

Heather Brown, a third year Business student at Trent University, is no transphobe. She takes a live-and-let-live approach in gender matters. But Trent has instituted a policy of gender-neutral washrooms, and Brown balks at sharing intimate space with members of the biologically opposite sex. She discovered that expression of her discomfort is more than unwelcome on her campus; it has literally become a forbidden opinion. More on that subject anon. First, an eventually relevant digression to a TV vignette that popped into my head when Heather contacted me with her story. Transparent, the popular Amazon Prime series, is the story of an aging man, Mort, who comes out as "Maura," the woman he has wanted to be all his life. Much of this comedy-drama's brilliance lies in its protagonist's appearance. The series writers didn't opt for a young, androgynous subject who could easily "pass" as a biological woman, and whose outward presentation would bolster the politically correct understanding that gender is fluid, detached from biology. Instead, they took a more difficult and courageous approach. Mort wasn't a particularly attractive man, and Maura is an even less attractive woman. In fact, given her tall, hulking masculine frame, receding hairline and saggy, hound-dog face, the lipstick and 1950s-era dresses Maura adopts for her new persona can't conceal her biological reality. The viewer's psychological struggle to accept Maura as a woman never abates. (--image--)

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AMAZON DIGITAL

The first-season scene I am recalling has Maura "out" as a female in a trial public run at a department store, accompanied by her two supportive adult daughters. All goes well until Maura needs to pee. With trepidation, she joins the queue in the busy women's washroom. Noticing her, a woman at a sink loudly asks, "Is that a man?" Heads swivel. Maura is embarrassed and makes a move to leave, but her older daughter gets into it with the woman, shouting, "This is my father and she's a woman!" (or words to that effect). The other woman indignantly responds, "There are young girls in here!" Maura is now in full retreat, pulling her daughter away, who in a final thrust screams at the woman, "F***ing c***!" Three things were going on here. The woman at the sink (not steeped in political correctness) saw an obviously male person dressed as a woman and became spontaneously alarmed. Maura — as a biological man who understands very well how threatening men (even "men") can look to women when they feel vulnerable — only sought escape from an excruciatingly awkward situation. For the daughter it was a political issue. Enraged on her father's behalf, she was insensitive to her adversary's discomfort. She could not imagine that in certain situations there may be legitimate claims for "safety" on both sides. Her parting obscenities reflect the utter contempt of special-interest zealots for any point of view but their own. Back to Heather Brown. In January, Arthur, a tuition-funded newspaper serving Trent U and the city of Peterborough, printed a sober, responsibly conducted debate on Trent's gender-neutral washroom policy: critiqued by Brown, defended by a staff writer. Trump administration to lift Obama-era education policy allowing trans kids access to bathroom of choice Report on Christian schools defying LGBTQ policy has 'complicated' legal implications, minister vague on why In a previous era, such evenhandedness would have been considered normal journalistic practice. But on campus today, it is the metaphorical daughter screaming "f***ing c***" who has the final word on what is and what is not admissible for discussion. Responding to protests against Brown's article, Arthur editors Dan Morrison and Josh Skinner retracted the piece from their website, issuing a statement to readers that "the safety and humanity of any group of people is not up for debate." Apologizing for having failed to meet "sufficiently high editorial standards," they announced immediate plans for "anti-oppression workshops" for themselves and the Arthur staff. (Yes, Reader, I couldn't help thinking of Orwell either.) Brown next approached the Trent Queer Collective to ask if she could speak at a meeting. Permission was granted and then, "in response to feedback," rescinded: "We will not be giving a public platform to this conversation," TQC posted on their Facebook page. Finally, Brown asked the Trent Conservatives, where she is a

member, if she could speak at their next “Pints & Politics” event. They readily agreed. According to Brown, a moderate number of people showed up, and a productive conversation was held. Only two people disagreed with her position in a “very civil” manner, attendees “asked good questions” and there were “no hard feelings” from anyone. Isn’t that the way contested political terrain should be handled everywhere on a university campus? To conclude on a personal note, from what I understand of Transparent’s Maura, she would have been perfectly happy to pee in a designated single-stall bathroom, physical relief, not tyranny over others, being her objective.