Hidden Dangers

QUEERETHIOPIA

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"Queer Ethiopia" is an alternative space created by a group of queer Ethiopian women. It is designed to be a space for a diverse group of Ethiopian queer women whose sexual and gender identifications vary. It includes cis and trans women who may be lesbian, bisexual or asexual. This is a space where the experiences of queer people takes center stage. We hope to include personal experiences from our daily lives as queer people, various stories, interviews, original artwork and poetry. We hope it will also serve as a place where Ethiopians in Ethiopia and Ethiopians in the diaspora come as themselves to explore and create an online community.

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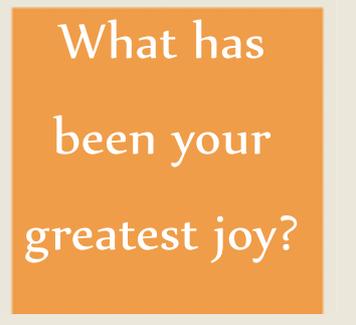
From the Editors

Welcome to the 13th issue of Nisnis, where we confront the critical realities of life in the Ethiopian queer community. In this edition, we explore the issues of catfishing, outings, doxxing, and state surveillance — topics that impact the safety and well-being of the Ethiopian LGBTQ+ community in profound ways. These topics have become even more critical given the increased hate that we are experiencing as a community.

These experiences, while difficult, are not just about danger; they are also about resilience. Our feature story highlights the voices of five people who share their encounters with these threats. Their stories serve as powerful reminders of the challenges we face, but more importantly, they speak to the strength and support that can come from our shared struggles.

Catfishing and outings can shatter trust and instill fear, yet as we learned from one of our contributors, community support is a lifeline. One person recounts their close call with being outed and the unexpected solidarity they found among friends. Another shares their experience of meeting someone under false pretenses, emphasizing the importance of vigilance.

As Ethiopian queer people, we make our communities online which makes the need for safety and security even more crucial. Our articles on digital detoxing and the precautions necessary for meeting other queer individuals in person remind us that protecting our identities should always be a priority. These narratives highlight the proactive measures we can take to protect ourselves while still seeking connection.

The infographics included in this issue provide insights into online safety, digital security and practical tips for navigating real-life encounters. They empower us with the knowledge needed to recognize potential threats and how to engage in safer practices within our community.

As we deal with these challenges, it's important to remember that we are not alone. The resilience displayed by our contributors reflects the strength that exists within the queer community. They remind us that, despite the problems we face, there is power in sharing our stories and supporting one another.

This issue of Nisnis is also a call to action — it is a reminder that while we must navigate these difficult realities, we can approach them with awareness and solidarity.

As always, we thank all our contributors for their bravery in sharing their experiences and to our readers for your continued support. Your engagement is what drives us to publish these essential stories.
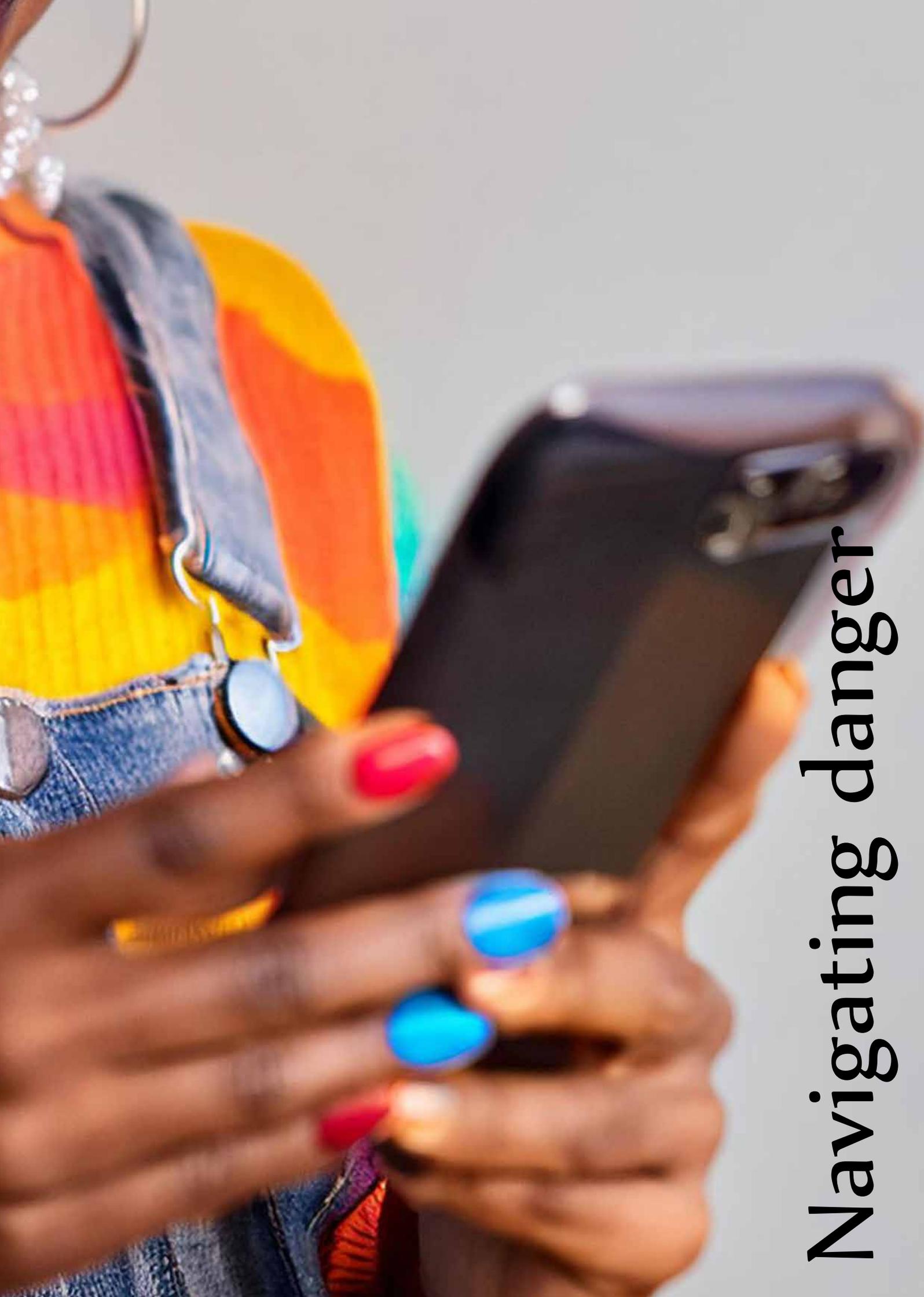
Navigating danger

Resilience of queer people in a hostile environment

What are the experiences of Ethiopian LGBTQ+ individuals as they navigate the hostile environment in Ethiopia? Through their stories of catfishing, doxxing, and the constant threat of being outed, we see the challenges queer people face in seeking connection. Yet, amidst these dangers, their resilience and the support of the community shine through, highlighting the courage it takes to live authentically.

It was in the time of Corona. Amidst the limitations on socialization and gatherings, Saba found herself desperate for human connection. Despite her instincts warning her something was off, she continued chatting with someone on Tinder.

