

DIAMONDS TG GROUP

Gourmet Girls Dining Club Study

Testing the Goods and Services Act

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Abstract. A group of transgendered women form a dining club and visit randomly selected restaurants in Cambridge to see if they will be treated as equally under the Goods and Services Act 2007 (revised) or not.

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Introduction.

A conversation concerning the exclusion of crossdressers (non-surgery) from the Goods and Services Act 2007 took place in February 2007 between transgendered people and the researcher. A decision was made to test the realities of being denied Goods and Services in Cambridge restaurants because the diners are transgendered in some way. The Act as it stood denied people who were not having medical treatment or had not transitioned from being treated as the same as those who had.

The study would also include aspects of public safety so taxis would not be used.

The design included ten restaurants selected for dining out on Saturday nights, the busiest night of the week and ten on Monday nights, being the quietest. The dates were arranged approximately two weeks apart. This was to see if service differed depending on which night we ate out. It was also intended to accommodate diners who couldn't come out on Saturdays but may be able to do so on Mondays.

Well that was the plan any way.

Note

At the time of the formation of the Dining Club the group used the Fleur de Lys as their base. However a change of management meant that we had to move to the Rose and Crown, Newmarket Road. We would like to thank the Staff there for their support and friendship during our stay way with them and wish them a happy future.

This venue is now scheduled for re-development and the group has moved to the Corner House on Newmarket Road where we still meet every week as the DIAMONDS TV/TG group on Wednesdays. www.tgcambridge.org.uk

We meet in the Bird on Hand, Newmarket Road on Saturday Dining Club night. (Usually the first Saturday of each month)

xxxxx

An occasional member phoned the Fleur one day to see if we still met there and was told that they don't have 'those kind of people there'

Needless to say we will not be eating at the Fleur.

But then I don't suppose they would want us there.

However, this study is testing the Goods and Services Act 2007

Design

A dining club is formed by asking transgendered members of TGCamb and TGNorthants Yahoo Groups to join a list of people willing to dine out in Cambridge from time to time as a group. Other similar women were also invited from other sources such as the Beaumont Society. Non-transgendered women were also invited. A list of Cambridge restaurants was downloaded from the Internet. www.cambridgerestaurants.com/alphabetical. It contained the names of 86 restaurants situated within Cambridge. Each restaurant's name was contained in a separate box. The list was cut up into 86 names.

A letter was prepared that described the dining clubs members as being transgendered and asked if the recipient restaurant had any objection to the ladies using their restaurant. It also explained that the ladies would be using the ladies cloakroom and not the gents and that it is customary to refer to each person in their female persona, i.e. *she, her, madam*.

Methodology

20 slips of paper that matched the restaurant name slips were prepared. 10 said **LETTER** and 10 **said NO LETTER**.

The 86 slips were placed in a box and 20 slips were selected at random. As each restaurant was selected a slip from the second box was selected, also at random. The result was 20 restaurants selected of whom 10 would receive a copy of the letter and 10 would not.

Data

1. Staff were friendly and cooperative
2. Staff referred to each person in her female persona
3. Any negative behaviour
4. Any other positive behaviour.
5. Overall impression 1 – 10

Conditions

1. Participant Observer The researcher will accompany the diners in most cases and her presence, as a gender born female will be taken into account.
2. Qualitative data
3. Field Experiment
4. Dining Club Members will not be told about the restaurant letter conditions.

What Really Happened

April 2007 (5 Diners)

Station Tandoori

The first restaurant to be selected was the Boulevard on Hills Road described as serving Mediterranean food. Except that it didn't. Pre-checks for booking requirements revealed the Boulevard no longer existed and it was now Station Tandoori. We went anyway as we like Indian food and we were trying to stick to the rules of the study.

We arrived unannounced and were quickly greeted by the friendly staff. They were very keen to make us welcome but were obviously not up to scratch regarding how the ladies should be addressed. A copy of the letter which had been sent to the Boulevard (one of the restaurants randomly selected for a letter) was produced by the researcher and it was clear that the present incumbents had never seen it. However they quickly adapted to the protocol of referring to all the ladies as 'madam' and were happy to wait 20 minutes before taking our orders so that one of our group could catch up with us as she was running late.

Soon we were all settled around our table and service commenced. The food was excellent as were the facilities although the restaurant itself was a little cold.

