who are not content to simply pick one gender but are trying to navigate a course of love regardless of gender.

And so I find I have run out of fucks to give with people for whom gender as a construct is a critical requirement for love. I simply cannot see gender anymore as a basis for love. Perhaps this is because I have been alone for so long. Perhaps I am simply tired of being boxed in. But I sense that my own box has kept me from love, and in some way that box has been defined by gender and my need to gain approval from one group or the other.

This book talks deeply - through personal stories - about why people come together through such good intentions and how staying connected in a marriage is such hard work. So there's more here than just women falling for women. Instead, these stories are more about women finding love and choosing love.

This is not erotica. The editors have put together real stories of real marriages where love was found outside and, in some cases, inside the marriage. There are no easy Hollywood endings: just real people trying to work things out as best they can.

Good stuff. I highly recommend. It's hard to find books like this.

Rachel says

I'm biased because my story is in this book!lol

It's a bit disheartening to read that some found the book boring because these are true stories of people's

lives. Everyday is not like a movie. You don't walk down the street with a theme song playing! But, everyone is entitled to their opinion.

That said, I had the great fortune to meet a couple of the authors and they were just fascinating as their essays. This book is a timely look at what is happening for a lot of women - we are starting to feel freer to become who really are. As anyone who has come out knows, "coming out" is a never ending process. So, our relationships with family ebb and flow, our children come to learn how to process that Mom is the same, yet different, our husbands/boyfriends mourn the loss of their wife yet figure out whether they can continue to be friendly/friends with the woman that they fell in love with.

This book encapsulated a special time in my life and I believe that many women who are struggling and questioning need a book like this - set in current times.

I met a woman at a book reading who snuck out of her home and appeared to be afraid of being followed by her husband, but wanted to meet me just to say thank you for writing my story because in telling my story, I was telling hers too. I was moved and that encounter led me to know that this book is vital and important. I'm very proud of it.

CaseyTheCanadianLesbrarian says

I had heard a lot of praise for *Dear John, I Love Jane: Women Write About Leaving Men for Women* (edited by Candace Walsh and Laura Andre) by the time I finally picked it up. So, I was expecting good things. This book, however, managed to actually exceed my expectations. It was so refreshing to read an entire book filled with a different kind of coming out story. I've never identified with the "I've always known", or the "I was a gender non-conforming kid so it figures", or the "I fell in love with a girl when I was five" stories. It's not that those stories aren't valid in their own right. But they never felt representative of my experience. It turns out a lot of other women felt the same way. *Dear John I Love Jane* has a few pieces where I was like, oh my god, this could totally be about me. It was so amazing to read and feel like, yes, this is my kind of queerness.

There's a huge range of different stories even within this anthology. There are women who were never really happy with men. There are women who've only really been attracted to one woman. There are women in this book who married men in good faith, and were completely blindsided by their later (sometimes exclusive) attraction to women. There are some women who open up their relationships with men to date women at the same time. There's even one woman in here who stays married to her husband after coming out as a lesbian. There are women who identify as bi, lesbian, queer, and some who are uncomfortable labelling or naming their sexualities at all. Lots of the women in the book have children. There is one woman who falls in love with a woman for the first time at age sixty-nine. Sixty-nine!! This diversity of experience aside, though, the vast majority of the women whose stories were in the book are white, and I would really have liked to have seen more women of colour, as well as women from different class backgrounds.

It was awesome to see women questioning and attacking conventional understandings of sexual orientation—that model that's built for gay men that just doesn't seem to do a lot of LBQ women justice. One woman writes about her lack of "brazen knowledge about" her sexuality; taught that she would be sure if she was queer, she felt paralyzed because she didn't know for certain. Another compares her newfound feelings for women as an acquired taste for fancy espresso when she used to slurp down drip coffee from a styrofoam cup without thought. Another blames Angelina Jolie's lips. One woman admits thinking that she

just wasn't that kind of girl, until she realized she was that kind of girl, but for "andro-butchy" girls. Another recounts her mother's reaction to her coming out as "JESUS CHRIST! I thought you were going to tell me you had cancer. I don't give a shit if you are a lesbian." Ha ha.