She felt encouraged when the conversation moved to Telegram. As their conversation progressed, her dismay increased, but she hoped it might lead to a genuine connection and an eventual in-person meeting.

After some time, the person requested a nude picture. She declined, but they persisted, even threatening her when she refused. "I will post your picture and tell everyone about you!" they warned.

Having faced threats before, she responded, "You're an idiot if you think I posted my real picture." Proud of her past lessons, she felt she was taking the right precautions. She believed she was safe behind her phone screen and her fake profile picture - until the person sent her a real picture of herself. "I don't know how he got my real picture; my Telegram settings didn't allow anyone to see my bio details," she said.

Too late, she realized that the person was a man pretending to be a lesbian, and she had no idea what he was capable of. For days, she worried about what he might do—would he post her picture? Where would he share it? Would he inform others or give her Telegram contacts to someone else? She was filled with dread.

In the end, she deactivated her Telegram account and prayed for mercy.

Sadly, Saba's story is not unique; it reflects a common thread within the queer Ethiopian community. As Saba herself noted,"Yes, there are maybe only a few people who have not been catfished." The experiences of being catfished, doxxed, and outed, among other security threats, partly define the experiences of queer people in Ethiopia.

While Saba's experience highlights the dangers of online interactions, Selam's story illustrates how even in-person connections can harbor hidden threats.

Selam: The Illusion of safety

For Selam, a queer woman living in Addis Ababa, the threat extended beyond her phone screen. She had been chatting with someone who claimed to be a lesbian and was interested in

"I don't know how he got my real picture; my Telegram settings didn't allow anyone to see my bio details …"

——

Saba

meeting other queer women.

Excited about the prospect of connecting with a new queer woman, Selam continued the conversation even when inconsistencies began to surface. The person frequently changed their stories and generally lacked consistency. When Selam pointed this out, the person dismissed her concerns, suggesting she was simply nervous. Despite her doubts, Selam kept chatting.

"There were a lot of things that made me suspicious, but we had good conversations, so I wanted to continue," she said. "I even asked her if she was being genuine."

Selam had several reasons to suspect that she was being catfished: the inconsistent stories, the requests for personal information, and more. Nevertheless, she agreed to meet.

When Selam arrived at the designated time and place, she found that the person she had been talking to was indeed a woman - but she had come with a man.

Thinking quickly, Selam pretended that she was the one catfishing the other woman, a tactic that helped her avert a crisis. Though unorthodox, it felt it was necessary for her self-preservation and was believable since Selam had initiated the in-person meeting.

Her story took unexpected turns, but it

> **"There were a lot of things that made me suspicious, but we had good conversations, so I wanted to continue."**
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>
> Selam

ultimately ended with the two of them hooking up. It turned out the woman wanted to explore relationships with women but felt she needed to protect herself from being catfished. While Selam was fortunate to escape harm, she learned a valuable lesson from the experience. The chaotic nature of their meeting ultimately prevented any meaningful relationship from developing.

Selam's caution in navigating relationships mirrors Tikur Sew's experience, where her vigilance led to a deep loss of faith in online connections.

Tikur Sew: Losing faith
The catfishing Tikur Sew, a lesbain, experienced led her to delete her account entirely. After starting a conversation on Facebook, the person on the other end asked her for a picture. When she insisted on receiving one from them first, they sent her a grainy photo that was hard to discern. Tikur Sew realized she was being catfished when she called the person on a different app and a man answered.

"I was gone from Facebook for two months," Tikur Sew said. "I didn't take it lightly. I was very angry."

Eventually, she mustered the courage to return to Facebook, recognizing it as a primary space for the queer community. However, she resolved never to talk to anyone without first seeking confirmation from her friends. Even with their reassurances about someone's safety, she still doesn't feel confident.

Her trust was compromised, and she now finds it difficult to fully trust people.

While Tikur Sew struggled with trust in online spaces, Boney faced betrayal from within her own community, showing that vulnerability can come from unexpected places.

Boney: Power of community
Sometimes, even knowing the people around us are queer offers no protection. Boney, who identifies as non-binary and prefers she/her pronouns, was outed by another queer person.

Boney was aware of the security measures necessary to avoid being catfished. She was cautious about sharing personal information, paid attention to red flags like inconsistent stories, reached out to mutual friends and community members for verification, checked the person's knowledge of queer culture, and listened to her instincts. Given all this, she felt unlikely to be catfished.

However, she didn't expect to be outed by someone within the community, which shattered her sense of trust and her ability to navigate life in homophobic Ethiopia.

"I had lost my faith in the queer community after what happened to me. But immediately after I was outed, queer people who didn't even know

> **"I was gone from Facebook for two months"**
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>
> Tikur Sew

my name came to my rescue," she said. "I felt that people could sense my pain. They came to help not because they knew me but because they realized they could also find themselves in the same situation tomorrow."

Thus, while she lost hope after being outed by a queer person, her faith was restored by the community's support.

Boney's experience serves as a reminder of how fragile trust can be, a lesson that Joy struggles with as she navigates her relationships within the queer community.

Joy: Learning to protect our peace

As a masculine presenting lesbian, Joy loves meeting other queer people and connecting in person, as it allows her to be herself and engage with her chosen family in a way that isn't possible with those outside the community.

However, she has learned that simply being queer is not enough. "We know many who identify as queer but have not accepted themselves," Joy said. She once believed that helping others on their journey to self-acceptance was mandatory, but she has since recognized the need to conserve her energy.

