

LESBIAN ERASURE

THE IMPACT OF GENDER IDENTITY IDEOLOGY ON
LESBIAN CULTURE, COMMUNITY & WELLBEING



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Woman is This (WiT)
Collective

www.witsurveyreport.org

About this Report

The **‘Woman is This’ (WiT) collective** is a group of (mostly lesbian and bisexual) women in the UK, with backgrounds and experience in campaigning, charitable organisations and social research. Each of us has been impacted by the promotion of ‘gender identity ideology’ within our personal and/or professional lives. We define ‘gender identity ideology’ as a set of beliefs that include the idea that: (1) people have a ‘gender identity’ that is distinct and can differ from their sex; (2) people can and should be able to physically, socially and/or legally change their sex; and (3) gender identity is more important than someone’s sex.

Gender identity ideology is widespread, with a growing presence and acceptance in society. There are many who feel strongly about the impact this is having on women and, more specifically, lesbians, yet feel too afraid to speak out. Many women across the world have had their concerns dismissed, been threatened for speaking out or silenced entirely. While some people will be aware of stories anecdotally, or in the media, there is little empirical evidence about the wide-ranging (and often hidden) impacts or resulting consequences of gender identity ideology. This survey was created by the WiT Collective to highlight the views and experiences of women and to collect large-scale data that can be shared with policymakers, campaigners and the general public.

While the WiT survey was about women’s experiences with, and perspectives on, gender identity ideology, this report specifically focuses on lesbians. The aim is to emphasise and prioritise the voices of lesbians who are impacted by gender identity ideology, including lesbian identity, culture and spaces. Through sharing these views and experiences, we hope to highlight the many and real concerns of lesbians.

This report calls for an urgent focus on the fundamental rights of lesbians as same-sex attracted females, as part of broader discussions and policy debates about gender identity, and support for lesbians to meet as a distinct group without fear or intimidation.

In autumn/winter 2021, approximately 3,000 women from across the world responded to the WiT survey on the impact of gender identity ideology on their lives and psychological wellbeing. Survey responses were collected online for ease of sharing and for participants’ convenience, ensuring a range of women could take part globally. Although data was collected in October and November 2021, the themes and findings are still relevant today. We sought to write this report in a way that is accessible and relevant to all interested, especially the women who took part in the survey. For this report, the data has been thematically analysed using a ‘feminist lens’ and perspective – centring lesbian voices. For clarity, a **Glossary of Terms** is provided at the end of this report.

We want to thank all of the women who took the time to respond to the survey and share their personal stories with us. We also want to thank the other members of the WiT Collective who helped develop the survey and code the data. Finally, thank you to those who gave us feedback and support throughout.

For queries about this report, please contact: wit.lesbianerasure@gmail.com

Further information on the WiT survey can be found here: www.witsurveyreport.org

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Executive Summary

This global online survey was circulated in autumn/winter 2021, with 2,982 women responding, **including 545 lesbians**. The survey contained 88 questions across eight sections covering topics such as mental health, single-sex spaces, the workplace and lesbian erasure. **The voices in this report belong to lesbians who feel silenced and unheard.** They describe their concerns about the widespread, disproportionate and deeply felt impact of gender identity ideology on lesbians – their sexuality, identity, spaces and wellbeing. For many, this represents the erosion of lesbian culture and community. **Key findings from this report are below.**

Key Findings

- **Redefinition of Lesbianism:** 94% of lesbians who completed the survey expressed concern about the redefinition of lesbianism from “same-sex” to “same-gender” attraction. Many lesbians felt pressured to accept that men identifying as women can also be considered lesbians, resulting in bullying and ostracization when they resisted this notion.
- **Loss of Lesbian Groups and Spaces:** 96% of lesbians were concerned about the loss of lesbian groups and spaces, which now often include men identifying as women. Lesbians reported experiencing harassment and intimidation, leading many to self-exclude or form ‘underground’ groups.
- **Sexual Coercion and Safety Concerns:** 96% of lesbians were very concerned about being pressured to engage in sexual activity with men who identify as lesbians. Lesbian dating platforms have been increasingly infiltrated by men claiming to be lesbians, raising serious safety concerns.
- **Fear of Sharing Views:** Many lesbians fear bullying and intimidation for sharing their views and experiences in relation to gender identity ideology. There is also a strong sentiment that lesbians can no longer rely on mainstream LGBT organisations for support or to advocate in the best interests of lesbians.
- **Loss of Role Models and Intergenerational Support:** 87% of lesbians were concerned about the lack of visible lesbian role models as a consequence of gender identity ideology.
- **Misogyny and Lesbophobia:** Many lesbians stated that gender identity ideology is linked to patriarchy, misogyny, homophobia and lesbophobia. They expressed concerns that existing societal prejudices are being reinforced and exacerbated without challenge, leading to a disproportionate number of young lesbians transitioning.
- **Significant Impact on Mental Health:** 58% of lesbians reported a significant negative effect on their mental health due to gender identity ideology, citing feelings of isolation, erasure, and intimidation. The pressure to stay silent and conform exacerbated these issues.

Recommendations

1. **Recognise and accept that lesbians are same-sex attracted females:** Acknowledge the needs and rights of lesbians as a protected group, as defined and outlined in the Equality Act 2010.
2. **Protect lesbian spaces:** Ensure lesbians can meet and organise as a distinct group without fear of discrimination, intimidation or retaliation.
3. **Promote lesbian visibility:** Support greater visibility and understanding of lesbians and lesbian culture, including use of the word ‘lesbian’, within wider social, political and organisational contexts.

Survey Design and Methods

A total of 88 questions were divided into eight sections, based on broad themes relevant to women's lives (see below). Each section included questions with a mixture of Likert (rating) scales, simple yes/no and longer open-ended text responses. This allowed women to explain how they have been impacted in more detail. At the end of the survey, a final open-text question was included for anything else women wanted to tell us. All questions were optional and the sections were as follows:

- (1) **General Questions:** access to mental health support; use of pronouns; and changes to language.
- (2) **Children and Young People:** girls' single-sex spaces; puberty blockers, hormones and breast binding; homophobia; and gender stereotypes.
- (3) **Holding Gender Critical Views:** threats, verbal and physical abuse; self-censorship; discrimination in political organisations; racism; and legal/criminal action.
- (4) **Lesbian Erasure:** sexual coercion; lesbian culture and role models; redefinition of same-sex attraction; men calling themselves lesbians; and impact on younger lesbians.
- (5) **Women and Professional Spaces:** fear of being fired; deplatforming; 'gender identity affirmation' at work; academic work being discredited; and all-women shortlists.
- (6) **(Mis)information:** male perpetrators being called women; data collection and reporting of statistics; loss of sex-based rights; and women's legal rights.
- (7) **Other Issues:** sexist or rigid sex-based stereotypes; detransition; exploratory therapy; women-only spaces; personal and intimate care; and women's sports.
- (8) **Demographics:** including sex, age group, ethnicity (self-described), sexual orientation, disability and country of residence and origin.