Score 9/10

The next event should have been at the HAKKA Chinese restaurant on Milton Road on a Monday but it was closed as there was a problem with the lease according to a notice in the window. (It has since reopened) There were no takers anyway so the event was regarded as cancelled. This would be a recurring theme for dining on Mondays and it was eventually dropped from the study.

May 2007 (8 Diners)

Lawyers

Our next Saturday event was at Lawyers on Lensfield Road where we were welcomed with great enthusiasm. We had pre-booked and the restaurant had received a letter. The service was excellent and we ate from the modern English style menu accompanied by some gorgeous Australian wines. A great night out at a large comfortable table at far end of the building but still managed to attract a couple of curious male customers whose heads appeared rather inexplicably around the corner.

We had parked a few streets away and had to walk along Hills Road. A visitor asked one of the group for directions and seemed totally unaware of any possible differences between us. We all agreed that we felt safe walking around the area having arrived at about 8 pm and left around 10pm.

Score 10/10

June 2007 (7 Diners)

The Vine

This event fell on Strawberry Fair Day but we didn't expect to find our next venue FOOTLIGHTS closed as a result. Having parked our cars in the Grafton West car park we walked the comparatively short distance to the entrance of the Grafton centre where Footlights restaurant is situated. Given the amount of people around at that time, 8pm, (as Midsummer Common that had accommodated the Fair was close by) it was with some trepidation that we walked up the steps only to be greeted by the Staff saying that they were not serving that evening and were about to close. They suggested we went to The Vine at the far end of Burliegh Street, a five minute walk away.

Burliegh Street is poorly paved and the journey in high heels was uncomfortable to say the least but we reached The Vine and gathered around the entrance to read the menu displayed there. Opposite is the entrance to WT's Snooker Club and a small group of youths had congregated outside. One of them stared rather keenly at a member of our group before pointing firmly at her and shouting to all and sundry 'it's a bloke'. We hurriedly entered The Vine.

We were quickly seated but the service was very slow as there were only two people serving. The choice wasn't very good especially for the vegetarians but the atmosphere was pleasant except for when a small fight broke out between two men standing at the nearby bar and one of them nearly landed on our table. Everyone stayed calm though as befits our style!

On returning from the Ladies the researcher noticed a small group of people sitting near the back door who seemed a little concerned about the noise emanating from the street. The group of youths seen earlier had grown in number and were becoming rather rowdy. The group felt uncertain about leaving (they were teachers apparently and had read the body language) As our group were ready to leave we joined forces and left by the back door and returned to the car park using the service road between the Grafton Centre and rear of Burliegh Street rather than risk any confrontations.

Overall the food was agreeable although portions were quite small but it was the atmosphere on the street which discouraged us from returning.

Score 7/10

The original choice FOOTLIGHTS did not receive a letter; neither did The Vine as substitute but both venues were both polite and respectful to the group.

August 2007 (7 Diners)

Bun Shop

July Dining Club event was postponed as the researcher was on holiday on the first Saturday and the rest of the group didn't want to dine out without her. In a way it was disappointing that this opportunity was missed as it would have given an insight as to whether the group were treated differently without the presence of a gender-born woman.

The Bun Shop did not receive a letter. We parked in Jesus Lane and walked through Malcolm Place without any problems. Having entered the restaurant we were quickly shown to our table. There was a large hen party arriving at the other end of the room but they did not seem to notice us. The room filled up quickly during the evening and apart from a few sideways glances we were virtually ignored by the other diners.

Our waitress was charming and very friendly and helpful apart from when she accidentally spilt a bottle of water over one of the group! The portions were huge and few of us managed to finish our plates but the food and choice was excellent.

Score 9/10

September 2007 (6 Diners)

The Ghandi

The Ghandi was originally chosen for July but postponed. By now the original choices are not always being used for various reasons. The list used for selection purposes was hopelessly out of date and some of the venues had very poor reputations. There were also a lot of Indian restaurants being drawn which rather biased the study in terms of variety. There was a takeaway in the selection too which we had to substitute although the takeaway was the only recipient of a letter to reply by leaving a very friendly message on our voicemail. There was also a sandwich shop, long closed down on the list and several restaurants had changed hands.

We parked again off Hills Road and walked along Regent Street. No-one felt comfortable about using the Queen Anne car park. The Ghandi had received a letter but we had not booked in.