I highly, highly recommend this collection. Not only did I love the content, I thought the majority of the pieces were really well written. I think Dear John I Love Jane is especially an important read for queer women whose stories are of the "I've always known" variety and for folks who need to confront their biphobia (there are an unfortunate number of lesbians who need to work on this). I'll just leave you with this last awesome quotation, from Amelia Sauter: "You won't find me rewriting history to say that I was gay all along. I was straight. Now I am gay... I always thought I couldn't change. I was wrong and that freaks out a lot of people who are scared to imagine that one day everything they think is true and permanent could change. I found my knight in shining armour, and she's a girl."

Nikki Fordey says

This book billed itself as something different, but I was kind of bored. The stories were very similar and I stopped caring. Sometimes it just seemed strange- there just wasn't enough tension and drama. I wanted to know more about what it was like for a marriage to dissolve, for children to acclimate to their mother being a lesbian, to be confident in what you were feeling. Instead, story after story followed the "I was married, then I wasn't and now I'm with this amazing woman and we'll be happy together forever!" I understand that when people are writing about their own lives they are limited by the truth. But I just didn't find these stories compelling and I had to force myself to finish the collection. I was turned off by the only casual mentions of bisexuality, that for almost all of these women it was never a real possibility, even though they clearly had sexual and emotional attachments to both men and women. It seemed like the overall message was that "gay" can sneak up on anyone and you have to be open to it no matter when it happens and who it might hurt. Maybe I'm just getting defensive because of my own struggles with my sexuality. Bottom line- it was difficult for me to read this book. It made me uncomfortable and at times angry. I don't think that was the intention of the people who put the collection together. It all just seemed a bit too much of woe is me and not enough admitting their own mistakes and shortcomings. I purchased this book for 99 cents on amazon for my kindle and it was worth that much as it is different from most other things I have read. If you want to take a chance on this, I suggest you pay the minimum amount you can.

Janiece says

It was good to read this collection of many women's accounts of being attracted to women after being attracted to men. While there were similarities across the board, there were a lot of differences with each woman's story, too.

Some of the writers (almost all of whom are from the US) had literally never been sexually attracted to women before whatsoever, and it all came as a bolt from the blue. Others always had, but they married men despite this, for a variety of reasons. Some women awakened politically as well as sexually, rejecting the whole white picket fence, two kids and a dog paradigm. Others wanted to continue living exactly that life: but just with a woman in the place of a man. It confirmed for me the inherent fluidity and individuality of human sexuality, defying a binary notion and neat labels.

However, the writing style of a lot of it was a bit much for me, to be honest. Many of the writers were prone to gushings of sentimentality, florid metaphors, and hackneyed clichés: just as I was thinking it had the atmosphere of an American talk show, one of the writers went on to say that she and her partner had told their story on Oprah. I rest my case.

If you are interested in human sexuality, particularly around sexual orientation, you will likely find this worth reading. It's great that stories like this are out there, and I can imagine many of them being useful to other women who may be going through similar.

Loren Olson says

Much of what has been written about coming out centers on the struggle of late adolescence and early adulthood. The focus on my research has been men who come out in midlife. I purposely chose to ignore women in order to limit the scope of my work. So when I saw this book, I was curious to know if women who come out in mid-life have experiences similar to men who come out after having lived a heterosexual life.

After reading this book, I found a number of parallels:

1. Many have been married and did so in good faith. Marriage was not a shield they hid behind, but something they were totally committed to.
2. Many delayed their coming out after recognizing -- for the first time -- that they had powerful same sex attractions.
3. Although they had satisfying sex lives with their heterosexual partners, after experiencing sex with a same sex partner, they discovered a whole new level of physical and sexual intimacy they had not previously known
4. Many had difficulty identifying with the gay community and in many cases they felt some antipathy from the LGBT community.
5. Although LBGT demand that we live "authentic" lives, often what they mean is "authentic in terms of sexual orientation," with a disregard for the fact that "authenticity" might mean a commitment to traditional family values.
6. Coming out may be prolonged due to a reluctance to give up "heterosexual privilege," thus remaining in marriages.
7. Some men/women are willing to accept a polyamorous, same-sex lover in the context of preserving a marriage.

