

Jenny Lindsay

Poet and author

The cancellation

In 2019, an arts publication called *The Skinny* published an article in which its author stood by earlier comments calling for violence against lesbians with gender-critical beliefs: “Debate never works so fuck them up.” Lindsay responded to *The Skinny* on social media: “One of your commentators here advocates violence against lesbian activists at Pride. I find it extraordinary that such views are given an airing in *The Skinny*.”



Lindsay experienced a sustained campaign of harassment as a result of this post, which attracted accusations of tone-policing, bigotry and transphobia. People in her network started to distance themselves from her. Other writers said they would not share a stage with her. Organisations were pressured not to hire her. She lost paid work. The Scottish Poetry Library issued a statement calling for poets to stop bullying, harassing and cancelling other poets, in response to which more than 250 people signed an open letter accusing the library of institutional transphobia. The backlash against Lindsay persisted. She faced years of abuse, and continued to lose contacts and work.

The effect

Lindsay was warned that her safety might be at risk. She moved house and lost friends, and was dropped by organisations meant to support her. She lost her career: she no longer works as a poet and events organiser. “Because Scotland is so small,” she says, “no-one is ever going to hire you and give you opportunities.”

“A healthy liberal democracy needs a healthy literary culture, and instead it’s been reflecting a really damaging, divisive politics.”

Other people did not speak out because they saw what had happened to her, and feared the same thing happening to them. There was an impact, too, on the Scottish arts scene. Lindsay used to act as a bridge between institutions and grassroots writers, part of which involved scouting for new talent. “Nobody else is really doing that now in Scotland. It’s a real loss.”

Lindsay wrote a book, *Hounded*, detailing her experiences and those of many other women who have been abused, lost work or been otherwise affected as a result of gender-identity ideology. She plans to continue to focus on non-fiction: “I can’t see myself going back to poetry,” she says.

“I wouldn’t want to repeat the last five years, but I’m glad I spoke out about this. I can’t think [of] anything more embarrassing than not speaking out, because it is insanity.”