The staff were immediately attentive and soon found us a table large enough to accommodate 6 of us. The food and service were excellent. Some rugby players at a nearby table were seen talking to the waiter who seemed at great pains to explain something to them. A charity rose seller came round while we were eating and the rugby players bought a rose which they presented to one of our group when they passed our table on leaving. A charming gesture that pleased us all.

Score 10/10

October 2007 6 Diners
Rainbow Vegetarian Bistro

This Kings Parade venue necessitated us parking in the Lion Yard car park. Walking through a busy town centre past hostelrys such as The Eagle and the Bath created an awareness of our physical safety but we arrived at the Rainbow unscathed.

The restaurant was packed and we had to wait on the stairs for about 20 minutes before a table became vacant. The researcher had phoned in advance as the restaurant has a reputation for being busy at all times and had booked in a party of six. Staff members were courteous, friendly and helpful and seemed to be able to avoid any faux pas even though they hadn't had a letter and had no idea about who the party of six might be. The restaurant consists of a series of small rooms in the basement of the building and is very popular. Everyone enjoyed their meals and we all tried something we hadn't had before especially the carnivores among us who were having a meat free evening.

The return walk to the Lion Yard and the ticket payment ritual at the machine passed without incident and we left for home feeling rather triumphant.

If people had seen us or stared at any time we weren't aware of it but don't think we would venture out here much later than 10 pm and definitely wouldn't have crossed the Market Place for any reason.

Score 9/10 (it was a long wait with nowhere to sit or get a drink while waiting)

November 2007 (8 Diners)
Istanbul Turkish Restaurant

As the Istanbul is not far from the Rose and Crown where we met that night we decided to walk down East Road, leaving our cars in Occupation Road. This was a bit of an adventure really as it is such a cosmopolitan area in need of refurbishment and the pavements were definitely not stiletto friendly.

We had little information about the Istanbul other than it is a late opening venue after a night in the pub, somewhere to meet up with friends for supper. Never the less we were a little surprised to find only the takeaway section open at 8 pm. However having explained our wish to have a meal at 8 pm not midnight the owner kindly opened up the dining room for us. The restaurant had received a letter but this was not mentioned.

This was our first experience of food sharing and most of us accepted the concept with enthusiasm although one person found the idea rather unwholesome and clung onto her choice rather than sharing it around.

The waiter was impressive and kept bringing the courses as fast as we could eat them. The food was a little disappointing though with meat being the prominent feature which left our vegetarian member with little choice. This was deemed to be a typical Turkish experience the waiter proudly explained. There are no vegetarians in Turkey he claimed but made up for the lack of non-meat choices by giving us free baklava for our sweet course. Overall though most members enjoyed their meals but it was agreed that we probably wouldn't return as it didn't really fulfil our expectations. For the purpose of the study though there were no discriminations.

Score 7/10

December 1st 2007 (7 Diners)
Yu Garden

Yu Garden Chinese Restaurant on Newmarket Road wasn't originally selected but was recommended to us by one of the main group members. Having tried food sharing once we were intrigued by the protocols of this non-menu venue with its fixed price and service 'china-style'

The researcher called in prior to the actual meal time to check that there would be a table for 6-8 people available at 8pm. Parking is easy as there is a car park at the rear of the building. As a non-selected venue it did not receive a letter.

We duly arrived at 8 pm and two tables were brought together so that we had plenty of room between us. The warm, friendly lady owner explained to us that we would be eating out as if we were in China. Family restaurants there do not have menus. The owner asks the diners their personal preferences i.e. hot, spicy, mild, meat, fish and shellfish, vegetarian etc. The chef then produces a series of dishes to suit all tastes making sure that a Peking Duck is included of course! There were three vegetarians in our group and their dishes were equal to the meat and fish ones that everyone else ate. This is a family restaurant on the edge of a large estate. There were families with children dining at the same time as us and they called out to us in a really friendly way to say how lovely they found the restaurant, food and staff and they hoped that we were enjoying it too.

We all agreed that this was a superb eating experience that even the most conservative ones among us could return to again and again.

