

## **Kissing a transgender woman doesn't make you less of a man**

*Why is it so hard for cisgender men to admit that transgender women are women?*

On a night out with a date, the conversation took a rather disappointing turn. The 23-year-old white, British/Italian in front of me went on to say that he had no problems with gay people. In fact, he nurtures great homosexual friendships, but he can't tolerate transgender women. Apparently, a couple of his mates have been "traumatized" by talking to female-looking individuals in nightclubs that turn out not to be "real women". He tries to convince me that his friends were victims of assault because they were tricked into "kissing a woman that was born a man" unknowingly. As I expected, he went on to say how science and mother nature have proven that transgenderism is absurd.

My failed date seemed to be a defender of the heteronormative standards targeting specifically the T out of the LGBTQIA+ community. On Twitter, the hashtag [#TransWomenAreConMen](#) is currently trending in the United Kingdom, spreading a hateful dialogue on how there are only two scientifically defined genders, female and male, and everything else should be considered "[mental disorders.](#)" It isn't any surprise that conservatism continues to profit from scientific claims to invalidate the rights of transgender people - a constant effort to remove them from public life. However, it's high time cisgender men (a "cis-gendered" individual is one whose gender identity corresponds to the gender they were born with) understood their problem with transgender women says much more about their toxic masculinity than trans women themselves.

The slightest reference to queerness is enough to hurt the so acclaimed – and ultimately fragile – heterosexual masculinity. Marco Berger's provocative and discomfiting drama *Horseplay (Los agitadores)* depicts this with perfection. In the film, Artur (Iván Masliah) invites a bunch of young men to his luxury villa over Christmas break. The scenario is playful and unpredictably erotic: the group of straight men can't help but engage in increasingly sexually charged pranks on each other. From fooling around to setting up explicit photos of homosexual engagement between themselves, the joke is about how gay they can pretend to be - hilarious. One of the men is challenged when he thinks that accepting a follow request from a gay man on social media might implicate

him as queer - which is unacceptable for him and his comrades. The masculinity on display is shown to be fearful and precarious.

"The majority of straight men are worried about what society thinks of them if they date a trans woman," Miss SaHHara, a transgender woman who works as a model and songwriter, [told the BBC](#). Samantha Lux, digital creator and trans activist, opens up in her [Is Not Dating Trans People Transphobic?](#) video that guys with whom she was romantically involved were incapable of acknowledging their relationship because they "Couldn't get over this sense of shame" and "Fear of being judged by their friends or family" for being attracted to a transgender woman. One of the most outrageous arguments I hear from people is that trans women should disclose their transness to avoid manipulating a man's sexuality. As if, just like magic, having sex with a trans woman would make a straight man gay. Nonsense.

Christian and Matilda, a cisgender man and a transgender woman, respectively, share how the couple is often trolled by internet users calling them out as having a "gay relationship, on [Truly's YouTube channel](#) . "They're always referring to you [Christian] as gay, which makes no sense," says Matilda. So, what happens is that labeling men who are attracted to transgender females as gay emasculates and distances them from men who don't want to endure the stigma that these men face. Laverne Cox, the *Orange Is the New Black* star and transgender advocate, explained how this issue had affected her and other trans women over the years: "Womanhood of trans women is often disavowed, that a lot of people don't see trans women as women, and so the men who are attracted to women, people think they're gay," she said in an interview for "[The Ellen DeGeneres Show](#)".

A favorite fallacy used against trans women is that they are "**deceptive sexual predators**" for indistinguishably looking like cisgender women and tricking men into spending the night with them. Many argue that coming out about being transgender in the first date is best practice for "consent" and "preference" reasons. However, this pretext for honesty could also be transphobia if you think about. "There are hormonal sweet spots where trans women can transition and be effectively indistinguishable at a certain level from cisgender women," Dr. Liadh Timmins, a specialist in sexual

orientation and gender identity at King's College London, told the [BBC](#). "So being unwilling to date on the basis of someone being trans, rather than on the basis of individual stimuli is something I would personally call transphobic."

Also, disclosure right off the bat can come with deadly consequences for transgender women. "When a man is towering over you, making sexual advances, you might be in a very precarious situation where you might be killed if you say that you are trans," warns Kat Blaque, an American political YouTuber and trans activist, in a video where she shares her personal experience. In an attempt to victimize themselves, men invoke the "trans panic" defense to justify their violent behavior towards trans women - an excuse often used in court for the murders of transgender people.

Similarly, calling a consensual kiss an assault is also a fruit of this straight male anxiety. What we need desperately is for cisgender men, including my unsuccessful date and his lads, to dismantle toxic masculinity and erase this outdated and hurtful stigma that transgender women are males and that straight men shouldn't be attracted to them if they want to be considered 'man enough' – whatever that means.