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How to Cite: Benson, C 2019 Pride and Pudency: Paratextual Domestication and the US DVD Release of *Pride*. *Open Library of Humanities*, 5(1):18, pp.1–25. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.318>

Published: 11 March 2019

Peer Review:

This article has been peer reviewed through the double-blind process of *Open Library of Humanities*, which is a journal published by the Open Library of Humanities.

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PRIDE REVISITED: CINEMA, ACTIVISM AND RE-ACTIVATION

Pride and Pudency: Paratextual Domestication and the US DVD Release of *Pride*

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In December of 2014, when *Pride* was released on DVD in the United States, a number of critics and activists criticised discrepancies between the film's earlier promotional materials and the DVD's cover, namely the omission of certain details from the synopsis and imagery. Erasing a banner brandishing the slogan 'gays and lesbians support the miners' and omitting explicit references to queer people from its synopsis, the DVD's packaging drew extensive criticism and was labelled an example of 'straightwashing' (Child, 2015). As the US DVD release of *Pride* demonstrates, paratexts, the various ancillary materials that surround a film and its release, harbour the capacity to 'neutralize and domesticate potential threats a narrative poses to a social or cultural status quo' (Cavalcante, 2013: 86). Andre Cavalcante explains that whilst materials like promotional posters and DVD covers may be used to 'highlight themes identified as attractive by marketers and promoters' such materials may also serve to 'subvert those [aspects of a film] designated as culturally troubling' (2013: 87). Reflecting on this latter issue of paratextual domestication and its impact on queer cinema and visibility, this paper takes the US DVD release of *Pride* as a case study. Analysis of the US DVD cover and the controversy it attracted serves to highlight both the problems with the US DVD release as well as the immense attention and visibility it unintentionally instigated.

In December 2014, when the film *Pride* was released on DVD in the United States, a number of critics and activists criticised discrepancies between the film's earlier promotional materials and the DVD's cover. An image that had been used elsewhere in the film's promotion was re-used on the packaging for the US DVD, however it had been edited to remove a banner brandishing the slogan 'lesbians and gays support the miners'. Direct references to queer people were also omitted from the DVD's synopsis. Labelled an example of 'straightwashing' (Child, 2015), the US DVD packaging drew extensive criticism, a fitting correlate to the negative attention its US classification drew in the lead-up to its earlier theatrical release. This neutralising of the film's content makes the US DVD release an exemplar of paratextual domestication, a concept coined by Andre Cavalcante (2013: 86) to capture the ways that paratexts are used strategically to 'neutralize and domesticate potential threats a narrative poses to a social or cultural status quo'. Whilst some – including its director Matthew Warchus – have defended the domestication of the US DVD as a promotional tactic to increase the film's viewership, others have lamented the irony of promoting a film called *Pride* in this way. Presenting the story of the 1984–5 British Miner's Strike and the founding of the Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners organisation (LGSM), *Pride* celebrates unity and solidarity whilst challenging homophobic presumption and division. As the title indicates, the film is very much about pride; equality and fearlessness are valorised throughout, making the perceived deception of the US DVD particularly vulnerable to criticism. One of the early scenes in the film makes this point particularly salient. When LGSM are rebuffed by the miner's union because they are 'poofs', one of the group's members suggests, 'Maybe we should just hand the money over. Anonymously. I mean we don't *have* to say we're gay, do we?'. Another agrees, 'at least then we'd be helping'. But LGSM's fierce leader, Mark Ashton (Ben Schnetzer), cuts them off: 'No. This is a gay and lesbian group and we are unapologetic about that'.

Almost thirty years after the true events that inspired the film, *Pride's* US DVD release touches on similar tensions regarding visibility, representation and LGBTQ media. Yet, as much as the omissions from the US DVD cover are worthy of scrutiny,

closer analysis of the wider criticism the changes attracted serves to highlight both the problems with the release as well as the immense attention and visibility it unintentionally instigated. This paper draws on paratextual theory and, in particular, Andre Cavalcante's concepts of paratextual domestication and double work to examine the controversy that surrounded the US release of the film. It asserts that the types of content and people that paratexts render visible or invisible is telling because the meanings deemed suitable for promotional circulation are assessed in relation to hegemonic values and market-considerations (Cavalcante, 2013). It also examines the ways that paratextual domestication can lead to unanticipated outcomes, such as increased critical attention and collective galvanizing by audiences. Issues of straight-washing and strategic erasure are garnering increased journalistic attention; this paper contributes to a burgeoning body of academic scholarship on the subject and queries the perceived benefits or strength of such promotional strategising.