As the purpose was to understand the impact of gender identity ideology on women's lives and wellbeing, a 'purposive' sampling method was used. The survey was not intended to be statistically representative of the general population and was shared only with individual women, groups, and organisations involved in the global women's movement. It was not advertised publicly due to concerns about coordinated and antagonistic 'brigading' from groups who oppose women with so-called 'Gender Critical beliefs', which would have compromised the quality of the data. A variety of methods were used for sharing the online survey link, including personal networks and women's groups known to the collective, webinars, privately on social media (i.e. direct message), word of mouth and flyers at women's conferences and events. While the survey was shared internationally, due to a lack of resources for translation services, it was only available in the English language.

Open-text (qualitative) responses were thematically analysed and descriptive analysis of the quantitative data was carried out using a combination of Excel and SPSS. Data tables can be found in the **Appendix** (page 24).

Participant Characteristics

A total of **2,982 women** responded to the survey.¹ They are diverse in terms of ethnicity, age, sexual orientation and country of residence (see **Tables 1 – 3, page 5**). Over half of the women (56%) were living in the UK at the time of the survey.

¹ There was a total of 3,452 survey responses, of which, 470 (13.6%) were removed for the following reasons: survey abandoned or incomplete (N=375); sex not reported (N=61); and male (N=34).

Table 1: Sexual orientation of the women who responded to the survey.

	All Women (%)		UK Resident (%)	
Lesbian	545	(18.3)	212	(12.6)
Heterosexual	1,845	(61.9)	1,220	(72.7)
Bisexual	499	(16.7)	220	(13.1)
Other	35	(1.2)	8	(0.5)
Not Stated	58	(1.9)	18	(1.1)
Total	2,982		1,678	

Table 2: Age group of the women who responded to the survey.

	All Women (%)		UK Resident (%)	
18 – 34 years	556	(18.6)	126	(7.5)
35 – 44 years	510	(17.1)	294	(17.5)
45 – 54 years	811	(27.2)	567	(33.8)
55 – 64 years	676	(22.7)	456	(27.2)
65 + years	382	(12.8)	227	(13.5)
Not Stated	47	(1.6)	8	(0.5)
Total	2,982		1,678	

Table 3: Region of origin and residence of the women who responded to the survey.

	Region of Origin (%)		Region of Residence (%)	
United Kingdom	1,585	(53.1)	1,678	(56.3)
Rest of Europe	345	(11.6)	319	(10.7)
North America	604	(20.3)	623	(20.9)
South America	37	(1.2)	19	(0.6)
Middle East	26	(0.9)	17	(0.6)
Africa	18	(0.6)	3	(0.1)
Oceania	139	(4.7)	166	(5.6)
Asia	31	(1.0)	18	(0.6)
Not Stated	197	(6.6)	139	(4.6)
Total	2,982		2,982	

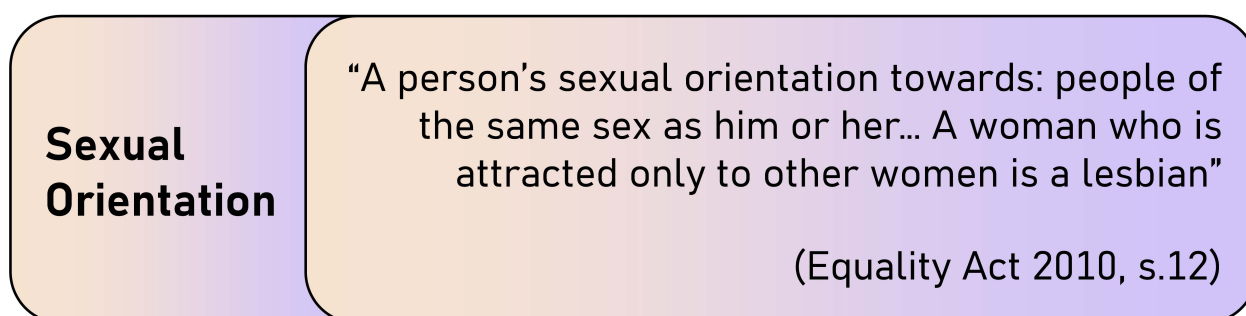
Main Findings

Five-hundred and forty-five lesbians completed this survey (18% of all responses), of which, half provided an open-text response to the ‘Lesbian Erasure’ section of the survey (n=268, 49.2%). The main issues and impacts of gender identity ideology, as reported by lesbians, were as follows:

- Shifting definitions, language and meaning of the word ‘lesbian’.
- Intrusion into the lesbian community, spaces, groups and reduced intergenerational support.
- Erosion of personal boundaries, violent threats and sexual coercion.
- Reinforcing misogyny, lesbophobia and detriments to mental health.

Shifting Definitions and Language

The definitions of ‘lesbian’ and ‘sexual orientation’ matters. In the UK, sexual orientation is one of nine ‘protected characteristics’ in the [Equality Act 2010](#), with sexual attraction defined on the basis of biological sex, not gender. In other words, the Equality Act 2010 recognises that lesbians and gay men are attracted to “people of the same sex” (i.e. same-sex attraction). However, some organisations and activists have tried to redefine the words ‘lesbian’ and ‘sexual orientation’ on the basis of gender or ‘gender identity’ (i.e. “same-gender attracted”; [GLAAD, 2022](#)). While changing the meaning of these terms can have legal consequences, the findings from this report also show significant impacts for lesbians and their psychological wellbeing ([Falkner, 2023](#); [Foran, 2024](#)).



