

Briefing paper on the situation for lesbians in Scotland

Background to Scottish Lesbians

Scottish Lesbians is a grassroots lesbian organisation started in May 2022 when the founders identified a lack of groups, facilities, or events for lesbians, or any groups campaigning for lesbian rights. We now have around 60 members. We are the only lesbian group in Scotland which is organising politically, and we are only aware of one or two other groups (social groups) which run strictly lesbian-only events. The founders of Scottish Lesbians 'vet' all prospective members to ensure that they are women, lesbian, and in tune with the ethos of the group. Despite political change being one of our key aims, a founding member was recently required to remove a badge stating simply 'Scottish Lesbians' in order to be permitted access to the Scottish Parliament building at which she was an invited guest.

Language

'Lesbian' is a word with a specific meaning: an adult female who is exclusively same-sex attracted. We do not recognise any man, however he identifies and regardless of surgical or hormonal treatment, as either female or a lesbian. 'Man' or 'male' in this document, therefore, refers to any man, regardless of how he identifies. This is important because our language is being co-opted by men and by straight or bisexual women who are happy to date trans-identifying men. 'Lesbian' is now being misused as an umbrella term in order to accommodate men, for example by Oban Lesbian Weekend, which is actively promoted as a mixed-sex event. 'Lesbian' is sometimes written as 'Lesbian*', the * indicating that it is being used 'inclusively' (it is notable that this 'inclusion' leads to many lesbians self-excluding from spaces and events). At the same time, the language of gender ideology (cis, any language which describes women in terms of body parts, 'genital fetishists') is being forced upon us.

Self-ID

Although the Gender Recognition Reform Bill was blocked by the Westminster Government, in practical and cultural terms self-ID has been available to trans-identifying people (short of acquiring a Gender Recognition Certificate, GRC) for several years in Scotland. Institutional policies have enshrined self-ID. The outcome of the recent court case involving For Women Scotland established that men with a GRC should be considered as women *for all purposes*, which has implications for the Equality Act and this will be examined in their forthcoming case in the Supreme Court. Scottish Lesbians has more than 25 members so could be regarded as an association; this may place us in the position of having to decide whether to break the law should a man with a GRC apply to join.

Changes in society are running ahead of policy and the law; self-ID is now established in what were previously lesbian spaces while other spaces have become LGBTQ+ and the lesbian events they hold are open to men. For example, Glasgow Women's Library allows men to self-ID into events, classes and resources intended for women, including the lesbian archive - an archive which was previously only available for women to access.

Lesbian spaces

It has become very difficult to exclude men from lesbian spaces, especially if those spaces, events or groups are advertised publicly. Males are demanding access to lesbians for dating, and shame, bully or threaten lesbians who refuse. This has had the effect of driving lesbian culture in Scotland underground, which means it is very difficult for young or isolated lesbians to make connections.

Scottish Lesbians is in touch with lesbians of all ages, from 19 to 70+, from across Scotland. Young lesbians tell us that they are under a great deal of pressure to accept men in their spaces and as romantic partners. Some of the lesbians in the group have been pressured to identify as trans because of their same-sex attraction. They have expressed anxiety about their future careers if they speak out about lesbian issues, and are at risk of being ostracised by their peer group if their rejection of gender ideology becomes known. This has had a serious adverse impact on their mental health.

Homophobia

The campaigns around the Gender Recognition Reform Bill and self-ID have emboldened homophobes, who make lesbians feel that there is something shameful or bigoted about our sexual orientation. Lesbians who assert their sexual boundaries are described as being obsessed with genitals or as having a 'fetish' or 'kink'. As found by the Cass review, young lesbians are under pressure to adopt a trans identity rather than simply be lesbian. There is some evidence (eg, Dr David Bell, Tavistock Clinic whistleblower) that same-sex attracted young people and especially lesbians are having their sexuality 'transed away'. The Sandyford Clinic has not been subjected to the same scrutiny as the Tavistock and controversial treatments, which are now heavily restricted in England, are still available in Scotland.

It has become considerably harder for lesbians to assert our boundaries. At the recent 'Let Women Speak' event in Edinburgh a young man was seen by us holding a sign reading 'Dykes love girl dick', and we were told by Police officers present that this example of rape culture/forced conversion was acceptable free speech. Since attending this event with our Scottish Lesbians flag, we have been abused and likened to Nazis on social media.

Scottish Lesbians undertook a piece of research looking at lesbian experiences of coming out. We collected data from women around the world, including 13 participants from Scotland. Lesbians reported barriers to coming out which included familial disapproval, lack of representation, porn culture, and the impact of gender identity theory. Gender ideology was reported as a negative by over 80% of participants. You can download a copy here:

<https://scottishlesbians.org.uk/files>