The paper commences with an overview of paratextual theory, demonstrating the potential influences of materials like DVD covers and press coverage, before focussing on the US DVD incident and its ramifications for the film and the wider realm of LGBT politics and cinema. Critical articles and user comments sections are examined and discussed to provide an overview of the controversy and the attention it garnered. Providing a discursive analysis of these materials, the paper illustrates the intensified attention that paratexts attract, as well as their potential to provoke important discourse and critical reflection.

Paratextuality

Artefacts like DVD covers, promotional TV spots or opening title sequences may at first seem peripheral or incidental to the study of screen texts. However, as paratexts, these types of materials are becoming increasingly prominent in our convergent media landscape, where they are readily viewed, shared and scrutinised by viewers online. The term paratext was first coined by Gérard Genette to refer to materials that may seem ancillary to a literary work but are allied to it nonetheless: book covers, epigraphs, typeface, reviews and advertisements. In *Paratexts: Thresholds*

of *Interpretation* (the English translation of *Seuils* (1987)), Genette outlines the significant function that paratexts can play as well as the liminality that characterises their definition and relationality to the literary work. The paratext, he explains, is:

A threshold, or [...] a 'vestibule' that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back. It is an 'undefined zone' between the inside and the outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary [...] a zone not only of transition but also of transaction (1997: 1–2).

The transactional potential of the paratext highlights that the peripheral materials that surround and permeate a text can influence the interpretative or meaning-making process, including whether or not the reader will continue to engage. This liminality strikes parallels with Derrida's parergon, the 'trembling limit between the "there is" and the "there is not"' of a work of art (1987: 28–29). Undermining any clear distinction between the inside and outside of a text, paratexts highlight that value and meaning are, in part, 'constructed outside of what we have often considered to be the text itself' (Gray, 2010: ix). Moreover, as Jonathan Gray (2010: 7) demonstrates, both official (produced, commissioned or authenticated by the studio) and unofficial paratexts (those produced by others, such as fans and critics) warrant attention because they each harbour the potential to shape a film's textuality and cultural impact.

Official promotional paratexts are designed to 'highlight themes identified as attractive by marketers and promoters, and subvert those designated as culturally troubling' (Cavalcante, 2013: 87). Accordingly, their analysis provides fruitful ground for studying representational politics. Cavalcante (2013: 86) employs the term paratextual domestication to encapsulate this selective process of omission, explaining: 'Paratexts have the ability to neutralize and domesticate potential threats a narrative poses to a social or cultural status quo'. Brookey and Gray (2017) identify LGBTQ media as an area of particular significance to paratextual studies, observing that some paratexts can play a role in inviting queer readings, whilst others can be seen to thwart such interpretations. Films depicting LGBTQ content are likely targets

of paratextual domestication because their sexual and gender politics may be seen to threaten the status quo (Brookey and Gray, 2017; San Filippo, 2013; Cooper and Pease 2008). Such domestication can influence, or limit, the ways that LGBTQ media is read or interpreted (Brookey and Westerfelhaus 2002; Cooper and Pease, 2008; Richards, 2016; Benson, 2017; Wuest, 2018). This is particularly true of films that depict LGBTQ content in an ambiguous or subtextual way. For instance, Robert Alan Brookey and Robert Westerfelhaus (2002: 22) demonstrate that the additional features on the *Fight Club* DVD served to shape and discipline readings of the film's homoerotic elements 'to make the product more marketable to mainstream audiences'. Examining the film *TransAmerica*, Andre Cavalcante (2013) observes similar promotional tactics designed to disavow queer content. Likewise, numerous critics have discussed the ways the marketing of *Brokeback Mountain* reifies readings of the film either as a 'universal love story' or as a 'gay cowboy movie' (Cooper and Pease, 2008: 249), subsequently neutralising the film's troubling of heteronormativity in a quest to secure greater mainstream success (Cooper and Pease, 2008; San Filippo, 2013; Piontek, 2012). In these ways, domestication impacts on-screen representation. Its ramifications can also be felt off screen, in the wider mediascape.