Ninety-four per cent (N=2,805) of women who completed the survey stated that they were ‘very concerned’ about lesbianism being redefined as ‘same-gender’ rather than ‘same-sex’ attracted (see **Table 4**). Of the 545 lesbians who completed the survey, 95 per cent (N=516) were ‘very concerned’, and even greater, 98 per cent of lesbians living in the UK (N=207). In particular, they were concerned that redefining lesbianism in this way leads to the inclusion of males who identify as women. For example, ‘gender identity ideology’ insists that gender identity is more important than biological sex, and therefore, sexual orientation is based on ‘gender identity’, not biological sex. By using this definition, it means that when a heterosexual man *‘identifies as a woman’* (also known as a *trans-identified male* or *transwoman*), because he is attracted to women (the opposite sex) he would be considered a lesbian or “trans lesbian” by supporters of ‘gender identity ideology’.

Of the 543 lesbians who completed the survey, 96 per cent (N=524) were ‘very concerned’ about this notion that men can be lesbians, including 98 per cent (N=207) of lesbians living in the UK (see **Table 5**). This was seen as highly problematic for many participants and led to them feeling “angry”, “worried” and “afraid”. Lesbians described being “coerced” and “pressured” into accepting that men can be lesbians, followed by “bullying” and “ostracization” if they refused. They also explained the other potential consequences and broader impacts of this change for lesbians, which are discussed in more detail throughout this report.

“Heterosexual men and women have taken over the word lesbian and have redefined what it means in a way that actually excludes lesbians.”

(Lesbian, aged 35–44 years, UK)

“I am not 'same-gender attracted', I am attracted to the same sex and sorry, but genitals are an important part of that.”

(Lesbian, aged 18–24 years, UK)

“When the concept of biological sex is attacked then the very notion of same sex attraction by default is also under attack... No other demographic is treated as appallingly as lesbians.”

(Lesbian, aged 35–44 years, Republic of Ireland)

“Lesbian erasure has been always a thing, even before gender ideology appearing, but I cannot but notice that this time is even worse because they are going to the core of lesbianism by erasing sex and same-sex attraction.”

(Lesbian, aged 55–64 years, Mexico)

“Very distressing to me as a lesbian. I fear for young lesbians and what they are going through.”

(Lesbian, aged 55–64 years, New Zealand)

“Lesbian erasure is one of my greatest fears. I hate how my generation (Gen Z) has twisted the word “lesbian” into something meaningless.”

(Lesbian, aged 18–24 years, USA)

Many women commented on the increased use of “queer” as an alternative descriptor for lesbians. [Stonewall’s](#) definition of “queer” is typically used by other organisations: “a term used by those wanting to reject specific labels of romantic orientation, sexual orientation and/or gender identity. It can also be a way of rejecting perceived norms of the LGBT community”. Others define it as an “umbrella term” for various sexual orientations and/or gender identities ([Equalities Office, 2018](#)). However, there is no agreed definition ([LGB Alliance, 2023](#)).

Some lesbians stated that this term has “no definition or boundaries and is inclusive of straight people” (Lesbian, aged 55–64 years, UK). They expressed disdain, describing it as “nebulous”, “offensive”, “abusive” and “homophobic”. Firstly, because it was previously, and still is, used as a homophobic slur. Secondly, by using it as an alternative for ‘lesbian’, or to describe same-sex attraction between women, it erases the very specific experience of lesbians – both in terms of their sex and sexual orientation. Many lesbians also reported that this has had a profound impact on lesbian culture, spaces, and especially young lesbians. Mothers and close family members also expressed significant concern and anger. In particular, that young lesbians say they do not want to call themselves lesbians: “My daughter is gay. She says she prefers being called ‘queer’... she said she doesn’t want to be called a lesbian because men have pornified the word.” (Bisexual, aged 55 – 64 years, UK).

"This distortion of both language and behaviour is deeply harmful, particular to young lesbians just coming to terms with their sexuality and coming out."

(Lesbian, aged 55–64 years, UK)

"I have experienced firsthand, how 'lesbian' is akin to porn for many men."

(Lesbian, aged 55–64 years, UK)

"Younger women and my friends' daughters already avoid this word like the plague. They think the term 'lesbian' is offensive."

(Lesbian, aged 25–34 years, UK)

"And then the fact that lesbians in the media don't even want to use the word lesbian. People think all these new terms help people figure themselves out, but all they do is encourage overthinking."

(Lesbian, aged 18–24 years, USA)

"Lesbian Visibility Day is mostly being ignored... The word 'lesbian' is disappearing in the word 'queer'."

(Lesbian, aged 35–44 years, Germany)

"Most lesbians my age (23 years) are queer. Also, I've lost two friends of 20+ years over this. I feel like I'm going crazy."

(Lesbian, aged 18–24 years, Germany)

"I am a lesbian. I am being erased by gender ideology. I am being called queer. I am being called a man for my same sex attraction."

(Lesbian, aged 18–24 years, Australia)

"I've noticed that a lot of events (club nights etc) geared towards lesbians being able to meet one another have abandoned that word [lesbian] all together as if it is something dirty that is not to be touched due to its exclusivity, in favour of "more inclusive" yet somewhat nebulous terms such as "queer"."

(Lesbian, aged 18–24 years, UK)

Lesbians also highlighted the significant role of mainstream LGBT organisations, and the wider community, in creating or pushing for these shifts in language: "Stonewall and all LGBTQ+ orgs have allowed it to happen [and] are actively encouraging it" (Lesbian, aged 45–54 years, UK). They accused these organisations of "deserting" them and adding to their "distress". Some drew attention to a BBC article ([Lowbridge, 2021](#)) about the sexual coercion of lesbians by trans-identified males ([Wild, 2019](#)). Specifically, some also commented on Nancy Kelley's attempts to suppress publication of this BBC article whilst she was the CEO of Stonewall, as per a leaked letter in which she described lesbians' concerns as "analogous to issues like sexual racism" (see [Bartosch, 2021](#); [Sodha, 2022](#)).

“Even if you look at reports published by Stonewall (an organisation that I am not in favour of) over the past ten years or so you can see how over time the usage of the word lesbian has sharply declined in favour of placing a spotlight on transgender people. Ultimately, whilst trans activism and gender identity ideology hurts women, it specifically hurts lesbians.”

(Lesbian, aged 18–24 years, UK)

“Stonewall has positioned itself as the spokespeople for lesbians/gays while concentrating on trans issues. They are colonising gay space – a different issue entirely.”