One of Joy's friends was affected by an

"I avoid these spaces now. Yes, it means I may not meet many queer people, but it also means I'm not overwhelmed by those who have not accepted themselves and create chaos in my life."
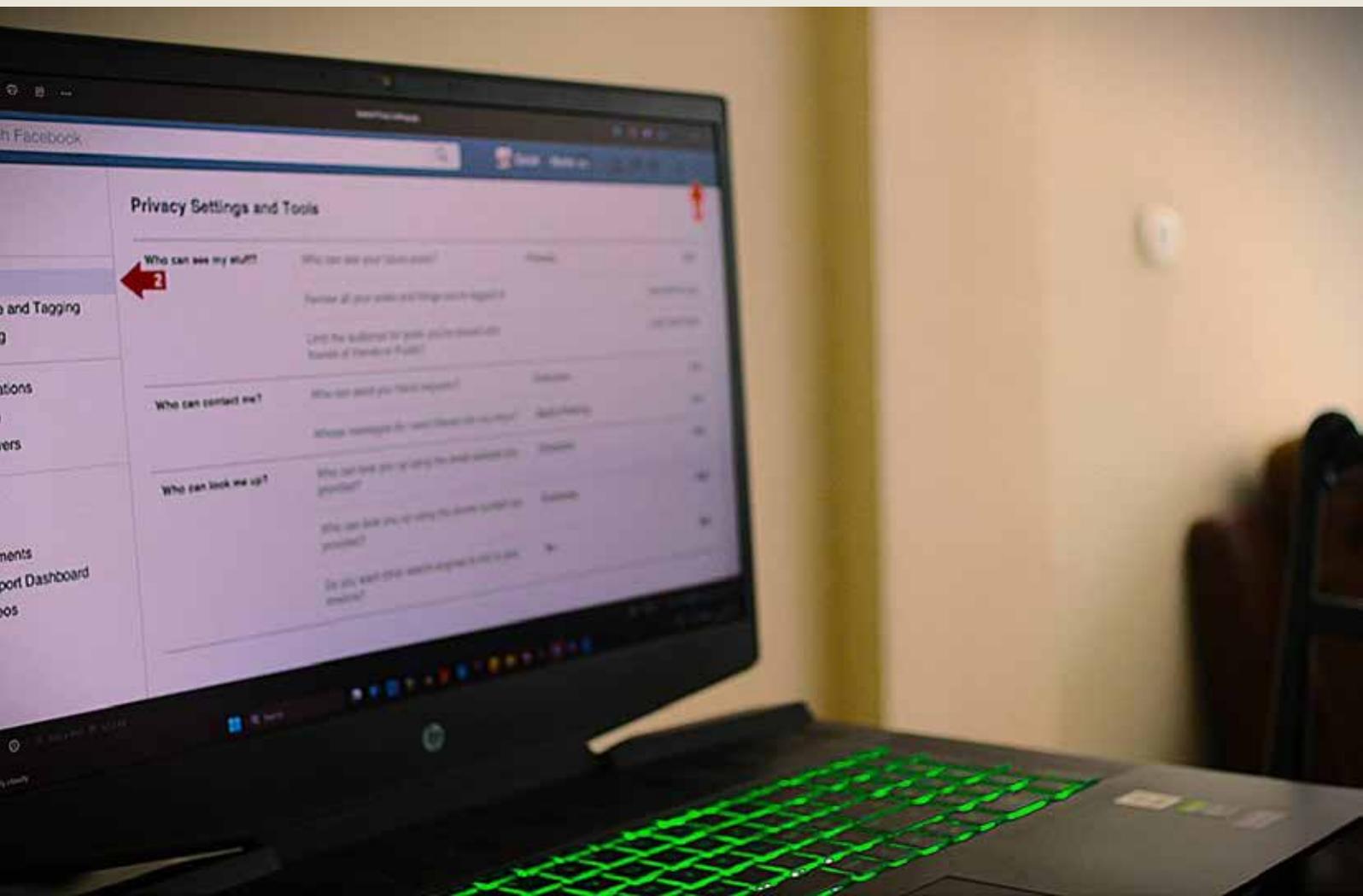
Joy

interaction with another community member. This friend had befriended someone who had become a born-again Christian and kept insisting that she needed to stop living in sin and accept God into her life.

Joy constantly worried that her friend would be outed by him. From this experience, she learned the importance of being selective in her interactions.

"I avoid these spaces now. Yes, it means I may not meet many queer people, but it also means I'm not overwhelmed by those who have not accepted themselves and create chaos in my life," she said.

While Joy learns how to maintain her peace and care for her mental health amid chaotic interactions, Blu's journey speaks to the emotional challenges of seeking connections when confronted with potential risks.

Blu: Hope and resilience

Blu lost sleep for days as she waited for Facebook to be filled with her images and personal information. She had been catfished by a man who pretended to be a lesbian, treating the catfishing of queer Ethiopian women as a sport from which he derived great pleasure. He openly admitted this to her.

New to the queer community, Blu fell victim to catfishing in her eagerness to connect with other queer women. She continued the conversation long after she felt uncomfortable, believing that as long as she talked to him, he would not out her.

He never outed her, but the constant doubt and fear took a toll on her mental health. She worried that he would reveal her identity and that she would lose both the emotional and financial support of her family.

Three years later, she feels empathy for her former self. While she was not outed, she regrets all the worry she experienced. Now a married woman, she and her wife support each other.

"We used to live with our families; we didn't believe in ourselves, and we didn't have jobs. Now we are independent, and if anything happens, we have each other and I support them and hope they will support me," she said. "The situation in the past has made me very strong. It has shown me that I have someone, and I have recognized my own strength."

Blu's reflections on her past experiences connect to a broader narrative of resilience, enabling us to consider the collective strength of the queer

"I had lost my faith in the queer community after what happened to me. I was gone from Facebook for two months."

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Boney

community in Ethiopia.

Conclusion: Mapping our bright future

The stories shared by Saba, Selam, Tikur Sew, Boney, Joy, and Blu create a vivid image of the challenges queer individuals face in Ethiopia. Each narrative highlights the harsh realities of catfishing, doxxing, and the constant threat of being outed. These experiences create a climate of fear, making genuine connections difficult and fraught with risk.

Yet, amidst these struggles, there is a powerful sense of resilience. Community support emerges as a lifeline, with individuals stepping in to help one another in times of need. Boney's experience of being outed by a fellow queer person reflects the deep fractures that can exist within the community, but it also illustrates how quickly that same community can come together to offer support and solidarity.

Joy's realization about the need to protect her peace underscores a vital lesson: not every interaction will lead to genuine connection, and being selective can be a form of self-care. Blu's journey from fear to empowerment serves as a testament to personal growth, proving that even in the darkest times, there is hope for healing and strength in the face of adversity.

These stories remind us that while the path for queer individuals in Ethiopia is fraught with challenges, the spirit of resilience and the power of community can pave the way for a brighter, more accepting future. There is strength in vulnerability, and together, and they embody the hope for change in a society that often seeks to silence them.

"The situation in the past has made me very strong. It has shown me that I have someone, and I have recognized my own strength"

▬▬▬

Blu

... even in the darkest times, there is hope for healing and strength in the face of adversity.

- S -

I've definitely been catfished before. Three different people managed to figure out who I am, where I live, and my Telegram account after catfishing me. Let me tell you about one of them. I had a fake account on Facebook, and I didn't recognize the guy who started talking to me. I was new to meeting people online, and I didn't fully understand how queer communities interacted or what topics they discussed. I didn't suspect he was a man. He had no idea what my real name was or where I lived. One day, I can't remember exactly what he said, but it was something along the lines of asking for my nudes. I told him, "I don't do that, not now, not ever." He started threatening me, saying I would regret it. He said, "I know who you are. Don't play with me," and then he sent me a screenshot of my real account. I deactivated my account immediately.

TIPS TO STAY SAFE ONLINE

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU SHARE WITH YOUR OFFICIAL ACCOUNT

1

- Limit personal information shared on public profiles
- Adjust privacy settings to restrict who can see your posts and friend lists.
- Do not use your actual social media accounts to share any pro-queer content or engage with openly queer accounts on social media
- Avoid listing sexual orientation and gender identifiers (e.g. the rainbow flag, preferred pronouns etc.) in your bio

2 **CREATE QUEER SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS**

- Create separate accounts with aliases or pseudonyms that doesn't reveal your identity for queer related activities
- Don't link your pseudonym account to your official accounts or email addresses
- Avoid tagging your location in posts or photos, especially in real-time.
- Don't use these accounts to publicly interact with your friends through their official accounts because it puts them in danger too
- Regularly review followers and remove those who may pose a threat

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU SHARE WITH YOUR PSEUDONYM ACCOUNTS

3

- Do not post or message any identifiable personal information on this account (e.g. your actual name or familiar pet names, full or partial pictures of yourself, photos of your personal belongings and places that you frequent, tattoos/scars/piercings, clothes you usually wear, etc.)
- Set your account to private and review friend requests carefully. Only accept known contacts. Or check their posts, their friends list and verify with other trusted queer friends if they are familiar with the account

4 **STAY INFORMED ABOUT PLATFORM POLICIES**

- Understand the rules and regulations of the social media platforms you use
- Familiarize yourself with the platform's reporting features in case of harassment or threats.
- Know how to quickly deactivate or delete accounts if necessary for your safety.