In addition to reflecting inwards on the texts they accompany, paratexts also project outwards and offer contributions to popular culture and reflections of our cultural milieu. Whilst paratextual scholarship is growing in screen studies (Klecker, 2015; Johnston, 2014; Wuest, 2018; Shaw, 2018), notably, as this paper will examine in relation to *Pride*, audiences and online press are also demonstrating increased awareness of and investment in paratexts, leading to a proliferation of unofficial paratexts in response to issues of domestication. The erasure or distortion of LGBT subject matter in marketing materials has particularly garnered attention, reflecting Brookey and Gray's contention (2017) that such content is highly susceptible to domestication. But domestication is not limited to reifying heteronormativity. The US DVD release of *The Sapphires*, for instance, was criticised for sexism and whitewashing after it de-emphasised the film's four Aboriginal stars (Raeburn, 2013; Quinn, 2013; Newstead, 2013; McDermott, 2013). Much like the case study at the

centre of this paper, the example of *The Sapphires* highlights that domestication is being noticed and criticised by audiences and critics.

Paratexts affect not only the films they market but other texts and reading positions, as well as broader understandings of complex political terms like queer (Sisco-King, 2010). In fact, the very existence or constitution of queer and LGBT cinema is largely dependent upon paratextual work: 'a film's LGBT "identity"' explains Wuest, 'is far from a natural, stable certainty. Rather, it is highly contingent on, among other things, the way that industrial practice treats and presents the text' (2018: 25). Interrogating distinctions between LGBT and queer content is beyond the scope of this paper, but an acknowledgement of this distinction is relevant for two key reasons. Firstly, it enhances clarity around terms. This paper defines and discusses *Pride* as an example of LGBTQ media rather than queer cinema.¹ This reflects the film's own strategic efforts to amass mainstream appeal and contributes to shaping how the film is viewed and understood. This attribution illustrates the role that critical discussion plays in classifying films, as well as informing the meaning of said classifications themselves. Secondly, as this first point foreshadows, the distinctions between LGBT, queer and mainstream cinema are worth noting because they further indicate the influence of paratexts on how we engage with and understand films (Sisco-King, 2010; Richards, 2016 Wuest, 2018). The distinctions between these classifications may be informed by textual characteristics, but they are largely driven by 'the industrial work of packaging, promoting, framing, and naming a text' (Wuest, 2018: 40). Accordingly, turning to an examination of some of the official and unofficial paratexts that framed *Pride's* release in the US can reveal a great deal about how the film has been understood, as well as the ways that its meanings have impacted wider understandings of paratextual domestication and LGBTQ politics.

¹ The term LGBTQ media is used as an umbrella term here. It is important to note, however, that the film does not offer explicit trans or bisexual representation in the same way that it engages with gay and lesbian identities. The film does not directly queer or challenge normative conceptions of identity either. Despite this, I use this umbrella term as a means of aligning the film with the wider realm of LGBTQ media, which highlights the wider applicability of the ideas and issues being discussed to films that depict LGBTQ subject matter.

***Pride's* release in the US**

Whilst dispute and politics are at the heart of *Pride*, the controversy that followed the film's theatrical and home release in the United States was likely unanticipated. Inspired by true events, the film tells the story of an unlikely union between London-based gay and lesbian activists and Welsh miners striking in 1984–5. Despite its powerful political message, *Pride* is largely void of content or imagery that would be described as particularly subversive or explicit. In his review for *The Telegraph*, Robbie Collin (2017) described *Pride* as 'terrifically warm', likening it to a stage show or fable. It was reported as a shock, then, when, prior to its US release, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) gave the film an R Rating, thereby restricting access for those under 17. Responding to the MPAA rating, a number of articles queried the motivations for the film's strict US classification. Writing for *The Washington Post*, Kristen Page-Kirby (2014: n.p.) expressed her frustration with the MPAA, criticising the 'new level of bigoted idiocy' that the *Pride* classification represented. The MPAA, she explained, 'seems to believe that a gay character can't appear on screen without terrifying audiences' (Page-Kirby, 2014: n.p.). Accordingly, she claimed, 'if *Pride's* gays and lesbians were anything but gay or lesbian, the filmmakers could throw in a butt or two and still get a PG-13, preferably if the butts belonged to women' (Page-Kirby, 2014: n.p.). Writing for *The Independent*, Ian Burrell (2014: n.p.) described the US rating as 'draconian', while Susana Polo (2014: n.p.) drew comparisons between *Pride* and a number of releases with PG-13 ratings, observing that ultimately *Pride* is 'less titillating than your average Adam Sandler movie'. Burrell (2014) and Page-Kirby (2014) made similar comparisons, pointing to other PG-13 examples including: *Philomena* (2013), *World War Z* (2013), *The Dark Knight* (2008) and *Man of Steel* (2013). Making these comparisons, critics sought to illustrate the irrationality of the *Pride* rating by emphasising that many heteronormative films containing explicit language and violence had secured more moderate ratings.

