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# A guide to spotting and avoiding 'wokefishing' in dating

Building a potential relationship on a foundation of lies is bound to end in tears.

By MARIANNE ELOISE ~ JAN 8, 2021



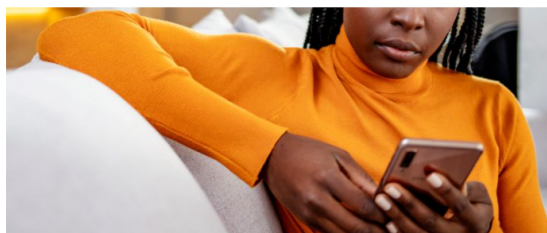
We see it on dating app bios all the time: “NO terfs”, “NO racists”. Many of us make our political stance clear from the outset, refusing to date across the political spectrum. But if someone on the other side wants a shot, what do they do? Well, it turns out, many will pretend to be more progressive than they are in an effort to reel us in. And this dating practice is so common that a new term, “wokefishing”, has been coined to describe it.

Named by *VICE*'s Serena Smith, memes around the phenomenon have also been making the rounds. And recent viral video on Twitter shows the natural endpoint of politically divided dating: (mostly) men will position themselves as more progressive than they are in order to get on your good side. In the video, [Will Hislop](#) does an all-too-familiar impression of a “feminist fuckboy on a date,” reading Maya Angelou and claiming “chivalry is misogyny” to get out of paying. It's too! Real!

So here's what you need to know about wokefishing, how to spot the red flags, and why it matters.

## What is wokefishing?

Essentially, it's anyone who cosplays as caring about the same political issues as you (aka they act woke) in order to reel you in. The word ‘wokefishing’ is a play on ‘catfish’ and was coined by Serena Smith in a piece for *VICE* that investigates all of the ways being wokefished can go downhill. It then snowballed, with even the *Daily Mail* asking “have YOU been wokefished?” as if that's something that concerns literally even a single person in their readership.





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Love Coach [Sophie Thomas](#) says that, while the term is new, relational manipulation is "as old as humanity". "Manipulators will tend to gain control by pretending to be everything you always wanted - that includes seemingly aligning to what you care about - until they have you under their spell and the façade shatters."

In 2021, with tensions rising, few of us feel comfortable dating across the so-called political divide. According to a survey by [Match](#) earlier this year, more than half of singles believe it isn't possible to date someone with different political views, up from around a third in 2012. A similar survey by OkCupid saw an 187% increase in political mentions on profiles between 2017 and 2018, a trend that continues, and one that's more common in women - 72% of woman-identifying respondents said that they could not date people with strong political opinions that opposed [their own](#).

The reasons for this are obvious: for younger generations, politics is far less of a taboo topic than it was for our parents, and it's one that matters to us. We are more politically educated, more impacted by politics, and more aware of intersectionality and other issues. Last year in particular, issues surrounding Black Lives Matter, the pandemic and the American election have tangible impacts on people's lives, and it's understandable that we wouldn't want to spend time with anyone whose views oppose ours or infringe on our rights.



### What are the red flags of wokefishing?

It can be a variety of things: someone claiming to be a feminist, or anti-racist, or vegan, or something else that aligns with your beliefs isn't necessarily lying or not heavily invested in fighting for justice in that area. Someone who upfront espouses their feminist ideals in their dating bio or offers you woman-oriented book recommendations is definitely cringy, but they could just mean well.

Instead, look for other signs that they might not 100% stand by their views: Do they claim to be a feminist, but then reel off pretty shitty, non-feminist views? Do they claim to fight racism, but actually just seem to fetishise people of colour? Do they talk over you on issues that actually affect you but not them?

**"Any kind of deceit within a dating context is ultimately fucked up"**

Dating and relationship expert [Sarah Louise Ryan](#) says that there are a few easy ways to spot red flags. "If you hear for example casual racism from someone who claims to be progressive and interested in equality and human rights issues, or perhaps it's someone who claims to be a humanitarian but then argues about nature or nurture for human beings who have less than others in the world."

Above all, though, Sarah believes you should trust your gut. "Do you trust this person? How is being around this person making you feel? Do you trust them? If your gut is saying you do not trust them then it will be hard to build on anything from there."



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### Why does it matter?

It matters because any kind of deceit within a dating context is ultimately fucked up. If someone overstates their achievements or pretends to love a book that you do to show off to you on the first date, that's not necessarily deception or anything more than boyish exaggeration. In fact, we all do it when we like someone and want to seem cool, whether in a romantic situation or not.

**"Building a potential relationship on a foundation of lies is bound to end in tears"**

But taking the thing that matters most to you - your politics or your identity - and pretending to also give a shit about it in order to have sex with you at a time when politics and activism matter more than ever is uniquely messy. Building a potential relationship on a foundation of lies is bound to end in tears one way or another. Wokefishing in particular is on the rise because, according to Sarah, the world is changing. "Much needed conversations are being had about race, the planet, being kind to others and political change globally, meaning that people feel pressure to conform to said conversations." Basically, some people know that they aren't getting any if they don't pretend to care: so they *lie*.

Dating and relationship coach [Kate Mansfield](#) agrees that wokefishing, and deceit more widely, is dangerous. "One of the reasons that so many relationships fail is due to people pretending to be someone that they are not, but unfortunately longer term it will come out as incompatibility," she says, adding that relationships built on distrust will fail. Sarah adds that it can have long-term psychological damage for the victim, too. "Those who have been on the receiving end of the masquerade that is wokefishing can begin to doubt themselves," she says, comparing the feeling to [gaslighting](#).



SAVANNA OGBURN / REFINERY29 FOR GETTY IMAGES

**What can you do to avoid being wokefished?**

Talk, talk, talk! Most things in this world could be solved by communicating, and this is no exception. If someone seems to be faltering or lying about an issue, ask them outright what their thoughts are on it. If someone is skirting around how they voted, ask them to their face – they're unlikely to be able to lie if you just ask. Having real, meaningful, lengthy conversations with people before you meet is an easy way to determine whether their politically "woke" chat-up line or bio is cringey but truthful, or a sleight of hand designed to get you in bed. Decide where your line is, and if you feel uncomfortable in any way, just leave. No mediocre sex with a person who claims to read Germaine Greer or attend protests is worth your discomfort.

Sophie adds, too, that not rushing into anything and trusting yourself will help. "If you think someone is pretending to be someone or something else my advice is to slow it right down, date other people and when you feel sure, end the relationship." Authentic relationships build with time, and if you're not 100% on someone, pull back.

**When is a wokefish not a wokefish?**

When it doesn't matter to you. If someone says that they're vegan but you find out that they occasionally eat a box of fried chicken when they're very drunk or very sad, they're not necessarily wokefishing you - they're just human.

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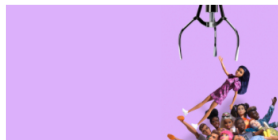
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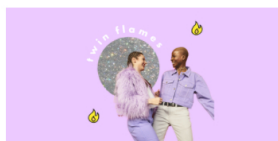
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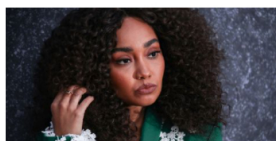
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