Score 10/10

Christmas Dinner (10 Diners)
Advocate

We loved our experience at Lawyers so much that we returned to it for our Christmas dinner under its new name of Advocate. Almost everything was the same except that this was a first nights' work for our wonderful waiter who took such pains to make sure that we were looked after as well as it was possible to be. Our table was in a different position as the back doors were now utilised by smokers wishing to use the garden area but this was fine by us as we weren't disturbed by the constant trickle of gaspers heading for relief!

Again we walked from Hills Road, this time in the dark without any qualms.

Score 11/10

By now we had decided to try some more restaurants that hadn't been selected as well as those that had. The scientific element was being adapted to personal tastes rather than eating in places that didn't match our personal preferences. This was the downside of randomly selecting restaurants.

February 2008 (5 Diners)
Koh-i-noor

Several diners had expressed an interest in trying Moroccan food after one of the group said that they had had a very good meal at Al Casbah on Mill Road. Interestingly the group member had visited in male dress so had not tested the Goods and Services Act. Having had two outings in December January was given a miss so the Moroccan restaurant was discussed as another new eating experience for the February outing.

The researcher looked Al Casbah up on the internet and was rather dismayed by the negative comments it received from previous diners. Parking might be a problem too. No-one was keen to park at Queen Anne's so we relied on finding a space or two in one of the side streets that would be unaffected by parking restrictions at that time of night.

A quick drive by earlier in the week confirmed the restaurants' position on Mill Road and filled with a sense of foreboding the researcher e-mailed the Cambridge Police Hate Crime team at Parkside to alert them that we would be in the area that Saturday. No special treatment was expected or called for but the researcher felt that it was in the best interests of the groups' safety on the streets to make their visit known.

We arrived all in one car at a parking space in Mackenzie Road at around 8 pm and walked onto Mill Road. Using the nearby panda crossing we walked towards Al Casbah. We were almost immediately approached by the local beggars who were more interested in wheedling a few pound coins out of us than who we were although one man in particular was becoming a bit of a nuisance. We stopped outside Al Casbah and looked through the large window. The restaurant was packed and had a claustrophobic air about it. Unnerved we headed for the Koh-i-noor Indian restaurant a few doors away where we were taken straight to a waiting area until a table came available. Heads turned as some of the diners present became aware of us but the staff members were pleasant and kind and we felt comfortable and welcomed. As we were very hungry by now we settled for being served in the waiting area and ate our meal there in comparative peace.

After an enjoyable meal with good service we left and crossed over the road as a Police presence was dealing with an incident outside Al Casbah. It probably had nothing to do with the restaurant itself but it confirmed our unease at walking around the area. Mill Road has a brilliant selection of restaurants but accessing them can be hairy!!

Score for the restaurant 8/10 but only 5/10 for overall experience.

March 2008 (4 Diners)
Footlights.

We had originally intended to visit the Box Tree but on arrival were told that the kitchen was closed due to a private party. We moved on to nearby FOOTLIGHTS having left a message at the Box Tree to tell people catching up with us where we had gone. The message was never passed on so there were just 4 of us dining at Footlights which was an originally selected venue but had not received a letter.

The waiter was friendly, helpful and totally at ease with us. The food was good but the portions could have been a little larger!

Our table was close to the top of the stairs so was a bit draughty. An altogether average but pleasant visit.

Score 8/10

April 2008 (4 Diners)
Burliegh Arms

After another abortive trip to the Box Tree we moved on to the Burliegh Arms which is a very welcoming establishment on Newmarket Road that does typical pub fare. Neither venue had been selected so no letters had gone out. It has an excellent reputation for serving all comers and we felt totally at home there. We could order individually at the bar and our meals were brought to our table. A birthday party was under way nearby and we went unnoticed in the crowd (as far as we know!!)

Score 9/10

Results

22 women (including 2 non-transgendered women) participated over a 12 month period visiting 11 restaurants, one of them twice during which time it re-named itself but apparently this was not our fault! Four restaurants had received a letter and seven had not.

By now our numbers are being depleted for various reasons. Two of our regular diners have serious medical problems and another had gone overseas for a prolonged period. There are many people who would love to join us but for many different reasons cannot do so. We will continue dining out every month for the sheer enjoyment of it and along the way will take in more of the selected restaurants, some of whom will have received a letter and some that will not have done so. Based on our experiences so far we expect to find that Cambridge is a great place for transgendered people to eat out.