- B -

I haven't been catfished. but sometimes people give warnings, like advising not to meet certain types of individuals—those who were caught doing shady things. I think it's because of these warnings that I'm a little cautious. When going on dates, I make sure to do my own research before meeting up. Thankfully, nothing bad has ever happened to me, whether on social media or dating sites.

TIPS FOR MEETING IN PERSON

VERIFY THEIR IDENTITY BEFORE MEETING
1

- Look for mutual friends or check their social media presence for authenticity. Check with your queer friends if they are familiar with the account you are chatting with.
- Arrange a phone call and video chat before meeting in person to confirm their identity.

CHOOSE PUBLIC MEETING PLACES
2

- Select well-lit, public spaces (like cafes or parks) for your first meeting to ensure safety. Avoid secluded areas or private homes for initial meetings.
- Share your plans with a friend, including who you're meeting, where, and when.
- Plan an escape route or have a way to leave if you feel uncomfortable.

USE YOUR OWN TRANSPORTATION
3

- If possible, arrange your own transport to and from the meeting to maintain control over your circumstances and not have to rely on them to pick you up or drop you off.
- Keep your phone charged and have transportation options ready (like ride-sharing apps or public transport).

TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS
4

- Stay alert to your environment and any individuals nearby. Trust your gut feelings about people or situations. If something feels off at any point, don't hesitate to end the meeting or leave.
- Be cautious with alcohol or drugs, as they can impair your judgment.

- TS -

The name was Merry, so I initially assumed it was a woman and started talking to "her." Right from the start, she kept asking for my photo. I told her to be patient, saying we could exchange photos once we got to know each other better, but she kept insisting, which made me suspicious. I said, "Alright, show me your photo, and then I'll send you mine." What she sent was blurry and unrecognizable, which only increased my doubts. I started thinking this might be a man, so I called on Messenger. She didn't pick up. I kept calling, but there was no answer. Eventually, I told her, "I'm going to block you. You're not picking up because you're a man." When she stayed silent, I pressed further, saying, "I know you're a man." Finally, he admitted it, saying he was indeed a man. He called me back on Messenger, and when I answered and heard his voice, my suspicion was confirmed.

I blocked him immediately and shared his username and photo with my friends, warning them to be cautious of that account. He had been talking to other queer people as well, so they all thanked me and blocked him too.
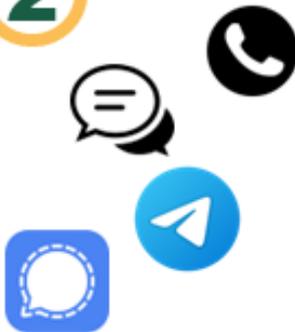
TIPS FOR
DIGITAL DEVICE SECURITY

SECURE YOUR DEVICES

- Use strong, unique passwords for your phone and enable two-factor authentication for your accounts wherever possible.
- Keep your devices updated with the latest security patches

1

2

USE SECURE COMMUNICATION APPS

- Choose apps that offer end-to-end encryption (e.g., Signal, Telegram).
- Put password locks on your communication app (preferable not biometric)
- Direct text and calls are not safe from government monitoring.

KEEP YOUR DIGITAL DEVICES CLEAN

- Periodically scan your chat history, pictures, apps, search history etc. for any queer content and clean them out
- Log out of your queer social media accounts
- Save queer related pictures, texts, books etc. on the cloud and not on your phone
- Be aware of what sensitive data you would need to quickly delete (specific chats, queer dating apps etc.) from your devices in case of emergency.

3

HER

Grindr

ANONYMOUS BROWSING

4

- Use browsers that prioritize privacy (e.g., Tor, duck duck go) for queer related searches.
- Be aware that some websites may log your activity, so use incognito or private browsing modes.

Outed from within

Like a thief, I hurriedly left the house and neighborhood where I had lived for so many years, departing at an ungodly hour without properly packing my belongings.

They told me they wanted me dead. They repeatedly told me that I should not be allowed to live with such an identity and that I should die. When that wasn't enough, they added more by telling me that my landlords should have killed me. There was no end to the neighbors' gossip. There was a ton of verbal abuse, attempted assault, roadblocks and harassments on my daily route.

The sad part is that all of this was caused by a so-called member of my queer community. In the neighborhood where I was once respected as a career-oriented person, I had now become someone surrounded by many enemies whose hearts whispered only dark wishes for my demise. I rushed to prepare to leave the neighborhood. Like a thief, I hurriedly left the house and neighborhood where I had lived for so many years, departing at an ungodly hour without properly packing my belongings.

A person who is part of our queer community outed me and others without our consent for an insignificant reason. Of course, this person, and others like him, are doing this based on a distorted and narrow understanding of themselves. Hatred of other members of our community stems from self-loathing and self-rejection, and from those who wish for the downfall and destruction of others. But the trouble they caused by not accepting themselves had a negative implication on me.

From that moment on, I feel a strong sense of dread. My self-esteem has plummeted. I fear that something bad could happen to me at any moment. I worry that I could be in danger and be attacked at any given time. I don't feel any sense of confidence. I feel very insecure and uncomfortable when I'm alone or occasionally in public places. At night, even in my dreams, I get attacked. From that perspective, the fear that never leaves me has become traumatic.

The impact it has had on my family and friends, as well as my workplace, cannot be underestimated. Because of my fear and lack of self-confidence, I have even disappeared from the people in my life who have no idea who I am. Because I fear that if these people find out about my identity, they will attack me and cause me harm. I withdrew from most social life because I thought it would endanger my life. After that attack, I prefer my solitude rather than being with people. In fact, I don't want to spend any time with non-queer people unless I absolutely have to. This is because I lack confidence and if they find out who I am, I feel that there is no one who will refrain from taking action that will lead to murder or a high risk to my life due to their hatred. I have accepted that the solution to this is to isolate myself.

This country is not fit for living in freedom. The lesson I learned after being outed is that no matter how much I trust people, I am not safe from danger even when I am alone in my house because of the hate propaganda in Ethiopia. I'm too afraid to be myself, even behind closed doors with no one watching. Even on my own, knowing that the doors are locked and I am by myself, I still tend to check left and right because

I have no sense of safety. I have no place to express myself because I think I'm going to be in trouble at any moment.

What should not be forgotten is that when I say all this, it does not mean that every member of our community is bad, even if it is someone from our community who outed me. There are people in our community and people who work for the community who have advised me, and helped me, financially or in other ways. Not everyone in a community is the same; Not everyone is motivated to hurt others. I am very sad that I have faced such a problem but at the same time there are people who have helped me a lot to get out of the problem I am in. This shows that it's a matter of being selective, not that everyone in the queer community is untrustworthy.

