

# How misogyny makes the LGBTI community a lonely place for queer women

*Digital Pride: LA queer women tell GSN how West Hollywood isn't a welcoming place*



Is WeHo welcoming to the entire LGBTI community? Some don't think so | Photo: chillinjust/Flickr

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**West Hollywood is Los Angeles' gay neighborhood.** Most major cities have these neighborhoods. In San Francisco, it's the Castro. In New York City, it's Greenwich Village.

Located southwest of the Hollywood Hills, West Hollywood was once a safe haven for those within the LGBTI community. It was a place to congregate and feel both a sense of belonging and pride. Now, however, it's a representation of the LGBTI community of old.

'I feel like I have to carve out space for myself when I'm there,' Phoebe, a native Californian, tells GSN of her experience in West Hollywood.

‘As a bisexual woman, nothing about that neighborhood is meant for me and that is made very clear. It is populated by gay men, it is aimed towards gay men, and a specific type of gay man at that.’

This sentiment is a trend among **Los Angeles’ community of LGBTI women**, and it’s a sign that things need to change.

***Digital Pride is the only global Pride dedicated to enabling everyone to be part of a Pride, whoever they are and wherever they live in the world. This year, we are focusing on tackling loneliness and isolation. It takes place on Gay Star News from 29 April to 5 May 2019. Find out more.***

## No space for you

GSN spoke to three LGBTI women in Los Angeles – Phoebe, Dana, and Lauren — about their experiences in West Hollywood, and how its exclusionary nature can lead to isolation.

All of them remember their first time as overwhelming – and full of men.

Phoebe recalls: ‘The bar was filled with guys, the go-go dancers were all guys, the bartenders were all guys, and if I hadn’t been there with a male-presenting friend who wanted to be there, I would have left.’

Both Dana and Lauren agree that West Hollywood appears welcoming. Dana notes its history of gentrification and how ‘the general public tends to equate upper-class, white, gay men with safety’.



**Dana at WeHo Pride 2018 – though outside of Pride, she doesn't go to WeHo often | Photo: Provided**

Diversity, however, is another matter.

'There aren't any bars directed toward women, and/or the women's nights are hidden and never called "Lesbian Night," it's just a casual variation of "Girl's Night",' Lauren says.

Dana adds: 'It honestly sucks to know that there isn't a safe space exclusively for queer women to meet each other and feel comfortable getting to know one another or hook up like there are for gay men.'

All three of them tell GSN they don't have much interest in going to West Hollywood anymore.

## Misogyny pervades

These women share experiences of misogyny. They agree that as women they have suffered sexism within the LGBTI community.



Dana remembers going to an LA gay bar called Akbar: 'I was with a group of my queer women friends. We walked into the bar, and I remarked, "Man, there are a lot of guys here." Some man overheard me and replied, "It's a gay bar." I remember being so infuriated. "Women are gay too!" I yelled back.'

It also applies to specific identities. Lauren details for GSN how she feels gay men act derogatorily towards lesbians, and Phoebe laments biphobia and biersasure.

'I once had a boss (who was a gay man) who, after hearing that an actor on a show had come out as bisexual, scoffed and said, "We've all been bi, it's called college! Call me when she comes out as a lesbian!",' Phoebe recalls. 'This sort of behavior is common and makes us feel unseen within a community that is supposed to see everyone.'



**Phoebe wants to see more done for queer women | Photo: Provided**

## What needs to be done

'Los Angeles is a vast city with an incredibly diverse and expansive queer community. There is absolutely no reason that there shouldn't be dedicated spaces for every identity or in which every identity can feel welcome,' Dana frustratedly explains.

Both Phoebe and Lauren agree – and they mean physical spaces ('brick and mortar,' as Phoebe describes) for LGBTI women.

Lauren notes these spaces can't only be inclusive in a performative manner.

'Some places feel they are open to all walks of life, but from their marketing, advertising, clientele – they clearly have one focus group,' she says.

They also must consider all LGBTI women and intersecting identities.

Scholar Sabrina Alimahomed wrote in 2010 that 'sexism within the gay and lesbian movement forced many white lesbians to create a separate lesbian feminist community'.

Lesbians of color, then, became excluded from yet another group.

Earlier this year, a transgender woman of color said she was physically attacked by a group of gay men in West Hollywood, writing 'there are virtually no spaces where I am safe'.



**There is a constant journey to find where you belong | Photo: Provided**

# Consequences of isolation

'There is a dynamic in which, even within our own daily thoughts and feelings, loneliness can come up, despite being around other people,' Jonathan Wong, PsyD, a clinical assistant professor of psychiatry at USC, tells GSN.

He explains it's not surprising that neighborhoods like West Hollywood are hegemonic.

'Some cognitive processes show we have an affinity for people who look like us. People respond to faces they're familiar with, which, coincidentally, look like them. They adopt similar behaviors and social structures.'

The consequences, he warns, are also very real.

Two years ago, then US Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy warned about a 'loneliness epidemic'. This epidemic can lead to physical health consequences, Wong explains. Doctors have linked loneliness to things like inflammation risks and chronic diseases.

'It's modulated by stress and stress hormones. If you are lonely, you are in a negative physical and psychological state. To meet this physical state, stress hormones are released, and a chronic release of stress hormones is shown to result in a variety of diseases.'

For LGBTI people, their experiences exacerbate such stress hormones. Numerous studies have shown higher risks of depression and suicidal ideation in the community, and Wong says there are also connections between mental health and loneliness.

'The more likely you are depressed, the more likely you are to put yourself in a situation that compounds loneliness.'



Everyone deserves a place to feel pride | Photo: Provided

## Invisibility turned resistance

‘The community needs to recognize women as an integral part of the queer community and not an addition. We’ve been here since the beginning – stop treating us like an afterthought,’ Dana demands near the end of our interview.

All three of the women GSN talked to say the most critical times they’ve experienced loneliness is when they haven’t been part of an inclusive LGBTI community.

‘It made me sad, and it made me feel like a part of my heart was missing,’ Phoebe admits. ‘Without the physical touchstone of a location to unite the queer womxn of Los Angeles, we’ve had to carve out our own spaces and find pockets of one another.’

This idea of taking matters into your own hands is not new.

'Exclusion is no longer the predominant critique underlying the marginalization of today's queer women,' Alimahomed explained.

It's now invisibility. And queer women, especially queer women of color, use this invisibility 'to highlight their experiences of marginalization as well to resist dominant conceptions of what it means to be queer'.

Women are here to stay.

## What is Digital Pride?

*Digital Pride is the online movement by Gay Star News, so you can take part in Pride whoever and wherever you are. Even if you are from a country where being LGBTI is criminalized or leaves you in danger – it's a Pride festival you can be a part of.*

*In 2019, Digital Pride is tackling loneliness and isolation with articles and videos connecting LGBTI people. Join us by reaching out to someone who needs it. The festival takes place on Gay Star News from 29 April to 5 May 2019. Find out more.*