Discussion

Selecting at random from such a large pool of restaurants meant that there was greater room for error i.e. the list itself not being up to date so some restaurants no longer existed. There was also the unforeseen element of too many of one type of restaurant being selected, in our case Indian ones and therefore not a wide enough variety of types of food and establishments.

Had this study had an academic element to it we would have had to go with the selection and grit our teeth but as there was a social and voluntary participation involved it was decided that although we would stick to the spirit of the experiment we would never the less adapt it to our own tastes without compromising on the basic rules.

There was the matter of cost to consider too. Some diners were on a limited budget while others were not and the overall expenditure required on any given night tended to govern who was participating on that occasion.

The average cost per head was in the region of £15 - £20 depending on whether the diner had wine with her meal but Lawyers (later Advocate) averaged £25 - £30 per head but diners considered that they had good value for money along with an exceptional choice of wines!.

Dining out for transgendered people can be quite scary when it comes to using the toilets and it is customary for them to use the Ladies when dressed as women. There were no discernible objections to any of the group using the Ladies toilets at any of the restaurants.

Vegetarianism and religious dietary laws came into play and we found shortcomings at several restaurants who did not seem very interested in catering outside the mainstream requests.

It was quite difficult to keep track of the main aim of the study once people had ordered their meal and had their first drink. However any discrimination under the Goods and Services Act would have been immediately noticeable and this didn't happen – staff at all venues were polite and helpful although there were some fellow diners who were more than a little intrigued by us in some restaurants.

One member has reported that she feels far safer eating out in Cambridge than in her home town of Harlow where she described the population as 'Neanderthal' by comparison.

Generally speaking Cambridge has few terrors for transgendered people who wish to eat out at any of the hundred plus establishments available to them. There is a wide range of food on offer from many countries and the staff working in these particular venues bring into play their own customs and understanding of trans people. The ethnic mix in Cambridge is probably as diverse as any city elsewhere and people working in the industry tend to enjoy a highly sophisticated approach to their clientele.

The author would like to acknowledge the 22 ladies from the transgendered community who participated in this study and were instrumental in bringing together the Diamonds TG Group based in Cambridge; for making the Gourmet Girls Dining Club such a success, and to whom this study is dedicated.

Gourmet Girls

Dear Restaurateur

I am the social coordinator for a very special group of ladies who like to dine out on occasion as a group.

The reason that these ladies are special is because they are transgendered to a lesser or greater degree and appear dressed in female clothes.

Some are cross dressers who only dress up occasionally while others may be transitioning from male to female (Transsexuals). None are Drag Queens. Their aim is to be as 'passable' as females as they can. Some are more successful than others. Sometimes their wives and partners come along too.

I am not transgendered myself but have spent many years enjoying the company and friendship of this group who are very sensitive to adverse criticism. Being transgendered is not a choice that they make. Coming out in public as a group of diners is one of their ways of learning to accept themselves as they are and is beneficial to their psychological well being.

The reason I am contacting you is to ask you if you have any objections to us as a group coming to your restaurant from time to time.

The only concession that we ask is that all persons appearing as female be addressed as 'madam' or referred to in the female gender. If they require the rest room it is customary for them to use the Ladies. This is to avoid any misunderstandings in the Gents.

I would like to build up a portfolio of accepting Restaurants in Cambridge. The City has an excellent record in tolerance and understanding of minority groups.

If you have any queries please go to www.beaumontsociety.org.uk for guidance and for staff training purposes if you think this is necessary.

Please maintain contact directly with me via e-mail, post or telephone using the information at the top of this letter.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

kind regards

Diana Aitchison
Area Organiser
Cambridge Beaumont Society

Restaurants (original selection)

1. Boulevard	Letter now Station Tandoori. Phone call
2. Ying Wah	Letter
3. Lawyers	Letter
4. Chez Gerard	No Letter
5. Footlights	No Letter
6. Chillies	No Letter
7. Ghandi	Letter
8. Panos	Letter
9. Bun Shop	No Letter
10. Thanh Binh	No Letter
11. Caspian	No Letter (sandwich shop?)
12. Pipasha	Letter
13. Rainbow Veg	No Letter
14. Volunteer	No Letter
15. Istanbul	Letter
16. La Margherita	Letter
17. Mogul Tandoori	Letter
18. Tandoori Villa	No Letter
19. Nandos	Letter
20. Tapei	No Letter