Of course, especially when we are in trouble like this, it is very easy to get lost in gloomy and depressing thoughts. And so, we must know the benefit of talking with and seeking advice from people. Beyond just venting, we should talk openly to people we believe will truly understand our problems. Having said that, it is better to try to get closer to a solution by asking for help without feeling ashamed or feeling inferior by asking open questions about what kind of solution we need and the gaps we have, whether it is economic or intellectual.

It is better to take precaution in the first place so that we are not outed, but once it happens, it is better to focus on how we can get out of the problem as much as possible. But I was only able to see how difficult it is to do that when it happened to me.

... it does not mean that every member of our community is bad, even if it is someone from our community who outed me.

Catfished: Sprint
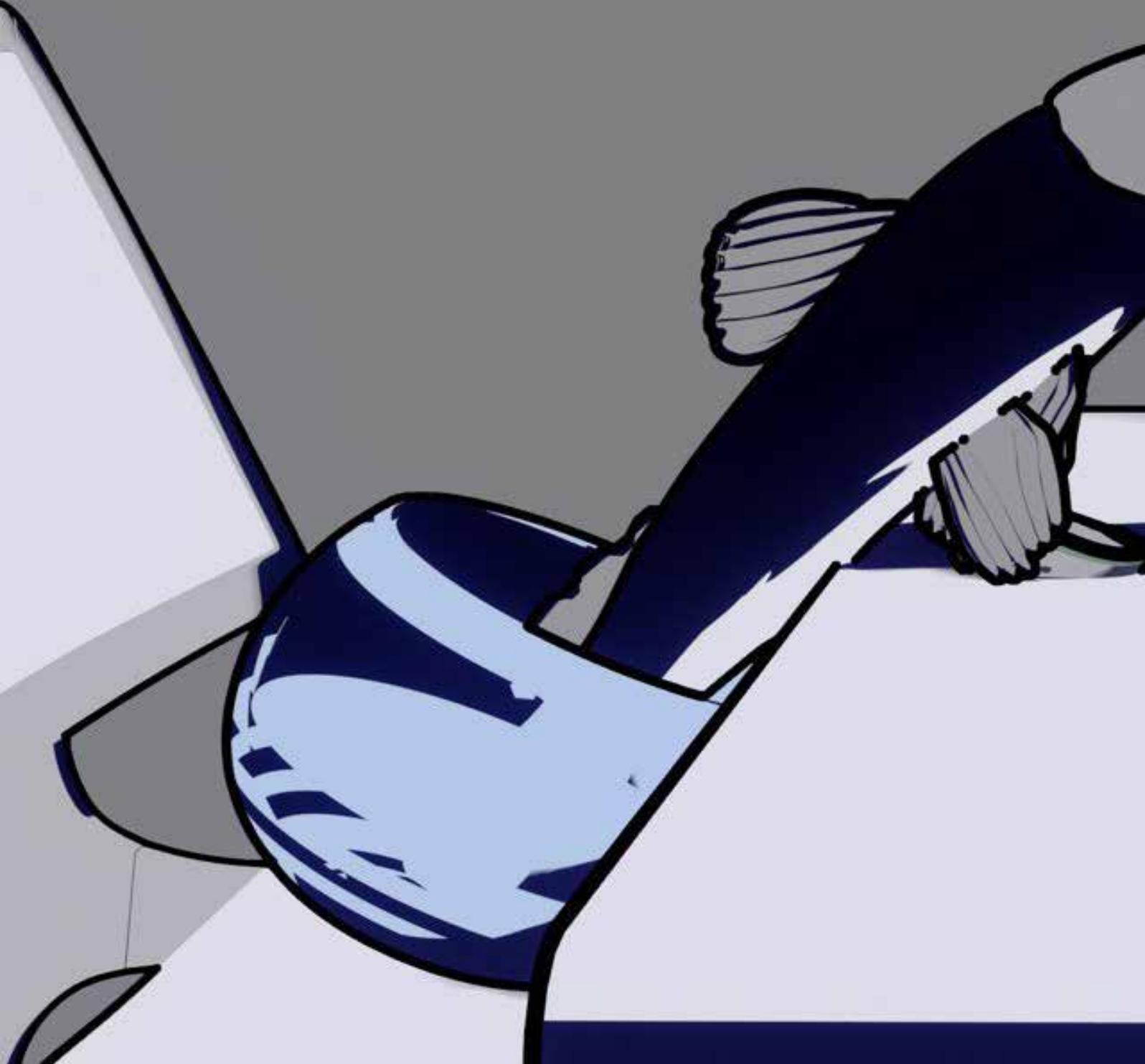
Like many of my queer brothers and sisters in Ethiopia, when I discovered my queer identity, I ran to Google and Facebook. Of course, when I think about it now, I would say that it would have been better if I had started my journey by jogging.

"Lesbian", "queer", "Ethiopian lesbians", "dating apps for Ethiopian lesbians"... there were no words that I didn't line up. I continued to search for those like me, trying every word that came to mind. I even put up my location on Facebook, Telegram and Google in an effort to find people. I would find groups on Telegram and join, but I only read the posts and then leave. After much searching, I got lucky and found a person or two. I don't even properly remember the names of the people I talked to. I just started talking to them out of eagerness. And so, I took a step down my long queer path.

We started talking with this girl. As usual, I rushed it. I sent her my number within a week. We started talking on Telegram. In no time, I received her picture, and in return, I sent my own picture along with a lot of personal information. I shared everything starting from how I spent my days to the neighborhood I lived in. Our conversation raged on telegram. About a month after meeting, we made plans to meet on a Sunday. We made the plans on a Friday so it's not like Sunday was very far off, but for me, it felt like a whole year away. I couldn't sleep until I met my first queer woman.

After we made plans on Friday, I texted her so we could keep talking until we met, but there was no reply. I waited all day, but not even a peep. Even if I was in the mood to talk, I reassured myself that we would talk the next day. I wrote her on Saturday morning, but she still wouldn't answer. I am the one who gave her my number so I couldn't call her. I didn't have her number. I got scared when I thought about it. I actually trusted a photo that was sent to me. We've never talked on the phone; our relationship was fully based on Telegram texts. I was worried. What was she thinking?

I finally received a text around 11 PM on Saturday night. One that said "I am just scared". With my heart full of fear, I asked "Why are you scared?" I was drenched in sweat until I got a response. A response that said "I'm a man. Forgive me because I am stressing out."

I wanted the earth to swallow me. I tortured myself thinking about who could do what to me. I couldn't think of what to say to him. What could I say to him? I thought of all the information I shared with him. Based on the information I gave him; someone could easily find me without much trouble.

> I finally received a text around 11 PM on Saturday night. One that said "I am just scared". With my heart full of fear, I asked "Why are you scared?"

I stayed quiet, too stunned to speak. I just sat down knowing there was nothing I could do. After some time, I think he felt bad for me and texted "I'm really sorry. I didn't mean to do this but I do this to a lot of women because I enjoy it." I didn't really understand the benefit and pleasure of doing so, but I kept my mouth shut.