(Lesbian, aged 65 years and over, UK)

“I struggled with this and in 2016 I stopped supporting Stonewall after our lesbian voices were ignored.”

(Lesbian, aged 65 years and over, UK)

“The comments made by Nancy Kelly of Stonewall regarding the recent BBC article on lesbians feeling pressured to have sex with trans women made me feel sick to my stomach. The redefining of the word lesbian to include males is homophobic. Lesbians feel like we are being silenced. [...] Now I feel afraid to go to Pride and I feel unwelcome. This makes me feel really sad.”

(Lesbian, aged 45–54 years, UK)

Lesbian Community, Spaces and Intergenerational Support

This section focuses on the impact that gender identity ideology has had on lesbian groups, spaces and the community. Eighty-eight per cent (N=2,633) of women who completed the survey reported that they were ‘very concerned’ about the eradication of lesbian culture (**Table 6**). Of the 545 lesbians who completed the survey, 96 per cent (N=521) ‘very concerned’, including 97 per cent (N=205) of lesbians living in the UK.

As a consequence of the changes to language in relation to sexual orientation and lesbianism (see previous section), a prominent issue was the prioritising of men who identify as women and their inclusion in groups or spaces for lesbians and bisexual women. Ninety-four per cent of lesbians (N=513) and 92 per cent of bisexual women (N=459) were ‘very concerned’ about this, as were 92 per cent (N=2,740) of all the women who responded (**Table 7**). Similarly, 94 per cent (N=512) of lesbians were ‘very concerned’ about having to meet in secret to avoid having to accept or welcome men as lesbians (including 96% (N=204) of lesbians living in the UK; **Table 8**).

Lesbians detailed the profound “damage done to lesbian communities” that they have observed or experienced. Specifically, lost opportunities to develop friendships and shared community. Many lesbians feel “devastated”, “isolated” and “lonely”, struggling to find a community to connect with. While there has been a general loss of lesbian-only groups and spaces, this has been exacerbated by the inclusion of men who identify as women in

those that still exist. Lesbians also described how the inclusion of men changes the dynamic and essence of these groups, spaces and events. For example, centring trans-identified males or by placing trans issues at the forefront of discussions, leaving lesbians on the periphery: “Every conversation has to centre in trans issues or accepting ‘girdick’. Lesbian communities have been divided and ruined.” (Lesbian, aged 35 – 44 years, UK).

“I had a lesbian meet up shut down for not allowing trans-identified males to attend.”

(Lesbian, aged 25–34 years, UK)

“It's impossible to meet in lesbian groups, without some bloke being there. It's ruined camping and walking and book groups.”

(Lesbian, aged 55–64 years, UK)

“The situation is critical. Plus, the only online lesbian communities centred around “cis” women only are pornographic ones made for men... Lesbian communities not centred around porn are all infiltrated by men now, and the majority of them only have men... Not “cis” women. We have lost the majority of our spaces.”

(Lesbian, aged 18–24 years, Brazil)

“As a lesbian, it's massively affected my mental health seeing men on dating apps, men wearing dresses and coming to lesbian bars or Meet up events that are supposed to be women only.”

(Lesbian, aged 45–54 years, UK)

“As a lesbian all I can say is that there is no lesbian culture anymore... Never did I think we would have to start meeting in secret again but here we are when the state gives permission to men to call themselves women it was never just going to stop there.”

(Lesbian, aged 45–54 years UK)

“As a lesbian this is my major impact. I do not go to lesbian meet ups or join lesbian groups because it is too dangerous and there is no point as they are full of men. In my experience some of these men are actively violent and boundary breaking.”

(Lesbian, aged 35–44 years, UK)

“As a lesbian in firsthand I have experienced this firsthand. In Toronto... the women's coming out support group is facilitated by a transwoman. My lesbian meetup group has a transwoman who demands attention and makes everything we discuss about him.”

(Lesbian, aged 35–44 years, Canada)

“I have no access to any lesbian spaces. The ones I tried to access got shut down.”

(Lesbian, aged 35–44 years, UK)

In these groups and spaces, some lesbians have also experienced assault, sexual “harassment” and “intimidation” from trans-identified males. These “frightening and outrageous” circumstances led to many lesbians choosing to ‘opt-out’ and self-exclude altogether, due to fear of male attendees and for their “physical safety” (discussed in the next section). For those who managed to find alternatives or set up their own lesbian groups and events, these were typically “in secret” “underground” or “hidden”. This required more effort and had additional implications for some lesbians, particularly those without local networks, for example, younger lesbians and those who have just ‘come out’ or moved to a new town/city.

As such, lesbians described a “vital” need for intergenerational support. There was “a sense of guilt and responsibility” for and concern about younger and future generations of lesbians. Eighty-seven per cent (N=472) of lesbians stated that they were ‘very concerned’ about the lack of lesbian role models in wider society (**Table 9**). Having to meet “in secret” and social networks being “forced underground” meant that older lesbians “can no longer be seen as role models” (Lesbian, aged 55–64 years, Sweden).

“As a lesbian who only came out a few years ago, this has affected me greatly. I feel as though I’ve been robbed of the experience I used to hope for when I was younger. I’ve been pressured and intimidated into leaving lesbian groups because I was unhappy about men posting nude pictures there.”
(Lesbian, aged 25–34 years, UK)

This is in combination with the “revisionism” of historical lesbian and female figures on the basis of sexist stereotypes and without empirical evidence. For example, suggesting women identified as transgender men because they wore more ‘masculine’ clothing than was typical for their time period (e.g. Joan of Arc; see [Feinberg, 1996](#)). In addition, the loss of lesbian role models because prominent and well-known lesbians in media or the entertainment industry are identifying as transgender men (e.g. Ellen Page, now known as Elliot Page) or ‘non-binary’. While some lesbians stated that role models do still exist, they acknowledged that these women were usually hidden or less prominent than heterosexuals or gay men.

“Lesbian communities have all but disappeared and this is distressing as someone who has been out for a few years, I cannot begin to imagine the isolation of young lesbians trying to figure out their sexuality now. Lesbians have been let down and completely abandoned.”
(Lesbian, aged 25–34 years, UK)

“Very concerned about the appropriation of our history. About re-labelling butch lesbians in history as trans or any lesbians who were gender non-conforming.”
(Lesbian, aged 55–64 years, USA)

“History revisionism is connected to lack of role models. The more gender nonconforming and likely same-sex attracted a woman was, the more people redefine her as not-a-woman.”
(Lesbian, aged 18–24 years, Germany)

“The issues for lesbians is most difficult for younger lesbians in my country. I’m older and we already have our social networks, but those have been forced underground. And therefore we can no longer be seen as role models for younger lesbians. All our clubs, social media groups etc. are invaded by “male lesbians” and their supporters.”

