

To whom it may concern,

We listened with interest to the BBC Woman's Hour segment on lesbian bars, broadcast on Friday, May 17th. The segment addressed the current dearth of bars or other social spaces for lesbian women, an issue which is very familiar to us as a group of lesbians. In recent years, as one of your guests, Joelle Taylor, pointed out, provision of social spaces for lesbians has been a 'desert'.

The premise upon which this segment was based, therefore, was fairly uncontroversial. Lesbians have few to no dedicated spaces left. Much more problematic was the implication that the guests and venues featured were in any way addressing this lack of lesbian spaces. We would go so far as to say that the guests you featured are symptomatic of, and indeed actively contributing to, a culture in which there is erasure of lesbian community and spaces.

You featured the proprietors of La Camionera, a new bar in London described as a 'lesbian bar'. In this low-quality interview - which made for very poor radio due to the distracting background noises of DIY, work which of course could not be seen by your listeners - the proprietors were at pains to describe that their 'lesbian' bar is 'inclusive' of anyone who chooses to visit.

You also interviewed Jess, who runs Dirt Dykes, a cabaret night for 'queer people of marginalised genders'. There was no explanation, given that lesbians were not the focus in this section, of the use of the word 'dyke', a word that is used positively by some lesbians but has also been a term of abuse. 'Dyke' is an epithet historically used for lesbians only, and does not denote anything to do with 'gender', so some probing into the use of this word would have been expected as a minimum for this interview.

Following the interviews with women who run these spaces, you featured the two women behind the Lesbian Bar Project, who have recently produced a documentary about the disappearance of lesbian bars. These guests explained that they see 'lesbian' as an 'umbrella term', and they spoke about 'queer' and 'trans' people and the outlawing of drag in Texas. Again, it was difficult to see any relevance of this section to lesbian women, other than that it provided yet another example of how the needs of lesbians have been completely subsumed into the needs of other groups of people.

Lesbians are same-sex attracted women, and the listener would not have understood that from listening to your feature. Scottish Lesbians recently completed a piece of qualitative research asking lesbians about factors which help or hinder us in coming out and living as lesbians. You can see our research report on our website [here](#). The vast majority of respondents in our study talked about gender ideology and 'queer' culture as being problematic for lesbians. Lesbians described movingly the importance of having spaces in which to meet other lesbians, and having lesbian role models, in order to feel confident and able to live as lesbians. Young lesbians told us that they struggled to find any lesbian spaces or community.

One member of Scottish Lesbians describes the importance of lesbian spaces from her own experience: 'Personally speaking, having a lesbian space as a young woman helped give me the confidence to be 'out'. It showed me that other ways of living, relationships and family were possible and I learned that from my lesbian elders. The lesbian disco I went to was a safe space to be myself away from the male gaze. These single sex spaces were so important and I worry about younger lesbians who don't have the opportunity I had.'

Your segment on lesbian bars was unfortunately symptomatic of the challenges facing lesbians. By uncritically interviewing women who misuse the word 'lesbian' to mean, in fact, 'anyone', you helped promulgate a harmful misunderstanding that there has been a resurgence in spaces for lesbians, when in fact the opposite is true. Many lesbians self-exclude from spaces such as the ones featured. Opposition to the misuse of 'lesbian' as an 'umbrella term' was glossed over and barely acknowledged at all in the piece.

The framing of 'lesbian' as an 'inclusive' or 'umbrella' term is lesbophobic. We are women who love and are attracted to other women. Perhaps, as a follow up to this piece, Woman's Hour could speak to some lesbians and explore why, in 2024, we are still subject to our same-sex attraction being framed as something that needs to be more 'inclusive'.

Yours,

Lorraine and Jenny
On behalf of Scottish Lesbians