I continued to talk to the guy, fearing that if I shut him out, he might expose my identity, and hoping that if he saw me as a friend, he would keep my secret. He started calling my phone. What started with casual greetings turned into him sending me pictures and even asking for my help to get his brother a job. My fear lingered. I couldn't help but worry about what he might say to me. He then told me he had a Telegram account that he only used for this purpose and that he could connect me with other women and sent me a Telegram username and password. When I logged in, I saw that he spoke to a lot of women. In fact, I remembered seeing the pictures of one of the women he was talking to on the same app that I met him on.

What I saw when I logged into the Telegram account he sent me worried me. The information he got from me, he used to impersonate me to speak with someone else; and the information he got from that person he used to impersonate them with me. Even if this guy did nothing bad himself, I couldn't begin to understand how far my information could reach and what the person who has access to it could do with it.

I realized this guy wasn't hitting on me. He didn't seem like he had bad intentions either. When he realized how stressed I was, he said "don't worry. I won't do anything with your information." He called and said "Please forgive me. I really feel bad for you now. I have deleted all of your information. If you don't believe me, check for yourself." And sent me his own Telegram username and password. It's hard to believe but it's been over three years now and nothing has happened.

I'm definitely lucky that this is all that happened. Out of haste and eagerness, I had gotten into an impossible race. The biggest thing I've learned is that finding other queer people is a marathon, not a sprint.

The biggest thing I've learned is that finding other queer people is a marathon, not a sprint.

Digital detox

I've also found
that stepping back
from social media
has been great for
my mental health.
I'm no longer
bombarded by
useless information
or negative energy.

When the hate speech against our queer community intensified, I only logged into Facebook to report content—nothing more. The insults and disrespect were overwhelming, and I didn't see the point in arguing with anyone.

At the time, I didn't call it a "digital detox," but I naturally started avoiding social media. I stayed away as much as possible, which meant I didn't engage in discussions or share thoughts on the hateful comments about ethnicity or sexuality. For about six months, I completely disappeared from social media.

During that time, people who knew me began asking my friends if I was okay. Some were worried, wondering if I was still alive, if I had gotten married—there was a lot of gossip. But stepping away wasn't a conscious decision; it just happened. One day, I found myself asking, "Why am I spending so much time on my phone?" I saw the weekly screen time reports and felt bad for wasting so many hours. I thought, "I could be doing something else—at the very least, I could read a book." That realization made me reconsider how I was spending my time.

When I tried reading again, I noticed how hard it was to focus. My attention span had diminished, likely because of platforms like TikTok, which condition us to hop from one quick clip to the next. Even when I tried to concentrate on a book, I kept wondering what was happening on social media. So, I deactivated my accounts, thinking it would stop me from logging in so easily. If it took a few extra steps to log back in, it would give me a moment to pause and reconsider.

It wasn't easy at first. I was so used to checking my phone constantly. In those six months, I actually decided to switch from a smartphone to an old-school button phone. Once I made that change, I started feeling more at peace. When we spend so much time on our phones, we lose touch with the people around us. You can be in the same room with someone, say hi, eat together, and then disappear into your phone, forgetting you're even at home. Even when we meet friends, we're constantly checking our phones with every notification, which isn't fair to the person in front of us. It takes away from real connection. If we're both glued to our phones, then what's the point of meeting up?

For me, a meaningful relationship now means being fully present, giving someone my undivided attention. And that's what I've started doing. I've also found that stepping back from social media has been great for my mental health. I'm no longer bombarded by useless information or negative energy. I can focus on reading, enjoying time with friends, and taking online courses—all with a clear mind.

This break also kept me away from unnecessary conflicts and arguments about societal issues that only

drain my energy. It has helped me protect my peace. If we can, I think it's worth trying to step away from social media for at least a month, or at least reducing our usage. It's better to start our day with prayer or something uplifting—building our energy in a positive way—rather than diving straight into our phones the moment we wake up.

In those six months, I actually decided to switch from a smartphone to an old-school button phone. Once I made that change, I started feeling more at peace.

Catfished:
... he wanted a threesome

I was in love. Considering how brief the time was, I at least really really liked her.

It all started in 2013, the year I came to terms with my identity as a lesbian. After my first relationship ended, I met someone online. I didn't have much experience back then, but I tried to make sure she was who she said she was—a girl.

I was happy to have found someone new, and our connection excited me. Without hesitation, I sent her my photo. Honestly, I usually don't share my pictures—I'm not comfortable with it—but this felt different. I trusted her. I had a soft spot for women, and as we grew closer, it felt right.

We kept talking, growing even more connected. At some point, after I had fallen for her, she asked if I wanted to meet a friend of hers. Given how close we were, I agreed. The guy she introduced me to seemed fine, and we talked. He shared stories of how they met and even showed me pictures of her. I was confused, but since this was all new to me, I brushed it off, thinking I just didn't understand.

Later, she asked me to meet him again, but I refused. I reminded her that my connection was with her, not him. She didn't take it well. When she pushed harder, I finally asked why it was so important to her. Her response took time to sink in.

It was his birthday when everything unraveled. As we argued about meeting him again, she finally told me the truth—she was in a relationship with him. My heart sank, but that still didn't explain why she was pressuring me. Then she revealed the real reason: he wanted a threesome, and I was supposed to be his birthday gift.

I was furious—mostly with myself for ignoring my instincts. The first time I met him, he asked a lot of personal questions, and I remember telling a friend afterward that I didn't like the energy he gave off. But whether it was my lack of experience or being blinded by love, I didn't listen to my gut.

On that final day, I firmly said no. She became angrier and threatened to post my photos on Facebook. I was terrified. The threats went on for days. I was so stressed. Then, by some twist of fate, the internet in my area went down. It was a strange kind of relief. By the time it came back, her account was still there, but I never contacted her again. I have no idea where she is or what happened to her.

I wouldn't wish that stress or fear on anyone. But what haunts me most is how she shattered my trust. When I first met her, I was excited to connect with other queer people. I was open and hopeful. After her, that changed. I became wary, especially online. What she did, along with societal pressure, took away the joy I once felt in meeting new people. Though I convinced myself that her actions were her own issues, the damage to my trust was real and lasting.

Mindful meet ups

Despite the dangers, I really enjoy meeting other queer people in person because these connections feel genuine and meaningful.

There have been times when we've gone to places and been told they're full, even though there were clearly empty seats. It was only after they noticed our "vibe" that we were turned away. I've also witnessed groups being attacked just for sitting together, and I know people who were harassed for simply feeding each other in the traditional Ethiopian way (gursha). For those of us who are labeled as "butch," we might be easily identifiable, which brings its own set of challenges. So, I can't say that gathering together doesn't come with risks.

Despite the dangers, I really enjoy meeting other queer people in person because these connections feel genuine and meaningful. There have been countless days where I've forgotten all my stress after spending time with them and gone home with a full heart. I have friends I consider family—sisters and brothers— and there have been days where we've met for tea in the morning and stayed together until late into the night. Meeting new queer people brings me a lot of joy. Our community can be complicated and full of drama, but surrounding myself with other queer people feels necessary and fulfilling.

