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Over the past few years, the BBC's reputation for fair and high-quality journalism was undermined when it came out that it was treating its women employees rather unfairly. First, the [gender pay gap scandal](#) broke in 2017. BBC's top paid men were earning in the millions, while their women counterparts were earning less than half of that. Next, BBC China editor Carrie Gracie famously quit when she discovered that the international editors (who were men) earned 50 percent more than her and her women colleagues.

Since then, the BBC has made long overdue strides in addressing its gender disparity problem, from promising greater transparency about the gender pay gap to implementing initiatives like the [50:50 project](#), which ensure that talk shows host equal numbers of men and women as experts. But in today's Britain, gender is no longer exclusively defined as men versus women. As trans and non-binary individuals fight for greater visibility and social understanding of their gender identity, are men-women equality initiatives enough?

It is clear that in this department, the BBC has not caught up—and other UK media outlets are doing even worse. While the BBC has a [higher number](#) of transgender employees compared to other news organisations, there are few trans people in leadership positions. When a few BBC employees brought up the need to include trans women in the 50:50 project in a WhatsApp group called “BBC Sisterhood,” other members of the group argued that a panel made up of two men, and two “male-bodied” individuals did not represent their vision of gender equality.

Some employees have complained that these conversations create a [hostile environment](#) for trans and pro-trans women working at the company.

Adding to this lack of representation is the fact that non-binary people are not included in their employee statistics at all. Ironically, BBC’s highest viewed episode on their innovative online youth network The Social, titled “[Boy or Girl?](#)” focuses on non-binary people, showing that their issues are on the editors’ minds. In this video, a gender non-binary person explains that non-binary people are not necessarily trans* gender, but do not fall into the traditional categories of “men” and “women”—experiences that definitely do not fit the narrow parameters of BBC’s 50:50 talk show representation or wage-equality initiatives.

Despite its abysmal track record, others think that the BBC is too diverse—one need only to look as far as the comments on the “Boy or Girl” episode to see the rampant transphobia among its viewers. Other mainstream media outlets are even worse. When news broke out about BBC’s record numbers of transgender employees, widely read tabloids such as [The Daily Express](#), [The Daily Mail](#), and [The Sun](#) published articles implying that there is a secret transgender lobby in the backrooms of the corporation.

This is not surprising given tabloids’ track record publishing sensationalist and factually inaccurate content on trans people. Last year, *The Daily Mail* ran [an article](#) suggesting that

allowing trans women to use the changing facilities at Hampstead Heath pond poses a danger to other women. Tellingly, the article's author only interviewed cis women, who expressed deeply transphobic views about how "male bodied" trans women put cis women in danger of sexual assault—a phenomenon that has proven to be extremely rare, particularly when compared to the

[higher rates](#)

of gender-based violence that trans women face.

[hi](#)

It follows a troubling trend in the British media's treatment of trans issues, and a stubbornness to evolve their views. While the tabloids run sensationalist stories, even reputable newspapers, like the *Guardian* have enabled transphobic commentary. In a [recent editorial](#) about the Gender Recognition Act, the editors wrote,

Gender identity does not cancel out sex. Women's oppression by men has a physical basis, and to deny the relevance of biology when considering sexual inequality is a mistake. The struggle for women's empowerment is ongoing. Reproductive freedoms are under threat and the #MeToo campaign faces a backlash. Women's concerns about sharing dormitories or changing rooms with "male-bodied" people must be taken seriously. These are not just questions of safety but of dignity and fairness.

While assuming that trans rights must collide with cis women's rights, the editorial completely ignores the fact that trans women face [systematic discrimination](#) in almost every facet of life—including the same gender-based violence that cis women face.

Given the shocking amount of transphobia in both mainstream and social media channels, some trans and non-binary individuals are setting up grassroots media initiatives to stop the spread of hate, and change the narrative. One of these is [Fruitcake](#), a trans and non-binary-run fashion magazine with a mission statement of being "honest, real and authentic for the LGBTQIA+ community."

According to *Fruitcake* founder and editor-in-chief Jamie Windust, most content on trans and non-binary issues is written *about*, but not *by* trans and non-binary people—a fact that is all-too-clear when perusing the British media. While Windust also works as a freelance writer, covering trans and other gender issues in a few mainstream publications, they find that editors can be cautious about covering issues in too much depth, thus stymying widespread understanding of gender issues even in the most progressive outlets.

"Publications that apparently welcome trans content often deem stories about trans people of colour or less-able people too niche," Windust says. "Even, when I pitch articles, I sometimes get a similar response. It's not commercial enough. There is no market for this. Fundamentally, I disagree with this way of seeing things."

Committing to intersectionality is not without its challenges. *Fruitcake* is a submission-based mag—and most submissions come from white able-bodied individuals. In order to challenge this, Jamie ensures that the magazine's editorial sections and submission calls are tailored to specific groups, a sort of affirmative action to ensure representation.

This approach paid off; *Fruitcake's* most popular issue to date (Issue #2) featured two trans women of colour on the front cover.

"This should not be seen as tokenistic diversity," Jamie explains. "I try to make sure that all the models feel comfortable and are able to communicate their lived experiences. After all, *Fruitcake* is all about equality. A platform for voices that get rejected from the mainstream!"

Comparing the BBC's internal battles over something as simple as whether or not to include trans women in a gender equality initiative with Jamie's tireless efforts to include as many trans and gender non-conforming experiences in *Fruitcake's* pages puts the media's challenges in creating a representative, diverse and fair working environment in full view. While the BBC's conversations are frighteningly reminiscent of arguments aired during the 1970s and 80s that advocating for the rights of Black and ethnic minority women threatens the "feminist project," Jamie is working overtime to create an inclusive space that counters these toxic narratives, and represents as much diversity as possible.

As a non-binary person myself, I think it is clear which direction we need to go in—but will exclusionary initiatives like the BBC's 50:50 project continue to be celebrated as landmarks for "equality," or will they be pushed to become truly inclusive?