(Lesbian, aged 55–64 years, Sweden)

“If this continues these lesbian role models will become older and older, and they will become a relic of the past. It will also discourage inter-generational connections between lesbians which are vital both for lesbians and women.”

(Lesbian, aged 45–54 years, UK)

“I came out in the 80s. There were bars, book shops, pubs. I feel very sorry that young women today are lacking these supports & outlets. Without them I may not have had the courage to come out at all.”

(Lesbian, aged 65 years and over, UK)

Boundaries, Threats and Sexual Coercion

As highlighted in the previous section, the issues of physical safety and personal boundaries within lesbian groups and spaces were significant. A recurrent experience described by lesbians was the fear of bullying for sharing their ‘gender critical’ views, criticising ‘gender identity ideology’ or for saying they are same-sex attracted, not ‘same-gender’ attracted. Most lesbians had been accused of ‘transphobia’ or called a “TERF” in a derogatory way, typically followed by inappropriate or abusive and threatening behaviour by men and, occasionally, other lesbians. Consequently, they felt “pressurised and intimidated” into leaving lesbian groups or were self-excluding altogether (see previous section).

As such, 94 per cent (N=513; **Table 10**) of lesbians stated that they were ‘very concerned’ about being shamed for asserting their same-sex attraction. In other words, shamed for stating that they are only attracted to females, not males, and for excluding all males as potential sexual partners, regardless of how those males identify. There was also a strong feeling from many, that lesbians who assert these boundaries can no longer rely on mainstream LGBT organisations to support them and advocate on their behalf, because these organisations question “the basics that lesbians are same-sex attracted”. Others also expressed fear of accusations and intimidation by these organisations.

"Lesbian erasure within LGBTQ+ community & organizations has left me feeling deeply betrayed by those groups and their allies."

(Lesbian, aged 55–64 years, USA)

"All of the mainstream LGBT organisations have deserted us as they are proactively against same-sex attracted people now."

(Lesbian, aged 45–54 years, UK)

"It's being allowed because Stonewall & all LGBTQ+ orgs have allowed it to happen, are actively encouraging it. It's deeply dangerous. Deeply immoral. It's rape culture. It's homophobic. It's a disgrace. Our movement has turned on lesbians for power, money and influence. We're witnessing one of the great social & political scandals in history."

(Lesbian, aged 45–54 years, UK)

"It feels like we are living in a parallel universe sometimes, when the basics that lesbians are same sex attracted is questioned even by 'LGBT+' organisations. It feels like we are going back to the days of Section 28 where we need to be hidden, but I don't want to hide."

(Lesbian, aged 45–54 years, UK)

"Men identifying as women and then claiming to be lesbians and encouraged to do so by LGBT lobby groups is the height of misogyny and homophobia."

(Lesbian, aged 45–54 years, UK)

"I'm a lesbian who no longer feels supported by the LGBT because of gender ideology. I feel betrayed, coerced into intimacy with transwomen, silenced by threats."

(Lesbian, aged 45–54 years, USA)

"It's positively criminal how badly the LGBT community are handling this. They must start protecting the actual vulnerable members of it. What's happening now is not fair on lesbians who just need our own space."

(Lesbian, aged 35–44 years, UK)

"Being forced to only operate in private spaces and having to vet attendants for fear of male invaders, has had a detrimental impact on many of us and has thrown young lesbian into isolation. The LGBTIQ+ community is not a safe place for young girls seeking themselves and other lesbian sisters."

(Lesbian, aged 65 years and over, Australia)

A significant and repeated theme that emerged was the coercion of lesbians by heterosexual men who identify as women (i.e. transwomen) and who claim to be lesbians. Ninety-six per cent (N=2,876) of women said they were ‘very concerned’ about lesbians being pressured or expected to engage in sexual activity with these men, as were 96 per cent (N=523) of lesbians ‘very concerned’ (**Table 11**). Lesbians also explained how lesbian dating sites were being “inundated” with heterosexual men claiming to be lesbians, with 92 per cent (N=503) being ‘very concerned’ about this issue, including 96 per cent (N=204) of those living in the UK (**Table 12**).

Some lesbians described their own experiences of being “coerced” and “pressured” into accepting men (who identify as women) as potential partners or sexually engaging with them. If they refuse, they are silenced with “intimidation”, “threats” and lesbophobic abuse. For example, they are told that they “have a trauma and need to “solve” it” or “told that they can ‘learn to love penis’ if it’s the ‘right one’”. Feeling “frightened”, “lonely” and “frustrated”, ultimately, most lesbians said that they have had to leave dating apps and meet in secret or self-exclude from lesbian groups altogether (see previous section).

Women referred to these pressures as “a form of violence against women”, “rape culture”, “conversion therapy” and the “corrective rape” of lesbians. This was also understood as being related to wider issues of misogyny and lesbophobia: “I think lesbians are getting a double whammy [being] female and lesbian” (Lesbian, aged 65 years and over, Australia). Others also explained association with pornography and the sexual fantasies or “fetishes” of heterosexual men in relation to lesbians and female sexuality. Lesbians also held the view that they were being “gaslit” into accepting that these heterosexual men should be treated as “marginalised and misunderstood”.

“I am not ‘same-gender attracted’, I am attracted to the same sex and sorry but genitals are an important part of that. Social media rhetoric and placards at protests with slogans such as ‘suck my dick you fucking terf’ aimed towards lesbians who explicitly state their same-sex attraction comes to mind.”

(Lesbian, aged 18–24 years, UK)

“There are no places for us. Trying to find a partner is scary since I’m genuinely concerned to be catfished by a man using online services (filters and so on).”

(Lesbian, aged 18–24 years, UK)

“Trying to online date or even joining other wlw clubs/groups is nearly impossible because half of them want to include men.”

(Lesbian, aged 25–34 years, USA)

“I feel like I’d be better off back in the closet. I am attracted to females. Not males. But if I state that on dating apps, I get banned for transphobia.”