Of course, I've learned to be cautious about the risks that come with my eagerness to meet others in the community. I'm learning this more and more with each passing day. Whenever there's an event or gathering, I make sure someone I trust will be there and that they know who invited them fairly well. If I'm invited somewhere, I double-check that a trusted person is attending and that the venue feels

safe—whether it's at someone's house or in a public setting. If I know the people, trust the venue, and feel comfortable, I leave the rest in God's hands and join.

It's easier when I'm with people I already know, but sometimes I meet strangers. In those cases, I make sure we have mutual friends, which helps me feel more comfortable. It also helps me open up, because I'm a good listener, and by listening carefully, I can usually get a sense of a person's true character. Even if someone is lying, they tend to reveal themselves eventually if they keep talking. Giving people time to talk helps me figure them out.

Meeting up with queer people carries risks, given the situation in our country but we can't say we shouldn't meet at all. We've created family-like bonds within our community, and it feels impossible to live without each other. So while I can't say we should stop meeting up entirely, it's wise to keep our circles small and choose safe places—homes or secluded areas where we know we won't be at risk. When we're in public spaces, like clubs, it's important to avoid drinking excessively because it can make us lose control.

To live peacefully, we need to be careful not to put ourselves in risky situations. Even attracting too much attention can be dangerous, so it's better to stay low-key for now. These days, unless you really know someone, it's a good idea to check them out through mutual friends and have a conversation first. Building meaningful relationships requires time and understanding, so we should take time to talk and get to know people. Avoiding public spaces and large queer gatherings is essential for staying safe.

When queer people meet, a lot can happen, but it doesn't mean bad things always occur. Still, since we only have each other, I suggest we pass this time by laying low and staying safe.

"How do you know if someone is catfishing you?"

These are selected responses from a questionnaire that was posted on a Facebook page …

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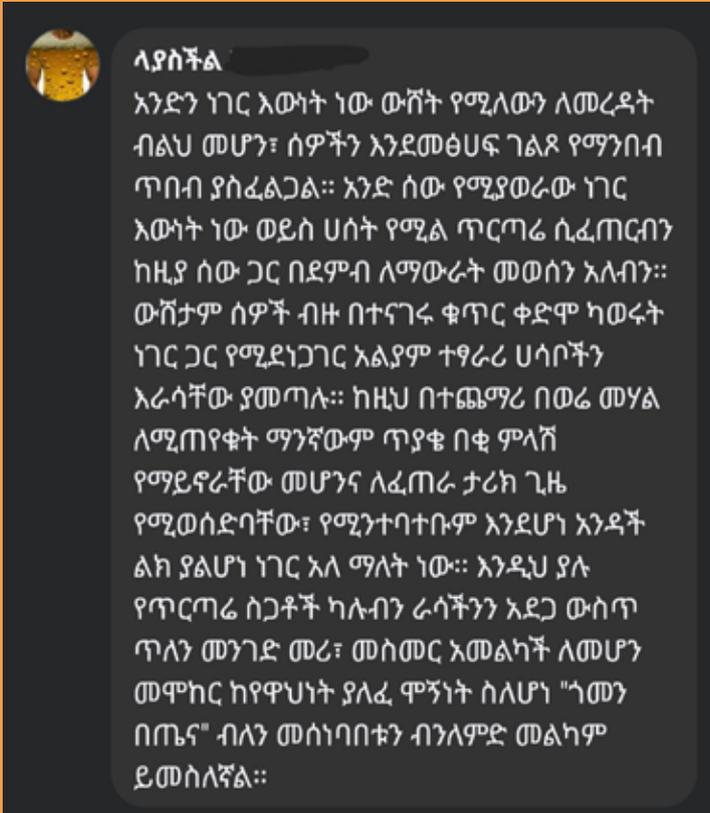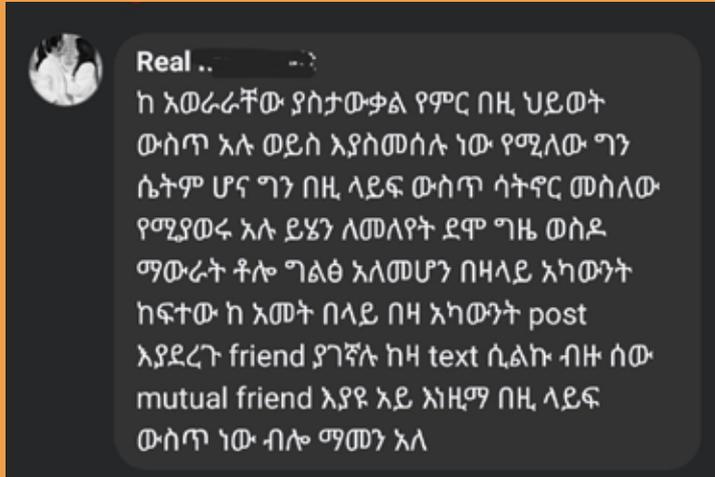
To understand if something is true or false, you need to be intelligent and be skilled at the art of reading people like a book. When we have doubts about whether someone is telling the truth or lying to us, we need to have the resolve to properly speak with that person. When liars talk a lot, they tend to say things that clash with things they had said before or contradict themselves. In addition, if they don't have satisfying answers to questions that are raised mid conversation and if it takes them time to create their stories or they stutter then it means there is something that's not right. If we have these senses of doubt, I think that wanting to be a trailblazer or light bearer to these people is stupidity beyond naivety so we need to tell ourselves "Greens while you're still healthy" and better get used to telling them goodbye

Jemes

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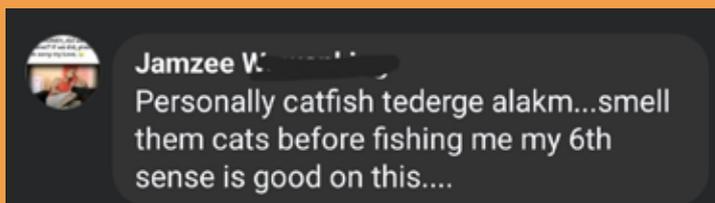
First, I think it would be indicative to check how long their account has existed on Facebook. And then we could also see the number of friends they have. The main way to check though is to check the number of mutual friends and to verify with the people we know in person.
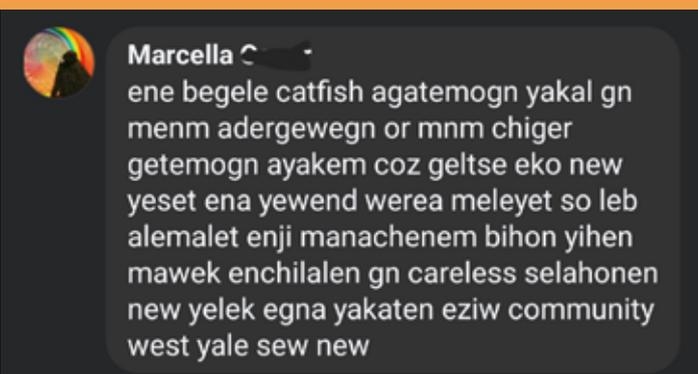
"How do you know if someone is catfishing you?"

