

I wish to express my support for the application by the Lesbian Action Group for a five-year exemption under the Sex Discrimination Act in order to hold female-only events.

I was fortunate to come out as a lesbian more than twenty years ago. Society was much more prejudiced against us back then and we did not have legal equality with heterosexuals. But in some ways we were better off because we had far more opportunities to connect with other lesbians, find a partner, make friends, and join a community. In particular, lesbians who were newly out or closeted could find safe, supportive environments in which to meet other women who shared our experience – without having to navigate the hostile or threatening presence of heterosexuals and men.

Nowadays, lesbians have marriage equality and widespread societal tolerance, but our community has virtually vanished. We have no organised, public social groups, events or venues. We have no female-only online spaces for dating or friendship. So-called Pride events are dominated by men and full of heterosexuals. How are lesbians supposed to find each other?

This is not a frivolous matter. Lesbians have normal human needs; we want relationships like anyone else. We want to fall in love, find partners, make friends, and be part of a like-minded community. Heterosexual women who wish to find a boyfriend or make friends with other heterosexual women have no shortage of spaces in which to do so. Lesbians do not. We are a tiny minority: our dating pool and social circle is necessarily very small and scattered.

In my own case, if it were not for my partner and her lesbian friendships (forged twenty-plus years ago), I would barely know any other lesbians nowadays. I cannot imagine how difficult it would be to be young, single, widowed, or newly out. These women are forced to choose between 'queer' events which are dominated by men, online dating sites which are unpleasant and rife with male sexual harassment, and (if they are lucky) small, private lesbian friendship groups which meet covertly and do not welcome outsiders.

None of these environments are conducive to our wellbeing, safety, dignity or social connectedness. In effect, lesbians have been forced back to the 1960s: forced to choose between lonely isolation and the threat of punishment – legal or otherwise.

It makes perfect sense for lesbians to want to rebuild a community. But women who try to do this are subjected to persecution, vilification and threats. Two recent, high-profile examples from the UK illustrate my point: a lesbian [speed-dating](#) event met with foul male sexual harassment and was cancelled by the host venue because the women would not permit men to join in their dating activities, while an organisation set up to conduct research, advocacy and events for lesbians, The Lesbian Project, was aggressively [protested](#) by threatening individuals who wished to frighten lesbians away from gathering together.

This deranged hostility is becoming more common, not less. In my lifetime, I have never known lesbians to be more isolated and divided from each other than we are right now.

To add insult to injury, the people inflicting this harassment on us claim to do so in the name of 'human rights', 'inclusion', 'equality' and 'love'. But men do not have a right to lesbians' company, and there is nothing loving, inclusive or equitable about shutting down a peaceful minority community.

Banning lesbians from socialising with each other unless we make space for men is not progressive. It is Homophobia 2.0.

I urge the Human Rights Commission to recognise this and decide in favour of the Lesbian Action Group's application.