Many viewed the rating of *Pride* as evidence of the MPAA's discomfort with LGBT content and quickly linked the decision to similar examples from the previous year. Ira Sachs' *Love is Strange* (2014) and Darren Stein's *GBF* (2013) were both identified by critics and audiences as comparable examples of the MPAA unfairly

assessing queer content. Joan Graves (2014), Senior Vice President and Chairman of the Classification and Rating Administration, responded to the controversy on the MPAA Blog. She described the criticism of the *Love is Strange* and *Pride* decisions as 'disheartening' because it 'stems from a misunderstanding of the rating system' (2014: n.p.). *Pride*, she explained, is classified R because of its 'language and brief sexual content' (2014: n.p.). Whilst Graves (2014: n.p.) pointed to films with R ratings for similar reasons – *Erin Brockovich* (2000); *Jersey Boys* (2014); *Frost/Nixon* (2008) – she added that 'comparing films is often comparing apples to oranges'. The MPAA's refutation of in-house homophobia is unsurprising, of course. However, writing for the *New Statesman*, Ryan Gilbey (2014) provided a more persuasive defence of the rating decision by unpacking the language and sexual content under question. Writing from the UK and familiar with the British Board of Film Classification's (BBFC) rating of the film, Gilbey (2014) drew on the description provided by the BBFC to warrant its classification of *Pride* as UK 15. Whilst other critics attempted to draw comparisons between the UK 15 and US R ratings to bolster their criticism of the MPAA, Gilbey highlighted the illogicality of this.² The US rating requires children under 17 attending *Pride* to be accompanied by an adult, whereas the UK rating prohibits attendance by children under 15. Perhaps highlighting the severity of both classifications, in Australia *Pride* was rated M: children under 15 could legally access the film, but it was recommended for mature audiences over 15. What this incident illustrates is that controversy with explicit links to homophobia and the film's politics was linked to the film prior to its theatrical release.³ Moreover, this controversy was visible in the press: it attracted discussion and provided a springboard for reflecting on important concerns around the rating and packaging of LGBT content. In these ways, the US rating controversy foreshadowed the furore that followed with the US home release.

² It is worth noting that comparisons between the classifications were fuelled by a misprint by *The Guardian*, which initially reported that the film had been rated NC-17 by the MPAA rather than R. The article was later amended to rectify this error.

³ Press coverage of the move to ban a screening of *Pride* in Turkey also served to highlight homophobia (Clarke, 2018; Pulver, 2018), as did the film's delayed release in Russia amidst anti-gay laws (Lee, 2015; Barraclough, 2015).

Pride was a critical hit. Throughout 2014 and 2015 it secured a number of awards, including the Queer Palm at Cannes, as well as a raft of nominations at the Golden Globes, BAFTAs and GLAAD Media Awards. It was also popular with audiences. Despite success on home soil at the UK box office (generating 6,331,824 USD), the film's limited release with CBS Films in the US constrained its financial takings (it took 1,446,634 USD) (Box Office Mojo, 2014). Whilst the film's rating could potentially be linked to its performance, its limited distribution in the US (particularly on its opening weekend) is the more obvious factor in its modest box office returns. On 23 December 2014, the home release of *Pride* commenced in North America, providing another opportunity to increase foreign sales and viewership. Yet, once again, the impending release of the film in the US was met with controversy.

In early January 2015, just over a week after the DVD and digital home release, *Pink News* reported on 'a number of shocking changes' that had been made to the cover of the US DVD (Duffy, 2015a). As Nick Duffy (2015a) details, two notable discrepancies can be observed between the cover art and earlier promotional materials. A comparison of the synopsis on the US DVD cover and an earlier synopsis that had been used to promote the film elsewhere – including on its official website and Facebook page – highlights Duffy's first concern about the DVD's erasure of homosexuality:

Official CBS website: It's the summer of 1984, Margaret Thatcher is in power and the National Union of Mineworkers is on strike, prompting a London-based group of gay and lesbian activists to raise money to support the strikers' families. Initially rebuffed by the Union, the group identifies a tiny mining village in Wales and sets off to make their donation in person.

US DVD cover: It's the summer of 1984 and much of blue-collar Great Britain is on strike. For one tiny Welsh village, the strike brings unexpected visitors – a group of London-based activists who decide to raise money to support strikers' families and want to make their donations in person (Duffy, 2015a).

