



Futile Yet Awesome Trademark Dispute

By **Stony Olsen**

There's an old saying about tilting at windmills that comes from the Miguel de Cervantes novel *Don Quixote* and is a metaphor for doing something that is hopeless.



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Just such a hopeless endeavor has been started by three ladies from Greece. But first, some history!

Some long-ago history, in fact. We'll have to go way back, to classical

Greece and the island of Lesbos with the female poet Sappho. Apparently, Sappho lived on Lesbos (which is near the Turkish coast in the Aegean Sea), and she wrote a bunch of poems, some of which extolled the virtues of female-female love. In so doing, she lent her name as a description of female-female love ("sapphic"), and in turn, the island of Lesbos lent its name to the term "lesbian."

Fast-forward to today's era. Women all over who, shall we say, prefer other women over men are referred to as "lesbians." That is apparently widely accepted. There's only one problem: inhabitants of the island of Lesbos today are referred to as "Lesbians."

As you may imagine, these two meanings can clash, though it does lead to the rather strange but perfectly possible scenario of running into a male Lesbian — i.e., a guy who lives on the island of Lesbos.

But three people (one man and two women) in Greece who live on Lesbos weren't very happy that apparently all sorts of assumptions were made about them when they called themselves Lesbians. So they have [sued](#) the Homosexual and Lesbian Community of Greece because that group is the only group in Greece to have the term "lesbian" in their name. The case will be heard in Athens on June 10 of this year.

One can sympathize with the poor people on the island of Lesbos, but I suspect this cause is hopeless. One principle of trademark law is that the term has to not be diluted; if it is diluted by "unauthorized use," it loses its protection. The classic example would be aspirin, which used to be a trademark but lost its protection due to the company with the trademark not protecting it.

Something similar will likely happen here. No one on Lesbos has complained until now that I know of. In any event, the poor souls on Lesbos are, like Don Quixote, tilting at the windmill — there is no way they will convince world opinion that the term "Lesbian" refers only to people who live on the island of Lesbos.

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