

I Am The Transsexual Your Boyfriend Wants to Be With: On Thought Catalog's Transphobia Problem

By Guest

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Abstract

I wake up, like any other woman, run my fingers through my long, bed-head hair, wishing I could stay asleep, and go to pour some cereal and coffee for breakfast. I decided to check my Twitter and my Facebook page, and in my feed, I see a Thought Catalog post that looks interesting. I click, I read, [...]

Article

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This has been a fairly accurate description of many mornings that I have spent before school or work, containing incredibly mundane experiences that even excluding my perspective as that as a woman are entirely relatable to more or less anyone reading them. That is why I was shocked to stumble across the piece published by Thought Catalog entitled “I Think My Boyfriend Wants To Be With A Transsexual” In which the author (who was brave enough to hide behind a veil of anonymity) takes pride in referring to trans people not only incorrectly (referring to trans women as transsexual men) but as “things.”

“I wonder if you had leveled with me about your intrigue with these men who look like women, or women with the parts of men, I wouldn’t be so scared. Scared of not knowing you, of life as the fool who blindly trusts while you meet escorts, the partner who will never understand you or your fascination with what I cruelly call “things.”

At least she had the dignity to acknowledge that it just MIGHT be a bit more proper to refer to trans women as women (albeit with unnecessary qualifiers which attach sexual dimorphism, itself not always a reality, inextricably to gender identity). I read on as she described her horror at her “otherwise straight” boyfriend being attracted to...women. The author continues to fish for sympathy through meandering paragraphs musing on the ubiquity of porn in society for several more vapid stanzas as she puts on full display her contempt for trans women, who she not only views as inferior women, but inferior human beings.

Don’t get me wrong. Trans fetishization is creepy. I don’t like to be thought of as anyone’s fetish, and the porn industry is certainly not kind to us. Slurs (that the author uses) like “tranny” and

“shemale” are common porn descriptors for a genre in which the objective is titillation at our objectification and humiliation. I think the author had a shitty boyfriend, and I am not going to dispute that. It’s beside the point.

The point is not only does her article reflect and reinforce harmful attitudes about trans women, but cis women as well, and those attitudes are the same ones that get us as women (trans or cis, but especially trans women and ESPECIALLY trans women of color) killed,, at the very least elevating our risk of being victims of sexual violence.

Her placement of women into hierarchies based on their socially determined fuckability (subjective as it may be) mirrors the sexist structure in place which places a woman’s worth on their sexual attractiveness to men. In a way, her hierarchical sexist thinking is fueling the exact same attitudes internalized by her boyfriend which would cause him to view his relationship with the author as dispensable in favor of seeking fleeting sexual satisfaction through his fetish for women that he objectifies. Take note, men’s rights activists, this is what it means to say that women can perpetuate sexism as well.

It also perpetuates the idea that we as trans women are valid only in our measure of fuckability to men. I say this as a trans woman who has a great deal of conditional privilege - I am read as cisgender by everyone that I come in contact with. Many times, people are shocked to learn that I am transgender. I happen to be judged as conventionally attractive for a woman, and I get quite a bit of attention from men. I know men want me. This should be totally irrelevant in whether or not I, or anyone else is seen as being valid in our claim to femininity, and while I am privileged conditionally as far as my looks are concerned, I at the same time know that with the knowledge of my biology, that privilege goes away. Even if someone knows that I am trans and still finds me attractive, I have to be skeptical of their motivations for that attraction, with the very real possibility that they are a trans fetishist, like the author’s boyfriend. I’m no stranger to that attraction.

For myself, honestly, I don’t care if someone thinks I’m not fully female. I don’t care if someone refers to me as a “thing”. I don’t need their validation to know who I am and I am immensely privileged in being a white trans woman - even at the prospect of seeking men for sexual or romantic relationships, that alone places me at a much lower risk of being killed as a result.

What I worry about is the young trans woman who is confused, who is questioning her identity, who is where I once was, who is reading Thought Catalog for advice only to stumble across an article in which the person giving that advice tells her that she is not an equal human being and should accept being a “thing”. What I worry about is the people who read this article and actually do sympathize with the author and accept our sexual fetishization and dehumanization as a given. What I worry about are the resulting effects of these harmful attitudes, legitimized by a popular internet site publishing them and elevating them into the mainstream.

What I care about is girls like me being seen as who we are and not being attacked in the places where we go to seek refuge when we need it. And that is why Thought Catalog should listen to people when they say their posts are problematic rather than doubling down and spotlighting them.

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