The US DVD cover removes any direct reference to the fact that the 'London-based activists' were in fact a gay and lesbian organisation motivated by their own marginalisation and subjugation. This omission obscures the film's narrative

concerns and it is particularly notable when compared to the more direct references to sexual identity made elsewhere in the promotional campaign, including the film's official website and Facebook page. The revised synopsis' conservatism is also evident in its erasure of references to the Union and Thatcher. These revisions neutralise the original synopsis, rendering it universal and more palatable for a US Socialist-averse media landscape. In addition to the revised synopsis, the cover also features a revised version of a promotional image that had been used elsewhere in the film's marketing. In contrast to the version of the image that had been featured elsewhere in the film's promotion – including on the official US and UK websites, the Israeli promotional poster, numerous reviews and the film's official Facebook page – the US DVD cover featured an edited version of the image from which a banner proclaiming 'Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners' had been digitally removed.⁴

The changes made to elements of the US DVD cover provide a compelling example of paratextual domestication. In his coverage of the changes, Duffy (2015a: n.p.) criticises the way that the US DVD cover 'entirely remov[es] homosexuality from the [film's] story'. Duffy's comment reflects concerns that paratextual domestication can exert textual influence over a film as well as its potential audience. It is certainly arguable that the changes to the *Pride* DVD cover render the film's queer subject matter and themes imperceptible or unclear to the unfamiliar consumer. As one online user explains via anecdote:

My husband was at a Videotron rental place here in Quebec, and they had the American 'sanitized' cover. He saw the name of the film and thought 'oh! A gay film?' but then read the description and thought it was NOT a gay film, so he didn't rent it (Mikey, 2015).

Despite its potential to powerfully reframe the film, the likelihood of the revised cover impeding recognition of the story's homosexual content upon viewing the film is unlikely. This is because the film's depiction of homosexuality is unambiguous – sexual identity and homophobia are principal, rather than

⁴ This can be viewed at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-30679455>.

subtextual, elements of the story. Moreover, the film's title and the majority of its promotion (including trailers and synopses used on social media) made its thematic interests and subject matter explicit. In the case of *Pride*, then, the US DVD cover seems unlikely to drastically neutralise the film's queer meanings upon viewing. In fact, the controversy it sparked may have fostered the opposite, with shared online outrage bolstering the importance of collective action and the significance of the film's stirring story of gay and lesbian pride arguably elevating the film from a feel-good flick featuring LGBT content to a politically-loaded instance of queer cinema. Domestication is motivated as a means of attracting a wider catchment of viewers but as the *Pride* incident highlights, it also risks alienating audience sectors and attracting critique and backlash.

The coverage of the US DVD controversy and the responses it attracted are telling. Whilst none of this coverage or commentary draws on the academic term paratextual domestication itself, the pervasiveness of neutralised marketing is evident in the exasperation expressed. In the comments section accompanying Duffy's (2015a) breaking of the story via *PinkNews*, a major LGBT + media outlet, users express frustration and anger, drawing on terms like 'absurd', 'sanitized', 'bizarre' and 'stupid' to describe the cover's omissions. In addition to their frustration, many users also note their lack of surprise or shock at the changes. For instance, while one user notes that 'the whole thing stinks', they, and others, also comment on the commercial motivations that they see as drivers of the change: 'I can imagine how removing the gayness allows the film to be stocked in more US retailers'; 'why would we be surprised?'; 'In the US, it's always about greed' (Duffy, 2015a: n.p.). Following the *PinkNews* exclusive, a number of other publications covered the controversy, including *The Hollywood Reporter*, *Daily Edge*, *Slate*, *BuzzFeed*, *BBC News*, *The Huffington Post*, *Indiewire* and *The Guardian*. Much like the comments from users on the original *Pink News* piece, these articles tended to criticise the changes along with the marketing strategy assumed to underpin them. The changes were not viewed as incidental, but as targeted and strategic – the suggestion being that both marketers and their envisioned audience would be offended or deterred by direct references to gay and lesbian people.

