

# No, They're Not Queerbaiting You

## By Allison Camper

Recently, Kit Conner, the 19-year-old co-star of the LGBTQ+ Netflix series *Heartstopper*, tweeted out, “im bi. congrats for forcing a 19 year old to out himself.” Usually, a coming out tweet is met with some sort of excitement from fans, but not in this case. Conner only tweeted this after rumors started swirling that he was what many like to call “queerbaiting.” Queerbaiting is a term that many like to throw around at celebrities, who they think are straight but are acting gay or trying to attract a queer audience to reach more people to make more money. After playing a bisexual character in the show, but being seen with women off set, people were angry with Conner, and accused him of pretending to be gay to boost his acting career. After months of harassment, people were demanding answers from him after he previously left himself unlabeled. Besides these so-called fans missing the entire point of the show, we should all have learned by now not to force identities on celebrities that we do not even know. Someone's sexuality is a private and personal part of their life and they do not owe anyone an explanation just because they are famous. Nonetheless, this was not the first time and most likely not that last.

Harry Styles has been accused of queerbaiting for the majority of his solo career. The former One Direction member recently took on a lead role in the movie *My Policeman*, a gay love story set in UK in the 1950s. This role has led to even more accusations of him subtly marketing himself as being LGBTQ+, without actually being a part of the community. In 2020, Styles became the first non-female cover star on *Vogue* magazine, while wearing a dress, causing backlash from all sides. Many conservative celebrities were very outspoken on their thoughts on a man wearing a dress, spreading a “bring back manly men” movement. But members of the

LGBTQ+ community were also upset that Styles had been chosen to be the face of a breaking-down-gender-norms narrative. Many were upset that a white, cis, and presumably straight male was receiving so much praise for something not as monumental as it was posed to be. For years people have been questioning his sexuality, but he has never given the answer people are looking for. “Sometimes people say ‘you’ve only publicly been with women’, and I don’t think I’ve publicly been with anyone,” He told *Rolling Stone* in a recent interview. The blame goes to the fans for assuming one photo of him with women automatically means he’s choosing to have a public relationship with them. Styles keeps his love life private, because he wants to, and people shouldn’t be assuming what they want or think he is.

This problem doesn’t just affect men though. Last year, Billie Eilish was the target of similar accusations after her “Lost Cause” music video and accompanying Instagram post fired people up. The music video featuring Eilish dancing around with a bunch of her girl friends, and her post of behind the scenes photos captioned “i love girls,” managed to upset a lot of people. They accused her of queerbaiting, and even more people assumed this was her way of coming out as WLW. Even though she never directly responded to the situation, she liked a posted reading, “This fandom is so embarrassing sometimes like why would you go in someones comments and say something you literally dont even know is true and something yall LITERALLY MADE UP, sometimes yall are so dumb. Some of you just need to learn how to mind your own business.”

What will come after we continuously bash celebrities for embracing homosexual themes in their art? Could it lead to actors taking on fewer roles, fewer TV shows and movies being made about LGBTQ+ stories, and less representation overall in the future? Not every member of the LGBTQ has the same opinion on this issue. This person has chosen to stay anonymous, but

when asked about how they feel on this topic, they said, “I think it’s stupid for people to hate them for doing what they want, they might not even have a choice in what they’re doing, with contracts and stuff. There's a whole team of people behind all that stuff anyways.” Maybe the actor is taking on a role because they like the story. Maybe the music video is about something different than your interpretation, or maybe they're just doing it for fun. When asked about the Kit Conner situation specifically, they said, “I believe that people commenting on his sexually missed the entire point of the show, the show was about someone literally getting outed and how horrible it was, It doesn’t make sense to me if you’re a fan of the show, you could treat someone so horribly.”

So is this ever going to end? What does queerbaiting really mean and is it actually harmful to the LGBTQ+ community? It makes sense in discussions about networks/movies/shows dangling LGBTQ+ representation/characters to viewers trying to look diverse, and to hook a bigger audience in. But when they never actually give it, playing it safe so as to not offend conservative viewers, it's proof that they're doing it for the money. But how could this apply to celebrities? Celebrities are real people, they can’t queerbate you, and they can't control what the media says about them. No person owes anyone an explanation on their sexuality, because that is something private to themselves. Even if they are extremely famous, or you think they act a certain way or are trying to suggest something, remember they owe you no clarification on themselves and not everything you see or read is real.