



Trans men loving gay men loving trans men

"Despite my physical status — I've been on hormones for over seven years and have had only chest surgery — many gay men are interested in sex with me," says trans man Evan McCraney. "It becomes easy to weed out those who want to try it as a fetish and those who are genuine."

"I've met a lot of amazing, open-minded men — who are socially aware, and who treat me as the guy I am: an equal in a queer men's world, regardless of my history and my body."

More and more trans men are coming out as gay and seeking other men as partners. It's easier than it used to be, says trans man Mike Hernandez, an author who has written extensively on trans issues. A rugged, bearded daddy, Hernandez has seen a lot of changes since he began transitioning in 1990. He says it was rare back then for trans guys to be open about same-sex attraction.

"The expectation was that we'd transition, marry a woman, adopt kids or have our partners artificially inseminated, then blend into the mainstream," says Hernandez. "It was taboo for a trans man to have a relationship or be sexually involved with another trans man."

While Toronto's queer women's scene has largely welcomed trans men (community events including the annual Dyke March and women's bathhouse parties are advertised as welcoming to women and all trans people) local queer men's acceptance of trans men varies. Many at the baths and other men's sexual spaces have little awareness of trans issues and lingering misogyny means some gay men can't cope with any female anatomy, even on another masculine guy.

"I was nervous," Claudio Ferreira recalls his first intimate encounter with now-boyfriend Evan McCraney.

"I've always been sexually confident but for the first time ever, I thought, 'Yikes, am I out of my league here?' I'd never considered fucking a trans guy before, but I'd also never met one before either."

Ferreira, 25, says he comes from a fairly conservative family background and trans issues were new to him. He wasn't sure how to proceed in bed. "When fucking, how do I know if he'll like it? What if I hurt him — or hurt his feelings? What if I say something wrong?"

But Ferreira found that his fears were misplaced. "The sex is different — but not necessarily because of his anatomy. We have a similar approach to sexuality. I love figuring out what makes people tick when it comes to sex. I like putting a lot of thought into sex and setting up scenes — and so does he."

Ferreira says the key to the success of their relationship is communication. "I have no problem stopping in the middle of sex to ask questions. 'If I do this, does it make you feel better or worse? What about this? Do you like that?' Evan made it pretty comfortable for me, anyway."

Although attitudes are changing trans guys still deal with other gay men making assumptions about their bodies or identities.

"The most frustrating thing is when guys use language for my body that feels feminizing," says McCraney.

Bottom line is McCraney wants to be treated as a guy. If you're not sure how to refer to his body parts, he says, then ask.

"Some guys ask 'stupid questions' about my genitals or what language I use to describe them. But I prefer stupid questions to stupid assumptions," says McCraney. "Most guys aren't willfully ignorant. There just isn't a lot of information on transmen available to them."

He says it's a common assumption that because they aren't born with penises all trans guys must be bottoms. "I'm a bottom, so that works out for me. But I know a lot of top trans guys who have problems finding nontrans men to play with."

"I enjoy being the active partner as much as the receptive one," says Hernandez, "and I prefer men who like getting fucked and sucked as much as they enjoy fucking and sucking."

Hernandez says the nature of the sexual encounter sometimes determines whether he tells someone he's trans. For instance, when it comes to fisting, "sometimes I disclose and other times I don't. If I have good technique and he has a good time, it doesn't matter anyway because fisting isn't about dick."

Hernandez says a lot of men assume he's interested in being penetrated in front. He isn't. "I'm a back-door man," he says.

While many trans men opt to take male hormones and get chest reconstructive surgery, fewer get any alterations below the belt, either because of cost or other personal reasons. This can come into play between the sheets in different ways. Some guys are simply not interested in frontal sex. For others the idea serves as an uncomfortable reminder of a tangible difference between themselves and other men. Still other men decide to simply "work with what they have."

Genitals are front and centre in the work of porn actor Buck Angel, the self-described "man with a pussy" who has starred in such features as *Vagina* (for more on Angel check out *Buck Angel: Aural to Oral*). Some argue that Angel's focus on what makes him different from nontrans guys can lead to fetishization. But other kinds of trans-man porn are emerging.

"Male bodies don't all look the same," says Ken Rowe of Trannywood Pictures. The company's first porn feature, *Cubbyholes: Trans Men in Action* — available in Toronto at *Good for Her* and *Come as You Are* — has been screened at conferences and film festivals internationally.

"Men are men and we all have different histories," says Rowe. "In our films we try to normalize different types of male bodies, as well as safe-sex practices."

Rowe says the company rejects the traditional idea of a director using actors to implement a vision. Everyone from the camera operator to the lighting guy to the actors participate in driving the project. "We let the community really shape it," he says.

Celebrating the diversity of trans men is Rowe's personal philosophy as well. He's not trans, but dates trans men.

"One weekend I cruised three guys — at the bars and on the street — and they all turned out to be trans. Guys with different backgrounds, body types, ages and relationships to the observable trans community. It taught me there are many ways to live your life as a trans man."

Similarly there are many ways for trans and nontrans guys to relate outside the sack. McCraney feels that gender socialization can play a big part. "Non-trans men have very different communication styles," he says.

While gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same, one can influence the other. Both McCraney and Hernandez spent time in dyke communities prior to transitioning, and say their openness to male desire relates to their acceptance as men themselves.

"It's no surprise that after I came out as trans my attraction to masculinity was more accessible to me," says Hernandez. "I was seen as I saw myself, therefore I had the opportunity to explore my desires."

McCraney was attracted to men as a teenager. "Once I began my transition, I realized that my sexual feelings toward men were still there, and that I could be a gay man."

"I was queer the whole time, just not in the same way all the time."

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SIDEBAR: HIV & TRANS MEN

Jae Sevelius of the University of California, San Francisco's Centre of Excellence for Transgender HIV Prevention, is currently conducting a study on HIV and trans men looking at the risks of transmission from sex, drug use or sharing needles when injecting male hormones. Could increased involvement with nontrans queer men mean increased HIV risk for trans men?

"Anecdotal evidence suggests that there is a significant subgroup of transgender men who engage in high-risk sex — including sex work — with nontrans men," according to the study's research abstract.

Existing research has indicated low rates of HIV infection among trans men but Sevelius says those studies have either focused on straight trans men or not tracked sexual orientation at all.

Here in Toronto trans men are being included in efforts to understand HIV-related behaviours among queer men in an ongoing study by Adam Green at the University of Toronto that focuses on risk-taking among various groups of men who have sex with men.

Primed, a detailed safer-sex booklet created by and for trans men "and the men who dig them" is available at Queertransmen.org. The smart and sexy guide was produced by the Gay/Bi/Queer Transmen Working Group, a part of the Ontario Gay Men's HIV Prevention Strategy covers a wide range of issues from the safety risks involved with disclosure to the ins and outs of bathhouse culture and includes a wide variety of trans-masculine identities and sex practices.

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