(Lesbian, aged 45–54 years, UK)

“I’m a lesbian and on dating apps I regularly get contacted by men who claim to be women – and I can’t even tell them to piss off because the app would side with the men.”

(Lesbian, aged 18–24 years, UK)

“Men have always had a lack of respect for lesbian women's boundaries. Now it's official. A man can declare his penis a female penis & implore lesbians to get fucked. There are no boundaries lesbians have against men. None. We are pressured, shamed & coerced into accepting men as sexual partners by calling our sexual boundaries 'racist' or genital fetish. It's rank homophobia.”

(Lesbian, aged 45–54 years, UK)

“I'm a lesbian - single - and I won't use dating apps as they're full of men.”

(Lesbian, aged 45–54 years, UK)

“I am actually frightened to date in case we meet up and it was a man catfishing. I get scared of attacks.”

(Lesbian, aged 35–44 years, UK)

“It feels impossible to go to a dating app or any other place where one could find relationships as a lesbian, due to my opinions and the fear and anxiety the current atmosphere around gender ideology is causing.”

(Lesbian, aged 25–34 years, Finland)

Misogyny, Lesbophobia and Impact on Mental Health

Alongside the significant impacts already outlined, many lesbians expressed concerns that gender identity ideology is reinforcing and exacerbating existing sexist stereotypes and societal prejudices without challenge. They also made associations between gender identity and broader social issues, such as patriarchy, misogyny, homophobia and, more specifically, lesbophobia. It is within this wider social context that many lesbians described their experiences and fears that gender identity ideology promotes lesbian erasure.

Ninety-five per cent (N=517) of lesbians were ‘very concerned’ about adolescent girls being told that they might be a boy if they are attracted to other girls and are not being made aware that lesbianism is a possibility or reality (including 94% (N=2,812) of all women; **Table 13**). They stated that lesbian identities were being erased and young lesbians were being pushed into transitioning: “Gender ideology has been catastrophic for young lesbians.” (Lesbian, aged 45–54 years).

Many lesbians were concerned about the disproportionate number of young lesbians transitioning (compared to boys or heterosexual girls).² They explained that this phenomenon is a consequence of “porn culture”, homophobia and misogyny, leading to increased pressures for young ‘gender non-conforming’ girls to transition; described as “the new homophobia”, “transing away the gay” and a form of “conversion therapy”. Blame was placed on homophobic parents, healthcare institutions, LGBT organisations, therapists, social media and on society as a whole.

² This phenomenon has been recognised by some clinicians and psychotherapists (for example, see [Griffin et al., 2020](#)).

"Men identifying as women and then claiming to be lesbians and encouraged to do so by LGBT lobby groups is the height of misogyny and homophobia."

(Lesbian, aged 45–54 years, UK)

"I see gender ideology as profoundly homophobic: it's transing the gay away."

(Lesbian, aged 55–64 years, UK)

"I am incandescent by the reality of hatred against lesbians from this gender identity bullshit. It seems misogyny is so interwoven that it is invisible, so this lesbian hatred is par for the course. We would naturally have rallied the world over by now. Only they're medicalizing us out of existence."

(Lesbian, aged 25–34 years, Germany)

"I find it very telling that gender rhetoric's definition of "woman", if not downright circular, consists of stereotypes associated with white western women."

(Lesbian, aged 18–24 years, Germany)

"Gender ideology is a regressive, misogynistic ideology."

(Lesbian, aged 45–54 years)

"Always the same old story—now the gender ideology is the newest child of patriarchal suppression."

(Lesbian, aged 65 years and over, Germany)

"As a lesbian I feel deeply attacked by the new homophobia hidden under the notion of transgenderism. There are no more safe spaces for us, no more dating spaces exclusively for us, and our same sex attraction is attacked by the people who supposed to be on our side."

(Lesbian, aged 25–34 years, UK)

"Some men always want to take away what women have... I think men who want to appropriate lesbianism hate any evidence of love and pleasure and are motivated by hatred of women to destroy lesbians."

(Lesbian, aged 55–64 years, UK)

"It is deeply insulting and I think it is rooted in a fetishisation of lesbians and of being a lesbian more than anything else... I also believe that the notion that a lesbian who refuses to date or engage in sex with a biological male claiming to be a woman is somehow bigoted or transphobic to be deeply homophobic and undermines the fact that my lesbianism is immutable."

(Lesbian, aged 18–24 years, UK)

"Every girl I know who identifies as a trans man is same-sex attracted, several from religious families where same-sex attraction is hardly promoted.... In real life, I have been told that I'm a bigot for not wanting to sleep with "trans women" - it's a horrible homophobic sentiment but I know who people will side with if I complain."

(Lesbian, aged 18–24 years, UK)

"The trend is towards lesbianism being 'othered' once again and that a same sex [attracted] or non-conforming girl will be more supported as a trans male."

(Lesbian, aged 45–54 years, UK)

"Concerned about high number of autistic lesbians forced to transition."

(Lesbian, aged 35–44 years, Russia)

"Girls are fleeing porn culture, strangling and predatory boys and declaring themselves trans and non-binary in order to escape the pressures to have sex with males who don't respect them."

(Lesbian, aged 55–64 years, UK)

"My lesbian daughter is currently considering whether she is trans. Teenage years as a girl are awful... Many like my daughter, are scared because being gay is hard in this society."

(Bisexual, aged 45–54 years, UK)

"I'm especially concerned about the impact on young lesbians who make up the majority of trans-identified youth... Worse, bc it's glamourized and comes with enormous amounts of gaslighting."

(Lesbian, aged 18–24 years, Germany)

"It is very definitely more "cool" to say you are trans than admit to yourself or others that you are a lesbian. It's a hugely homophobic, lesbophobic ideology."

(Lesbian, aged 55–64 years, UK)

"I questioned my "gender identity" for years and years... it all started because I wondered if my attraction to women meant that I was somehow really a man... This generation of lesbians is being destroyed."

(Lesbian, aged 25–34 years, USA)

"I see this as a form of conversion therapy against young lesbians and gay men, and other gender non-conforming children, who haven't been allowed to reach the age at which they start to experience and understand the nature of their sexuality."