Those responsible for the DVD's distribution and packaging were unable, or unwilling, to address the impetus behind the changes. Although CBS Films held the distribution rights for *Pride* in the US, they contracted the DVD distribution to Sony Home Entertainment, who remained silent throughout the public outcry. In addition to an official statement from CBS that assured *Pink News* they were 'looking into it' (Duffy, 2015b), *Buzzfeed* reported that 'a source close to the situation' revealed the changes were 'not an intentional move by CBS films ... [and that] those at the studio are unclear as to who made the changes' (Orley, 2015). The confusion around these moves serves to demonstrate corporate denial whilst also emphasising the absence of a singular, coherent authorial power in film distribution. Further, it also highlights that domestication can have wide-ranging impact regardless of whether it is a considered company-wide strategy. Suspicions from critics and audiences that the move was a strategic ploy by CBS are not unfounded. The design of DVD cover art is strategic (Johnston, 2014).

Moreover, the promotion and reception of films like *Brokeback Mountain* illustrate the enduring heteronormative impulses of mainstream film marketing. In 2006 the release of *Brokeback Mountain* was heralded as a turning point in Hollywood cinema and proof of the mainstream viability of gay films. However, as Thomas Piontek (2012: 123–126) argues, 'claims of such seismic shifts in social attitudes towards homosexuality are greatly exaggerated' and the film's popularity can be attributed largely to the fact that its marketing 'aggressively' targeted women and framed the film as a universal love story. Although queer representation seems to be improving on the silver screen, there remains a disjuncture between the queerness of on-screen content and the more heteronormative terrain of film marketing (Cabosky, 2015). In his analysis of award campaign ads for LGBT-themed films between 1990 and 2005, Joseph Cabosky (2015) illustrates the pervasiveness of paratextual domestication in the promotion of LGBT cinema to mainstream audiences. Whilst heterosexual intimacy is common in the advertisements Cabosky analyses, queer intimacy is treated as taboo. This is made especially salient by campaigns for queer films that foreground 'disingenuous imagery of male-female dynamics' to lead viewers away

'from queer realities' (Cabosky, 2015: 82). Although Cabosky's study focuses on award campaigns, 'advertisements targeting the Academy are generally no more or less queer than commercial campaigns targeting mass audiences' (2015: 82), as highlighted by Stuart Richards' (2016) account of the pervasive paratextual domestication associated with Indiewood productions.

Ben Roberts, director of the BFI film fund that helped to finance *Pride*, reflects these concerns and expresses criticism of the current climate for LGBT films:

I'm not surprised that the US distributors have taken a decision to sell more copies by watering down the gay content. I'm not defending it, it's wrong and outmoded, but I'm not surprised (Child, 2015: n.p.).

Continuing, Roberts cites the 'unfortunate commercial reality' that distributors must contend with when distributing queer content: 'LGBT material is largely marginalised outside of rare hits like *Brokeback Mountain*' (Child, 2015: n.p.). Matthew Warchus, the film's director, has a similar response to the US DVD release. In a statement issued to the press, Warchus commences by celebrating the film's message and success. Although he describes *Pride* as 'one of the most political films ever to hit the mainstream', he adds that it is also 'one of the most loved films of the year (even by those who hate politics)' (Jagernauth, 2015: n.p.). But in his efforts to emphasise the film's global appeal, his statement can also be seen to conservatively depoliticise *Pride*: 'I don't consider it a "Gay Film" or a "Straight Film". I'm not interested in those labels. It is an honest film about compassion, tolerance, and courage' (Jagernauth, 2015: n.p.).

Whilst the universalizing of narratives and forefronting of broad themes can be understood as a means of 'democratizing' a film and enhancing its accessibility (Cavalcante, 2013: 99), the problematic impact of this on queer cinema has been documented (Russo, 1981; Cooper and Pease, 2008; San Filippo, 2013). In *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies*, Vito Russo (1981) points to the tendency to universalize or neutralise homosexual narratives in early cinema. As Maria San Filippo (2013: 165) demonstrates in her analysis of *Brokeback Mountain*, this tradition is still alive:

While universalizing queerness may seem to promote empathy and tolerance, it really makes queerness safe only for straights – as an unthreatening, straight-regulated, commercially viable version of queerness that does nothing to displace the social and cultural centrality of straight privilege.

Attempts at universalizing and depoliticizing the film are also evident in the latter half of Warchus' statement, which comments more directly on the erasure of homosexuality from aspects of the film's marketing:

Marketing *Pride* has proved an interesting challenge from day one, and there are many people in the mainstream who have yet to see the film. My guess is some of those people are imagining that the film is maybe 'too political' for them ... [or] 'too gay'. As it happens, these concerns completely evaporate in the presence of the movie itself, but they are important when attempting to manage potential audience perceptions through marketing ... [T]his film, of all films, deserves to find a fully diverse audience, from all walks of life. Indeed its' [sic] very meaning and message is diminished the more 'niche' it becomes. I look forward to living in a world where these kinds of marketing negotiations are neither valid nor necessary – but we're not there yet. In a sense, that's why I made the film. For these reasons I don't automatically condemn any attempt to present the movie being misunderstood as an exclusively 'Gay Film'. I certainly don't regard such attempts as homophobic. (Jagernauth, 2015: n.p.)

