

## Members Only

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An increasing number of gay venues in UK cities are employing a 'members and regulars' door policy, meaning potentially that we may have to prove our gayness to step over the threshold into gay clubland. At first glance, a strict gay door policy has its merits, perhaps even its necessity. It is true that increasingly, hen nights pack out the dance floor and by letting all and sundry in to bars and clubs the relative safety of gay venues can be threatened. However, when taking in the wider implications perhaps promoting such strict measures is unfavourable?

There are perhaps three major questions to be raised: how is a members and regulars policy enforced? How can one prove his or her sexuality, (other than waltzing past in feather boa and full drag make up)? Finally, how would we feel if we were turned away from a straight night? In aiming to protect our utopian discotheque are club owners tempting a storm that could jeopardise heading out for a night on the tiles?

Furthermore, where does gay tourism fit into the equation, many gay men travel to UK cities to experience the exceptional gay scene of London, Manchester and Brighton, as examples, but obviously do not have the opportunity for membership or the status of a regular. How disappointing to make the trip over to Britain, only to be forced to prove your sexuality, (in a language perhaps not your own) potentially ruining the holiday you were so looking forward to.

Obviously the largest problem of operating such a door policy is that the decision has to be made as to what defines sexuality. Now, terms such as 'straight acting' are thrown around internet dating sites but lets take up the example and apply it to reality. Many gay men do not associate with behaviours synonymous with the gay stereotype. These gay men, perhaps those coming straight from work even, may not outwardly appear gay, however, this does not mean they should be tested in order to gain entry to a bar or club.

Typically, door staff are asked to limit entrance to those who are clearly drunk, perhaps part of a large group or causing trouble even before heading inside. How much more difficult is their job made by having to determine sexuality? Yes, there are those of us who frequent the same bars and clubs on a weekly basis and therefore may be recognised by the bouncers but for those of us who vary our social lives or may be trying a new bar for the first time, why should we be challenged?

Let us not forget that we are heading out to bars and clubs to spend our hard earned cash and have a good time, so we deserve to be treated with fairness from the moment we queue or step up to a bar, right? Let me highlight how much I agree with the sentiment of the policy before I continue; gay clubs should always maintain a good balance of people but ultimately ensure a predominant gay crowd. However, if members and regulars is to be a success then great care needs to be taken into how the door staff greet those revellers standing outside.

The easiest way to check on sexuality is to kindly ask if you have been to the bar or club before or perhaps even ask where your favourite venue in the city is, if you are not resident in London then this should not be seen as a negative. After all, the likelihood is that if you are making the effort to gain entrance to a gay club you are not likely a homophobe or looking for trouble. Persistence should be noted as an effort to prove sexuality and not as confrontational or aggressive. Remember, that door staff are typically highly sensitive to signs of nuisance and will more likely refuse entrance if you raise your voice, so stay calm and cool and try your luck, with charm!

Aside from the practicalities let us consider the implications away from the gay village. What happens if gay people are refused entry from a more typically straight venue? I am guessing that most people would be pretty incensed but then should this be noted when straight people truly want to head to a gay venue? Most of us have a mixed friendship group and from time to time may want to head to a gay bar, (more than anything gay bars are often great places for a drink with a friendly atmosphere and excellent décor, non?!)

So what should we be promoting outside our clubs and bars, tolerance, inclusiveness and friendship, or elitism and segmentation? Ultimately, wouldn't it be great to simply have the freedom to mix openly and express yourself in gay and straight venues, enjoying the music and atmosphere away from political correctness? Until that day we can continue to enjoy our gay majority nights so long as we have access to them. Sexuality is as much about being yourself as it is about being part of the "club" so do not be turned away from a venue if you have a right to be inside dancing beneath a disco ball, just remember, calm cool and collected as opposed to gasps and aggression will get you everywhere in the world!