There are a couple of significant differences:

1. One of the ideas discussed is the "fluidity" of women's sexuality. I have not found that to be true for men. In my experience men seem to become more exclusively homosexual over their lifetimes. Very few move in the other direction, and of course, the idea of whether or not men can become more heterosexual through reparative therapy is heatedly debated.
2. The decision about self-identifying as a lesbian also engages political discussions about the oppression of women. Women seem to become free by coming out, not only because of sexual authenticity, but from freeing themselves from expectations about gender. Men who come out late have not only experienced "heterosexual privilege, but masculine privilege, so their coming out lacks those political elements.

One thing appears to be true for both men and women who come out in mid-life is that the change is not one that occurs voluntarily. The thought of giving up the "advantages" of being heterosexual can make the choice to come out very difficult.

I am interested to hear others perspectives.

Loren Olson

Erika says

So, so good. And that's saying a lot because I usually dislike essay compilations. Jeanette Leblanc is exquisite, Meredith Maran is hilarious and so right on...all of them are worth reading and impossible to put down.

Joy says

I picked up this book during the summer Kindle sale at Amazon, both because it was cheap and because the subject matter is something new for me. As can be garnered from the title, this book is about women who came to love women later in life, often after having been in good relationships with men, sometimes married and with children. There are some very good stories in here, encompassing as wide a range of experience as possible given the limited subject. The most powerful stories, to me at least, were those where the husband/boyfriend supported his lady in love and respect as she learned about her new preferences, and some of these stories have terribly sweet endings. Many of the women write about two themes, namely the issue of "heterosexual privilege" that they had originally and then lost upon becoming a lesbian, and the issue of "not lesbian enough" as they struggled to find acceptance from other gay women as they moved forward with their choice. I did find that the book was a little too long, to be honest - I think that several stories could have been cut out due to similarities with others, and that would have made the remaining material stronger. On the other hand, I'm not the target audience for the book, which the editors state was to share these "later in life" coming-out stories with others who might be looking for shared experiences. It's definitely an interesting read and a new angle to consider about how sexuality and definitions can shape a person's life, even when they change at age 30, age 40, or even beyond.

Mandy says

I was very excited to find this book at my library as I was doing one of my routine sweeps of the "homosexual shelf." I'd spent hours there looking for just one book that would speak to what I was going through. I'd read several books about lesbian coming out stories, trying to find myself in them, but repeatedly read stories of young girls knowing they were different from early on. That wasn't my experience and I was starting to think I was crazy or completely unique in my situation. And then I found this, and it was like the essays were compiled just for me. Every single one of them had bits that I could have written. Realizing you need to be with a woman after nine years of marriage is hard. Realizing you're not the only one to have ever experienced it makes it a little bit easier.

Isobel says

As in any anthology, some of the essays in this collection are better than others. Some are so full of hateful language toward other lesbians (one author referred to "creatures" with hairy upper lips and "rhombus-shaped bodies") that I was put off. You'd think that people seeking acceptance and understanding from the world would not be so shallow and dismissive of others. Some of these essays really reek of what I can only describe as "femme privilege." Unsettling.

Emily Rhoads says

I read a review of this book that said it had too many essays in it, that the editors were not editorial enough. I couldn't disagree more. Every single essay in this book resonated with me in some way. The fluidity of sexuality is explored from every point of view in this collection of essays about women realizing later in life that they love women. Some realize they were lesbians all along, and some realize it's not black and white and that maybe it's just a particular woman they are in love with. This book is great, if you are queer, questioning, an ally, or just want to read some beautiful, at times heartbreak, collection of stories about love.