These are selected responses from a questionnaire that was posted on a Facebook page ...

Real .. ————

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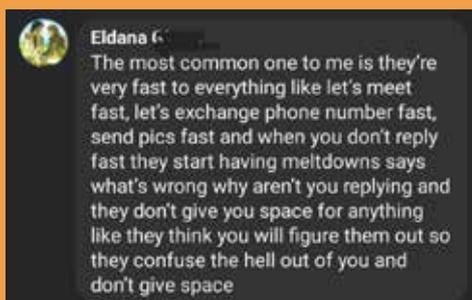
It's obvious from how they speak. Honestly, you can if they are a part of this lifestyle or if they are faking it. There are women who aren't in this lifestyle, only pretending to be. To differentiate that, it's better to take the time to talk to these people and not be easily open. On top of that, they open [Queer] Facebook accounts and post for over a year and make friends. So, when they send you a text, you'll see a lot of mutual friends and think "oh, these are a part of the community".

Jamzee V. ————

Personally catfish tederge alakm...smell them cats before fishing me my 6th sense is good on this....

Personally, I've never been catfished… አሳ ከማጥመዳቸው በፊት ድመቶቹን አሽትቱ። እኔ ስድስተኛ የህዋሰ አካላቴ እዚህ ላይ በጣም ጎበዝ ነው…

Marcella ————

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I personally have been catfished before but they haven't done anything to me and nothing bad came out of it because the differentiating between the way men and women talk is very obvious. So it's a matter of not paying attention but any one of us would be able to know. But it's because we are careless that we are having a hard time. It is someone within our own community.

Eldana ————
The most common one to me is they're very fast to everything like let's meet fast, let's exchange phone number fast, send pics fast and when you don't reply fast they start having meltdowns says what's wrong why aren't you replying and they don't give you space for anything like they think you will figure them out so they confuse the hell out of you and don't give space

"How do you know if someone is catfishing you?"

These are selected responses from a questionnaire that was posted on a Facebook page ...

> **Red F**
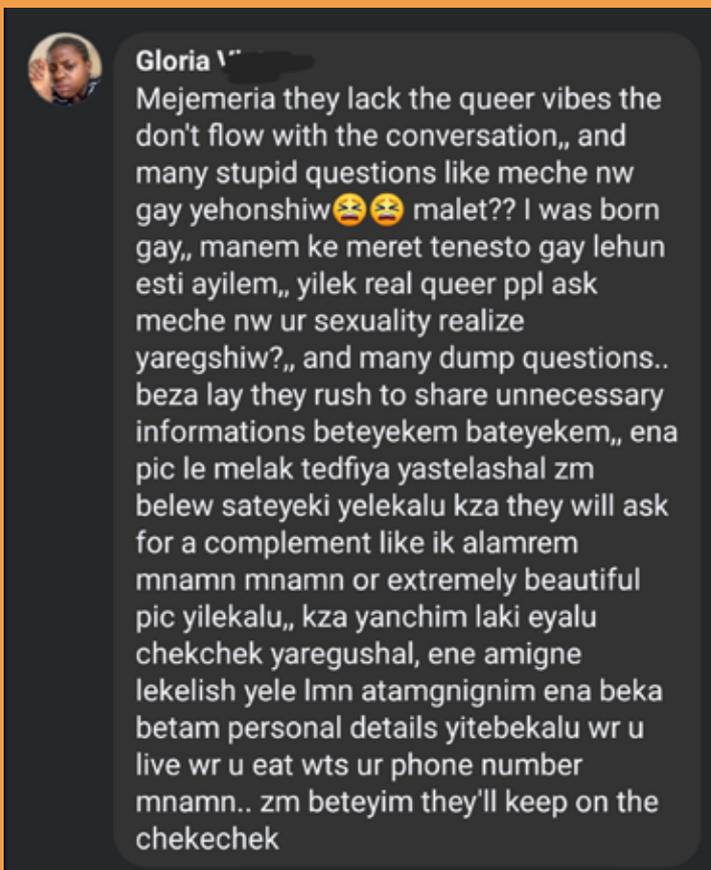> Awerarachew nud pic lemelakena lemeteyek fetan nachew teyakewochachew experience lay sayhon information magegnet lay yetemeserete nw yemisetut mabrarya consistency yelewem hul gize yeteleyaye sw endemawrat nw

The way they speak. They are quick to send and request nude pics. Their questions are more focused on getting more information instead of learning about your experiences. The explanations they give have no consistency. It always feels like you are talking to multiple different people.

> **Gloria V**
> Mejemeria they lack the queer vibes the don't flow with the conversation,, and many stupid questions like meche nw gay yehonshiw😣😣 malet?? I was born gay,, manem ke meret tenesto gay lehun esti ayilem,, yilek real queer ppl ask meche nw ur sexuality realize yaregshiw?,, and many dump questions.. beza lay they rush to share unnecessary informations beteyekem bateyekem,, ena pic le melak tedfiya yastelashal zm belew sateyeki yelekalu kza they will ask for a complement like ik alamrem mnamn mnamn or extremely beautiful pic yilekalu,, kza yanchim laki eyalu chekchek yaregushal, ene amigne lekelish yele lmn atamgnignim ena beka betam personal details yitebekalu wr u live wr u eat wts ur phone number mnamn.. zm beteyim they'll keep on the chekechek

First of all, they don't have the queer vibes and don't flow naturally in conversation. They ask ridiculous questions like, "When did you become gay?" Like, really? I was born gay—no one just wakes up one day and decides to be gay. Real queer people ask, "When did you realize your sexuality?" But these people just ask a bunch of dumb questions. They also rush to share unnecessary information, whether you ask or not, and start sending pictures without you even requesting them. Then they expect compliments, like "Don't I look good?" or they send photos of really beautiful women and start pressuring you to send yours, saying things like, "I trusted you with my pictures; why don't you trust me?" They also bombard you with personal questions—where you live, where you eat, your phone number—and even if you don't respond, they keep nagging.

"How do you know if someone is catfishing you?"

These are selected responses from a questionnaire
that was posted on a Facebook page ...

I agree with the points people around here have been sharing:

1. It's obvious from their conversations that some people move too quickly, calling you "my love," "my darling," or "my life" without even knowing you well. When part of you feels unsure, trust that instinct.

2. Before really getting to know each other, they may send nude pictures or videos. If you get caught up in the moment, you might make mistakes. Stop it. Most people in the queer community don't do this, and even if some do, it's better not to be led by sexual impulses. Self-control is important.

3. When you ask for a voice message, they often hesitate or make excuses. Sometimes they even send the voice of a beautiful woman, but it doesn't address what you asked. The solution is to insist on multiple voice messages—some people might send you 10 different ones, but that's a red flag. Block or ignore them if not it must mean you have a problem.

4. When you ignore them, they don't give up—they keep texting because they want something from you. Don't think you're loved or needed; they don't even know you. There's no way they can know you in an hour. What you need to do is run—yes, run straight to the block button.

5. They mix up their stories because a lie is a lie. They don't tell the truth, so trust your gut instinct.

6. I'll add more as I remember—let me take a breather.