(Lesbian, aged 55–64 years, UK)

All of the issues, experiences and concerns described in relation to gender identity ideology in this report has led to a disproportionate and profound impact on the mental health and wellbeing of lesbians. Fifty-eight per cent (N=317) stated that gender identity ideology has had a significant effect and 36 per cent stated it has had a moderate effect on their mental health and wellbeing (**Table 14**). Lesbians reported having to change and adapt behaviour to manage their physical safety and mental wellbeing, including limiting their social life. Some also described an internal struggle between what they feel is ‘right’ or in-line with who they are as a lesbian and a fear of the consequences if they speak out. They also expressed a feeling of isolation, erasure and lack of community support. These concerns and challenges were not isolated to one country but were reported by lesbians from around the world.

“This gender BS is the reason I left all social media which has had a major impact on my social life and has increased feelings of isolation and disconnection.”

(Lesbian, aged 45–54 years, Canada)

“Depression and distress made worse by misogyny and male violence.”

(Lesbian, aged 65 years and over, Spain)

“It makes me feel hopeless. I’ve never even met another lesbian besides my wife. I doubt I ever will again.”

(Lesbian, aged 25–34 years, USA)

“I just think it can be underestimated just how much of a toll “trans women are lesbians” has had on young lesbians. I went through a really dark time when I felt like I didn’t even deserve to call myself a lesbian because I thought my lack of attention to trans women was bigotry. I’m so sad lesbians are going through this.”

(Lesbian, aged 18–24 years, USA)

Summary and Conclusion

At the time this survey launched in October 2021, gender identity ideology was widespread with a growing presence and unquestioning acceptance by many. It has continued to become increasingly embedded within society, including in workplaces, politics, policies, media and social spaces. Whilst some perceive this as social and political progress, others are experiencing significant and detrimental impacts as a consequence.

Since then, some advances have been made for those who have challenged the pervasive nature of this ideology. Institutions are starting to reject Stonewall’s ‘Diversity Champions’ scheme, citing concerns about their influence, value for money and misrepresentation of UK law ([Churchill, 2021](#); [Hamilton, 2025](#)). Following Forstater’s successful appeal at the Employment and Appeals Tribunal (EAT) in June 2021, ‘gender critical beliefs’ have been legally protected under the Equality Act 2010. Additionally, as part of these beliefs, Bailey’s case cemented that disagreement with Stonewall’s campaigning is also protected ([House of Commons Library, 2022](#)).

However, this does not appear to have filtered down to workplaces and employers. There have been numerous cases and employment tribunals in which women (some of them lesbians) have successfully held their employers to account, challenging gender ideology in the workplace. For example, Professor Jo Phoenix at the Open University, social work manager Lizzy Pitt at Cambridgeshire County Council, and Roz Adams at the Edinburgh Rape Crisis Centre ([Leigh Day, 2024](#); [McCool & Gordon, 2024](#); [McGlone, 2024](#)).

It is clear from some of these legal cases and findings of this survey, that gender identity ideology has had a deeply felt and disproportionate impact on lesbians and continues to do so. This impact is also shared across generations and borders. These are not abstract fears or concerns based on hypotheticals, but real experiences, as described by lesbians. Lesbians have been, and will continue to be, profoundly affected unless something is done to address these issues, especially in relation to the silencing, abuse and intimidation experienced. While more people are attempting to highlight and speak out about the harms caused, there are still many who are too afraid to due to the intimidation and threats already experienced by others.

If this situation continues to go unchallenged, many lesbians (and women more broadly) fear that lesbian culture and community will be eroded to the point of no return. The purpose of this report was to bring attention to the views and experiences of lesbians, in their own words. It calls for a fundamental and urgent refocus on lesbian rights as part of broader discussions and policy debates about gender identity ideology. Further, to ensure that the rights of lesbians to meet safely as a distinct group without fear of intimidation or sexual coercion, and for 'LGBT' organisations (and society as a whole) to support them in doing so.

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Glossary of Terms

Conversion Therapy	<p>Refers to any intervention or practice that is intended to change someone's sexual orientation, especially from being gay/lesbian to that of heterosexual.</p> <p>While various 'LGBT+' lobby groups (e.g. Stonewall, Galop, LGBT Foundation) have widened this term to include 'gender identity', this report uses the original definition as it relates to sexual orientation only.</p>
Gender	<p>Refers to a set of social expectations for male and female people in relation to, for example, their behaviour and appearance. 'Gender' is not innate and can change with culture and over time.</p> <p>From a feminist perspective, 'gender' is a socially constructed hierarchical system that operates to naturalise and perpetuate the oppression of women. In other words, women are discriminated against on the basis of our sex, via gender – also known as sex stereotypes and roles. For example, see United Nations CEDAW (1979).</p>
Gender Critical	<p>Refers to the view or 'philosophical belief' that biological sex is immutable, cannot be changed and is important across various aspects of life, including social, political and legal. These views are protected by the Equality Act 2010 (see Foran, 2024)</p>
Gender Identity	<p>The notion that people have an internal or "innate sense" of being a man or woman, usually in relation to sex-based stereotypes, and which may or may not correspond to their biological sex. For example, see 'LGBT+' lobby group, Stonewall.</p>
Gender Identity Ideology	<p>A set of beliefs that include the idea that: (1) people have a 'gender identity' that is distinct and can differ from their sex; (2) people can or should be able to physically, socially and/or legally change their sex; and (3) gender identity is more important than someone's sex.</p>
Lesbian	<p>A female person who is attracted only to other female people (i.e. same sex-attracted).</p>
Lesbian Erasure	<p>A form of lesbophobia which deliberately or unintentionally ignores, discards or rewrites lesbians' history, experiences, media and other types of lesbian representation (see Morris, 2016).</p>
Lesbophobia	<p>Discrimination or prejudice, combining both misogyny and homophobia, specifically towards lesbians as individuals, a broader social group or lesbianism in general.</p>
Queer	<p>A term originally used as an offensive and derogatory slur against same-sex attracted people (i.e. lesbians, gay men and bisexuals). Some groups, such as Stonewall, define "queer" as an umbrella term "used by those wanting to reject specific labels of</p>

	<p>romantic orientation, sexual orientation and/or gender identity. It can also be a way of rejecting perceived norms of the LGBT community.”</p> <p>However, many same-sex attracted people reject the use of this term as a descriptor because of the negative connotations and historical meaning.</p>
Sex	Someone's biological sex, which cannot be changed.
TERF	Also known as a 'trans-exclusionary radical feminist'. Often used as an offensive slur or derogatory term to describe (mostly) women who do not believe that males who identify as women are women (see TERF is a Slur website)
Transgender or Transsexual person	Someone who identifies as a gender that does not correspond to their biological sex.
Transition or Gender Reassignment	The process whereby someone changes how they present socially (e.g. hair, clothes, voice, behaviour), physically (e.g. via medical intervention such as opposite-sex hormones, puberty blockers, surgery) and/or legally (e.g. changing their name, pronouns, sex marker on legal/official documents) to that of the opposite sex. For example, a male person who wears women's clothing, changes their passport sex marker to 'female' and calls himself (or identifies) as a woman.
Transman or trans-identified female	A female person who wishes to be or states that she identifies as a man.
Transwoman or trans-identified male	A male person who wishes to be or states that he identifies as a woman.