Warchus observes that the changes to the DVD are not ideal, but that in this case the ends justify the means. In addition to the moral and political apprehension that many had about Warchus' statement and the cover changes that sparked it, there remains the pressing issue of whether the strategy assumed to be at play is actually an effective means of increasing viewership. Whilst it is assumed that heteronormative imagery and domesticated texts are more marketable, proof of this strategy's effectiveness is difficult to determine, which highlights an important area for further study. To better

discern the strategic benefits of paratextual domestication, closer analysis of the promotional materials associated with the highest grossing LGBT films may provide a useful starting point. A nuanced study of the promotion, reception and financial success of smaller queer productions that strategically target niche audiences is also needed. Regardless of the potential financial benefits of the *Pride* DVD changes, which cannot be ascertained with any certainty by this study, the incident suggests that domestication can have unanticipated consequences, resulting in increased visibility and discussion of issues that threaten the status quo.

Paratextual perks: domestication and double work

In addition to their potential to domesticate or erase queer content, paratexts can also facilitate queer visibility. The queer content of a screen text may be a focal point of its promotion, for instance. This is particularly true within the context of specialist exhibition settings like queer film festivals (Benson, 2016). In other cases, a text's queer potential may be accentuated via marketing as a means of increasing its appeal to particular audience segments, a practice often criticised as 'queer baiting'. Even those paratexts that seek to domesticate or limit queer readings may be understood to contribute to queer representation in affirmative ways by generating dialogue and unveiling the pervasiveness of heteronormativity (Cavalcante, 2013). Cavalcante coins the term 'double work' to encapsulate these instances where paratexts are intended to domesticate queer content, but unintentionally 'create spaces that explore, validate and celebrate' LGBT lives and subjectivities (2013: 85). It is important to note, then, that regardless of the intended function or impact of a paratext, the ramifications of domestication may misfire because 'we regularly read against or in spite of them' (Brookey and Gray, 2017: 108). The term misfire, as opposed to backfire, is more suitable here; as *Pride* illustrates, domestication may invite unintended attention, but this may generate hype and prove an effective promotional technique in economic terms, thus delivering a favourable result for distributors albeit in an unanticipated way.

The US DVD cover was not marked by the type of polysemy or ambiguity prominent in Cavalcante's analysis of double work (Cavalcante, 2013: 99), but

the controversy surrounding the US DVD release of *Pride* and the coverage that it garnered is a good example of this concept. Though the cover art was deemed erasive and homophobic, the critical attention it garnered brought attention to the complex issue of straight-washing and provided vocal and unified condemnation of homo-erasure online (Duffy 2015a; Duffy 2015b; Orley 2015; Child 2015; Jagernauth 2015). Overwhelmingly, coverage of the incident lamented the changes and provided opportunities for calling out the damage of persistent homophobia. It also offered notable attention for the film ahead of its home release. Featured on a range of mainstream and LGBT news sites, the story was regularly accompanied by the unedited promotional image in question, along with the film's home release dates and details. A number of users of PinkNews also shared their accounts of purchasing the DVD in different countries to assist others seeking out alternate versions of the DVD, along with tips on how to acquire and use region-free players in the comments sections under articles. Contributing to the film's positive reputation, spread through word of mouth, many users also noted the film's worth and quality. In promotional terms, the changes may have inadvertently motivated financial benefits or increased visibility for the film. The controversy also sparked complex and meaningful discussions of the changes and their impact. Responding to articles covering the DVD changes and starting threads on message boards (Reddit, 2015; A Place of Safety, 2015), a number of users left comments criticising what they saw as homophobia and made efforts to stress the significance of the erasure to wider issues of representation. For instance, one user commented: 'Gay people should not remain invisible in society' (Peter E, 2015). Supporting this assertion, another described the removal of gay references from marketing as 'against everything Mark Ashton stood for!' (Steve Craftman, 2015).

