



Why 'Uber for women' is not discriminatory

Michelle Smith, *The Conversation*, 19 April 2016.

Available from **THE CONVERSATION**:

<https://theconversation.com/why-uber-for-women-is-not-discriminatory-58037>

©2016, Conversation Media Group

Reproduced by Deakin University under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution NoDerivatives Licence](#)

Downloaded from DRO:

<http://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30090189>

Performing Femininity

Storytelling and gender

Why 'Uber for women' is not discriminatory

April 19, 2016 5.45am AEST



Damon Jah/flickr, CC BY-SA

A planned Uber-style service, currently named Chariot for Women, is recruiting thousands of female drivers across the United States. The drivers will only accept women and child passengers.

The aim of the service, and other female taxi fleets, is to minimise anxieties about male drivers raping and assaulting female passengers.

The right for women to feel safe while travelling is superficially not contentious. The concept of a service that would refuse to employ or transport men, however, has invited accusations of discrimination.

Is every sex-specific business or institution, from girls' or boys' schools, to women's gyms or men's

Author



Michelle Smith

Research fellow in English Literature,
Deakin University

clubs, necessarily an example of discrimination? As a community, what do we understand discrimination to be?

Avoiding discrimination does not simply mean treating everyone exactly the same. In most instances, discrimination occurs when someone of a particular sex or race, for example, cannot obtain the same outcome or result as people who do not share that same attribute.

I have just spent a week in London. Poor access to underground trains for people with physical disabilities is obvious, even if logistically difficult to solve. If dedicated lifts or ramps were installed for the sole use of disabled passengers that would not constitute “discrimination” toward passengers without disabilities who were forced to take the stairs.

While such facilities might be closed to me, they would only make it possible for people with disabilities to have the opportunity to experience the same outcome as me—ready and easy access to a train service. This is just one example of how certain groups of people might need to be treated differently to achieve an equal outcome.

A multi-story Perth car park last week received publicity because it has reserved 28 spaces near the well-lit exit for female drivers. Regardless of whether the pink bays will produce any measurable improvement in women’s safety, there was a significant response that described the reservation of spaces for women as discriminatory towards men.

Some online comments and talkback radio calls asked what would happen if the situation was “reversed” and parking spaces were reserved for men.

In these two examples, situations in which roles were “reversed” would not simply mean spaces in a car park reserved for men or an Uber-style service that would only collect male passengers. For a true reversal, all of the factors that prompt specific initiatives for women would also need to apply.

That is, a true reversal of the car park scenario would require a hypothetical world in which men regularly feared for their safety when returning to their cars and were disproportionately subject to sexual assault. Moreover, this fear would need to originate in the majority of attacks being perpetrated by women upon men, leading most men to feel physically vulnerable in comparison.

Obviously there is no likelihood that the conditions that would constitute a “role reversal” could ever exist.

The fact that men are at risk of being subject to violent assault by other men in public does not erase the gendered nature of violence and sexual assault experienced by women. In addition, it should not play any role in determining whether an initiative to help women feel safer should proceed.

Similarly, a female-only driver service is one way for women passengers to potentially experience the same perception of safety as men who take regular taxi services with largely male drivers.

A true “role reversal” would not be a taxi service that refused to serve women. It would also need to exist in a world where male passengers were afraid to give a driver their home address, and were too often subject to unwanted sexual attention from drivers.

This is not to deny that gay men, elderly men, transgender men and other types of men might also fear for their safety in isolated locations like carparks or when being driven by a stranger. What they are intended to suggest is that discrimination is not reducible to differing treatment on the basis of sex, sexuality, race, gender identity, or disability when an endeavour is designed to counter a form of inequality and ensure an equal outcome.

Men’s rights advocates might suggest that “discrimination against men” is acceptable now that feminism has gone “too far”.

However, there is a clear difference between discrimination that excluded women from certain men’s clubs and societies (to prevent them from participating in spheres of employment or circles of power) and “discrimination” that seeks to allow women to feel equally as safe as men when moving in public space.