Appendix: Data Tables

Table 4: Concern about lesbianism being redefined as ‘same-gender’ rather than ‘same-sex’ attracted.

All Women			By Sexual Orientation					
			Lesbian		Bisexual		Heterosexual	
Not at all	38	1.3	15	2.8	9	1.8	10	0.5
Moderately	130	4.4	12	2.2	23	4.6	90	4.9
Very	2,805	94.1	516	1.7	467	93.6	1,738	94.2
Total	2,973		543		500		1,838	

Calculations exclude missing responses and columns may not add-up to 100 per cent: N=9

Table 5: Concern about the notion that men can be lesbians.

All Women			By Sexual Orientation					
			Lesbian		Bisexual		Heterosexual	
Not at all	31	1.0	11	2.0	9	1.8	9	0.5
Moderately	54	1.8	9	1.7	10	2.0	31	1.7
Very	2,891	97.0	524	96.1	478	95.8	1,802	97.7
Total	2,976		544		497		1,842	

Calculations exclude missing responses and columns may not add-up to 100 per cent: N=6

Table 6: Concern about the eradication of lesbian culture.

All Women			By Sexual Orientation					
			Lesbian		Bisexual		Heterosexual	
Not at all	48	1.6	9	1.7	8	1.6	29	1.6
Moderately	300	10.1	14	2.6	40	8.0	231	12.5
Very	2,633	88.3	521	95.6	451	90.4	1,585	85.9
Total	2,981		544		499		1,845	

Calculations exclude missing responses and columns may not add-up to 100 per cent: N=2

Table 7: Concern about lesbian groups prioritising and promoting men over lesbians and bisexual women.

			By Sexual Orientation					
			Lesbian		Bisexual		Heterosexual	
All Women								
Not at all	45	1.5	14	2.6	11	2.2	17	0.9
Moderately	188	6.3	16	2.9	28	5.6	133	7.2
Very	2,740	91.9	513	94.1	459	92.0	1,689	91.5
Total	2,977		543		499		1,842	

Calculations exclude missing responses and columns may not add-up to 100 per cent: N=9

Table 8: Concern about lesbians having to meet in secret to avoid having to accept men as lesbians.

			By Sexual Orientation					
			Lesbian		Bisexual		Heterosexual	
All Women								
Not at all	37	1.2	14	2.6	8	1.6	11	0.6
Moderately	154	5.2	19	3.5	28	5.6	99	5.4
Very	2,789	93.5	512	93.9	463	92.8	1,733	93.9
Total	2,980		545		499		1,843	

Calculations exclude missing responses and columns may not add-up to 100 per cent: N=2

Table 9: Concern about the lack of lesbian role models.

			By Sexual Orientation					
			Lesbian		Bisexual		Heterosexual	
All Women								
Not at all	125	4.2	12	2.2	15	3.0	93	5.0
Moderately	615	20.6	59	10.8	82	16.4	444	24.1
Very	2,237	75.0	472	86.6	402	80.6	1,305	70.7
Total	2,977		543		499		1,842	

Calculations exclude missing responses and columns may not add-up to 100 per cent: N=5

Table 10: Concern about lesbians being shamed for asserting their same-sex attraction.

			By Sexual Orientation					
			Lesbian		Bisexual		Heterosexual	
All Women								
Not at all	35	1.2	12	2.2	9	1.8	12	0.7
Moderately	116	3.9	18	3.3	15	3.0	76	4.1
Very	2,828	94.8	513	94.1	475	95.2	1,756	95.2
Total	2,979		543		499		1,844	

Calculations exclude missing responses and columns may not add-up to 100 per cent: N=3

Table 11: Concern about lesbians being pressured to sexually engage with men who call themselves lesbians.

All Women			By Sexual Orientation					
			Lesbian		Bisexual		Heterosexual	
Not at all	29	1.0	13	2.4	8	1.6	7	0.4
Moderately	73	2.4	6	1.1	6	1.2	57	3.1
Very	2,876	96.4	523	96.0	484	97.0	1,781	96.5
Total	2,978		542		498		1,845	

Calculations exclude missing responses and columns may not add-up to 100 per cent: N=4

Table 12: Concern about lesbian dating sites being inundated with men who claim to be lesbians.

All Women			By Sexual Orientation					
			Lesbian		Bisexual		Heterosexual	
Not at all	39	1.3	14	2.6	8	1.6	14	0.8
Moderately	220	7.4	28	5.1	34	6.8	147	8.0
Very	2,721	91.2	503	92.3	457	91.6	1,682	91.2
Total	2,980		545		499		1,843	

Calculations exclude missing responses and columns may not add-up to 100 per cent: N=2

Table 13: Concern about the suggestion being made to girls who are attracted to other girls, that they are boys rather than lesbians.

All Women			By Sexual Orientation					
			Lesbian		Bisexual		Heterosexual	
Not at all	38	1.3	14	2.6	9	1.8	13	0.7
Moderately	129	4.3	14	2.6	24	4.8	86	4.7
Very	2,812	94.3	517	94.9	466	93.4	1,743	94.5
Total	2,979		545		499		1,842	

Calculations exclude missing responses and columns may not add-up to 100 per cent: N=3

Table 14: The effects of gender identity ideology on mental health and wellbeing.

All Women			By Sexual Orientation					
			Lesbian		Bisexual		Heterosexual	
Not at all	128	4.3	29	5.3	20	4.0	77	4.2
Moderately	1115	37.4	198	36.3	180	36.1	708	38.4
Very	1,732	58.1	317	58.2	298	59.7	1,056	57.2
Total	2,975		544		498		1,841	

Calculations exclude missing responses and columns may not add-up to 100 per cent: N=3

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