Visibility emerges as an important but contentious aspect of the US DVD controversy. Whilst many criticise the US DVD for rendering homosexuality invisible, others take contrasting stances. As Warchus (Jagernauth, 2015) expresses in his statement on the matter, the importance of gay and lesbian visibility can be tabled as a reason to accept the DVD changes, as a means of increasing the film's visibility and viewership. This positioning of domestication as strategic is ironic in that it

advocates for visibility via erasure. Interestingly, this framing also reifies a hierarchy between the master text and paratext by prioritising the importance of filmic representation over the significance of promotional visibility. Like Warchus, some users also expressed the potential benefits of domestication, making observations such as: 'It is a small price to pay if it means some poor repressed kid in the Rust Belt gets to find out they are not alone in the world, then I'm all for it' (NickDavisGb, 2015). Others were more cynical, but similarly acknowledged the perceived benefits of the move: 'I can imagine how removing the gayness allows the film to be stocked in more US retailers. The viewers aren't the homophobes, they know what they're getting, it's a homophobic society that pressures distributors to adopt such policies' (Joe McDougall, 2015).

But support for the strategic benefits of the move were repeatedly challenged online. A common complaint expressed in user replies is the flawed logic seen to underpin the changes:

The logic isn't there. People will be buying this DVD knowing what it's about, and those buying it who are too ignorant to want to watch it with full awareness of what it's about would likely turn off the moment they understand where the story is going. This is nonsense, it's not marketing at all, it's deceit and homophobia (Li Thotomist, 2015).

Others highlighted that the move was likely to alienate some potential viewers, with one user saying: 'I saw the trailer for the [sic] *Imitation Game* and came to the conclusion that they'd barely be mentioning Turing's sexuality, which annoyed me enough to decide not to see the movie' (BAS, 2015). Particularly offended by Warchus' defence of the changes, another commented: 'Well then – if that's where we stand in the director's eyes I, as a gay man, shall NOT be going to see it!!!' (Neil Phelps, 2015).

The term straight-washing was also lent further prominence by the controversy, gaining attention in both mainstream and niche gay press. For instance, articles from *The Guardian*, *Gay Community News* and *Vice* all utilised the term and criticised the phenomenon. Moreover, a petition calling on the US distributors to rectify the cover art because it implies gay and lesbian people have 'something to be ashamed of'

was generated by the All Out Action Fund (2015). Frustration over straight-washing could also be observed on Twitter, with a number of users tagging CBS Films in their tweets to query the choice and demand action. Others stressed the importance of the history that the film documents and framed the US DVD controversy as another instance of homophobia requiring collective action or condemnation. Reflecting on the film's significance, one user wrote:

I have to admit that I was ashamed that I didn't know the history behind this movie. I knew nothing about the miners union [sic] helping the LGB fight their cause ... This is an important film IMHO [in my humble opinion] (Stephen, 2015).

Another observed that in light of the controversy, 'The lesson here is solidarity' (James, 2015). As these actions and discourses illustrate, the DVD changes and the coverage that followed can be understood to have performed notable double work by facilitating space for the airing and debating of complex representational politics.

Conclusion

As the growing body of literature in paratextual studies shows, paratexts harbour the potential to impact the texts they are associated with as well as the wider cultural landscape. The analysis of paratexts is particularly relevant to LGBTQ media because literature suggests these texts are particularly vulnerable to paratextual domestication. As demonstrated, this, in turn, has the potential to impact the textuality of particular films, as well as wider representational politics, discourses and norms. The US DVD release of *Pride* provides a useful case study for teasing out some of these tensions. Examining online responses to the US DVD cover reveals that widespread cynicism exists amongst some viewers, who believe that film distributors deliberately omit LGBT content and attempt to straight-wash films for financial benefit. The financial impact of the cover on US DVD sales cannot be accurately assessed by speculating on the recorded revenue or engaging with the limited representation of public opinion manifest in online articles and user comments. Although homophobia is an ongoing consideration in a film's marketing

and success, better discerning the connection between domesticated paratexts and financial takings is necessary and signals the importance of further research into correlations between queer imagery, domestication and revenue, including the impact of domestication to heighten the attention particular content receives, rather than neutralising or downplaying its impact. What the *Pride* DVD cover and the responses it garnered clearly reveal is that critics and audiences are aware and largely critical of tactics to promote and package films in ways that they deem homophobic or heteronormative. Consequently, their responses also highlight the double work that paratexts may foster.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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How to cite this article: Benson, C 2019 Pride and Pudency: Paratextual Domestication and the US DVD Release of *Pride*. *Open Library of Humanities*, 5(1): 18, pp.1–25. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.318>

Published: 11 March 2019

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