

Matt Bomer Creates Controversy With Transgender Sex Worker Role

Actor Matt Bomer recently came under fire for accepting a role as a transgender sex worker in Sam McNeil's drama, *Anything*. Based on a play of the same name, the film is about a suicidal man who begins a deep friendship with Bomer's character after moving to Los Angeles to be closer to family.

Bomer isn't the first cis male actor to play a trans woman in recent years. Eddie Redmayne was nominated for an Academy Award in 2015 for his portrayal of Danish painter Lili Elbe in *The Danish Girl* and Jared Leto won the 2014 Academy Award for Best Actor in a Supporting Role for his portrayal of a trans sex worker in Jean-Marc Vallée's *Dallas Buyers Club*. Both actors received similar criticism from the transgender community.

"When Matt Bomer plays a trans sex worker, he's telling the world that underneath it all, trans women like me are still really just men," [tweeted](#) actress Jen Richards, who auditioned—and was turned down—for a different role in the film. In Richards' series of tweets, she outlined why a cis man portraying a trans woman is harmful to the community. Among her concerns were a lack of roles available for trans women, the reassertion to cis audiences that being transgender is just a performance, and most importantly, increased violence against trans women perpetrated by cis men. "[Straight men] have sex with us, worry that makes them gay, then reassert their masculinity through violence aimed at us," explained Richards in another [tweet](#).

Despite backlash from the Twittersphere, Bomer stayed silent on his decision to accept the role until actress Jaime Clayton addressed Michelle Rodriguez—also cast in the film—and him directly in a [tweet](#). "I hope both of you choose to do some actual good for the trans community one day," she tweeted. Bomber blocked Clayton on Twitter in response, though he later unblocked her again.

Mark Ruffalo, the film's executive producer, took to Twitter to defend Bomer. According to Ruffalo, he suggested Bomer audition for the role after the two grew close while filming the HIV-focused drama, *The Normal Heart*. He also [tweeted](#) the transgender community directly in support, "To the trans community. I hear you. It's wrenching to you see you[sic] in this pain. I am glad we are having this conversation. It's time."

Richards [replied](#), thanking him for the tweet and added that she would like to start a dialogue about the situation.

Though Ruffalo initially appeared sympathetic to the trans community's concerns, he later backtracked, tweeting, "The movie is already shot and Matt poured his heart and soul into this part. Please have a little compassion. We are all learning."

Considering this isn't the first time concerns were raised over cis actors playing trans women, it seems Hollywood plans to continue ignoring the issue. Ruffalo called for compassion from the

audience, yet compassion for the trans community's many requests continue to be brushed under the rug while actors and filmmakers are rewarded at award season time and time again.

It remains to be seen how well *Anything* will do in theaters and during award season. However, if it follows the trend of other films of its ilk, cis actors will once again reap the benefits of ignoring the requests of the trans community.

If speaking out against these films won't change anything, perhaps boycotting them will. Compassion, it seems, goes only as far as ticket sales and Oscar noms.