

*“The subjection of women to men being a universal custom, any departure from it quite naturally appears unnatural.”*

John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, 1869.

When I came out as a lesbian in the late 1980s and early 1990s I was welcomed into a thriving community of women. That community has helped and supported me through a range of life experiences, especially those experiences of exclusion that were prevalent at that time. In the intervening years and on the basis of my lesbianism I have been physically assaulted; verbally abused; refused service; stared at in public; asked to leave premises; lost employment opportunities and ostracised at work. While these were unpleasant experiences, they are experiences that I share with other lesbians, especially those that do not conform to regressive gender stereotypes about what women should do, how they should behave and how they should dress. While these experiences have been profoundly negative they are common among lesbians and have developed a steely resilience within myself and my community.

While I was welcomed into a thriving community of women, I have grown increasingly troubled over the past few years about young lesbians joining my community. Lesbians are a small and marginalised group within the broader community and forcing us back underground where we again employ the use of passwords and vouching systems is regressive and robs us of our right to free assembly. It is akin to lesbian life in the 1950's and has no place in contemporary society. It robs us of the connection with our young counterparts who are denied an understanding of their culture and rich history, which was a connection that I so thoroughly benefited from. As lesbians we are no longer able to meet up as women with a common bond without the presence of men who do not share our experiences of the world.

My identity as a same sex attracted person has been erased in law and public policy as state and corporate entities now refer to me as being same “gender” attracted based on an ideology that I do not believe in or adhere to. Gender consists of regressive sex-based stereotypes that I have been liberated from, yet the state wishes to further imprison me in. Mainstream Rainbow Organisations that do not support my interests have supported this change without any consultation with me or my community. I am a same sex attracted women and no legal sophistry designed to get biological males into women's spaces will ever change this.

It is with bitter irony that I observe the legislation that protected me from discrimination in a range of areas in public life is now being used as tool to discriminate against me. That lesbians have not been able to meet without the presence of men in the state of Victoria for 20 years is regressive and profoundly homophobic. It renders me a lawbreaker that had a greater freedom of association when homosexuality was unlawful. That this is being done in the name of “inclusion” makes it all the more egregious. Any creepy man can currently self-identify as a lesbian and legally force his way into lesbian spaces that should be free of men staring and leering. We have the right to enjoy friendship, community and intimacy that is free of this coercive expectation and intrusion.

Lesbians have a right to freedom of association no matter what the state says. You can legislate against us, you can vilify us and call us names. You can threaten us and relieve us of our livelihoods. These are all things our community has endured before and endures now, but you will never stop us from meeting without the presence of men.

*“The coloniser always make use of ideological weapons. No matter whether this ideology is religion, philanthropy, a ‘civilising mission’ or whatever, it is intended to mask the true intent of the invasion.*

*That intention is always to pacify the invaded people and to convince them that the colonisation is for their own good."*

Anne Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police*, 1975.