Here I consider interviewees’ experiences of scene spaces, defined as the range of city venues in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Manchester and Yorkshire, such as cafes, pubs and clubs, frequented and recognised by lesbians as the typical and commercialised lesbian and gay space on offer in their towns and cities. All too often research into scene space has concentrated upon London (Binnie, 1995; McDowell, 1997) Manchester (Moran et al., 2004; Skeggs, 1999, 2001) and Brighton, in the United Kingdom, San Francisco, in the United States of America and other emerging urban ‘gay ghettos’ in Sydney and beyond (Binnie, 2000; Brekhaus, 2003). Scene spaces are leisure spaces, where people go to meet others, consume and spend time in a ‘friendly’ space, but such leisure space is also formed and fractured by material and interpersonal inequalities, with consequences for the enactment of sexual – and classed – identities. I argue for the necessity of including the experiences of classed individuals, in order to understand the socio-economic inequalities operating in scene space, which have been given attention in terms of the structuring of scene space, via commercialism, regeneration and ‘sophistication’, serving to produce upmarket and ‘classy’ scene space (Chasin, 2000; Hennessy, 2000; Warner, 1993). While the general ‘structural’ forces defining the trend of commodification have been well commented upon, there have been few attempts to understand it from the perspective of the meaning that individual lesbians find in commercialised scene spaces.

Skeggs (1999, 2001) and Casey (2004) show that scene spaces are increasingly becoming leisurely spaces of consumption, where the claiming of a lesbian or gay identity is no longer necessary to ‘consume’ such leisure space, but where the ‘intrusion’ of a straight presence into scene space is still far from unproblematic. Skeggs suggests that heterosexual working-class women enter scene space in order to be ‘safe from
the constant male gaze in heterosexual space. ... It is a space to be invisible, to not be forced to partake in the heterosexual market' (1999: 225). However, the broad inattention to working-class lesbians, either in or out of commercialised scene space, consequently makes invisible and unrecognised their spatialised struggles and the processes of identification and dis-identification operating on ‘their’ territory. Although Skeggs notes the ‘consequences for others’ that a straight presence creates, ‘hetero-women destabilize the claim just by reiterating the practices of normalized hetero-femininity’, working-class lesbians’ physical, material and subjective ‘entitlement’ to scene space may be more momentary and tenuous than that of a middle-class lesbian (1999: 227). The lesbians in Skeggs’s study remain un-identified in terms of class, suggesting that sexuality became the primary classifying device for the lesbians. Indeed the contrast with the identified working-class women suggests that the lesbians’ class positions were neutral or unmarked, which implies a middle-class status, again highlighting the need to more thoroughly ‘class’ scene space, the bodies within it, and the occupation of it.

Straight intrusion, like the commercial scene space itself, appears to be gendered (heterosexual women seeking ‘safety’ in gay men’s space), but are working-class lesbians also intruders in ‘their own’ space, priced out, marginalised and excluded? Casey (2004) notes that the presence of straight women in scene space adversely affects the comfort of lesbians as well as some gay men – I am hoping to highlight the intersection of sexuality, class and gender in order to demonstrate exactly who can feel dis/comfort. Considering the classed experience of working-class lesbians and their struggles for recognition, entitlement and identification can extend the complexity and understanding of the power relations operating in scene spaces. Most women described how lesbian and gay venues were located in ‘trendy’ areas with the result that particular classed displays, images and performances were required to enable entry, and this applied across the varied locations where respondents came from.

My attention to scene space is based on working-class lesbians’ desires to ‘fit-in’ and achieve identification through becoming part of this (commercialised) ‘community’, by literally appearing to be part of it – as well as the limitations upon and impossibilities of doing so, the frustrations of never quite getting it right. The overwhelming lack of entitlement to such space, of uneasily, awkwardly and even agitatedly occupying it, amongst the women in my study, produced an acute consciousness of the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, shaping criticism around notions of ‘pretentious’ scene space, as opposed to ‘real’ working-class