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PRIDE REVISITED: CINEMA, ACTIVISM AND RE-ACTIVATION

A Year of *Pride*: Revisiting the Activism Inspired by LGSM's Support for the Onllwyn Miners

Jade Evans

Independent Scholar, Portsmouth, UK
js.evans@outlook.com

In 2015, the year following *Pride's* distribution, UK and international fans were able to participate in events inspired by the film which supported activist causes. This article is a reminiscence of events I participated in with Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM), and an examination of the extent to which they relate to the events in *Pride*. Events discussed which were directly inspired by *Pride* include a restaging of a photo of LGSM in Hyde Park at the 1985 London Pride, a fundraising party similar to the Pits and Perverts benefit ball where Bronwen Lewis performed 'Bread and Roses', and LGSM and the miners leading the 2015 London Pride march. The events which related to moments in *Pride* became symbolic of the politics expressed within the film, but linked to contemporary issues. I will reflect on how LGSM brought the politics of their miners' strike activism into the events discussed, encouraging a younger generation, many of whom were not born when the miners' strike happened, to become involved in the activism that emerged out of *Pride*. Finally, I will end the piece by reflecting on LGSM's decision to wind down on activities not directly related to the miners' strike or its politics to support newly established groups supporting various causes, including migrant rights and struggling industrial workers. LGSM marked this with a farewell party, which was particularly moving, as the date coincided with the final day of work in Britain's last coal mine, making LGSM and *Pride's* messages of political unity all the more potent.

When *Pride* was released in 2014, it was, perhaps, hard to imagine that a film portraying the unlikely true story of unity between a group named Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM) and the residents of a striking mining village in South Wales, could be widely successful. Winning numerous awards, including Outstanding Debut Film for scriptwriters Stephen Beresford and David Livingstone at the BAFTAs in 2015, *Pride* resonated with different people, many of whom were not born until years after the miners' strike had ended. I am one of the young people who was both moved and inspired by the events in *Pride* to engage with the political activism that emerged out of the success of the film. This article addresses, from a personal perspective, the relationship between LGSM's activism during the miners' strike in 1984–85, and worldwide participation in the events and political engagement inspired by *Pride* throughout 2015.

Pride was screened in numerous cinemas throughout Britain on its initial release, securing £3.98m at the British box office, positioning itself as the 19th most successful film in Britain in 2014.¹ After the perhaps surprising success of *Pride*, a series of special screenings and events were held throughout the UK, as well as internationally, in support of various political and activist groups and charities. This included student union, LGBTQ+, Labour Party, and trade unionist groups, as well as events related to LGBTQ+ history and exhibitions, mining, supporting migrants and other persecuted communities, and general public screenings to raise money for LGSM's supported causes. The funds raised through these events primarily contributed to the Mark Ashton Red Ribbon fund (part of Britain's oldest HIV/AIDS charity, the Terence Higgins Trust), set up after LGSM activist and *Pride* protagonist Mark Ashton passed away from pneumonia, contracted as a result of AIDS on 11 February 1987. Donations and funds raised from LGSM's events also supported appeals from struggling workers. This included the SOMA Miners in Turkey, as a direct relation to LGSM continuing their support of mining communities, as well as supporting the McDonalds McStrikers and the Ritzy Picturehouse (Brixton) workers who went on strike.

¹ See BFI (2015) for more information on British box office statistics in 2014.

Whilst LGSM actively champion and raise money for more recent causes, they also continue their dedicated support of the Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign (OTJC) in their fight for justice against the brutal attack on miners by the police at Orgreave in June 1984. Since 2015, LGSM appear each year at Durham Miners' Gala, marching with their banner and selling *Pride* merchandise on their stall. In 2018, I joined LGSM at their stand, selling *Pride* and LGSM merchandise to raise further funds, where we similarly demonstrated support of OTJC by handing out Orgreave Justice stickers and leaflets. Through the displaying of LGSM's banner (as it appears in the final scene of *Pride*), and the sale of *Pride* DVDs and the infamous Pits and Perverts t-shirts, the association between the stall and the film is instantly recognisable to many attendees of the event, and it offers a platform for discussing the film, as well as other supported causes, such as the Durham Miners' Gala and the OTJC, with *Pride* fans. The profits of LGSM's merchandise sales continue their long-term support of the Durham Miners' Association and other mining-related causes and appeals, as well as several LGBTQ+ appeals, most of which are outside the UK (for instance, Kaos GL in Turkey), and at times, the proceeds of merchandise sales of screenings have been given to the organisers of the screening in support of their cause.

LGSM's reformation was officially marked in March 2015 at a celebratory reunion party in Onllwyn Welfare Hall, the village where they initially spent much of their time in supporting the miners during the strike. The publicity surrounding the event and LGSM's reformation propelled their activities into the public eye. LGSM publicly supported events around the UK, actively encouraging participation, primarily achieved through LGSM's social media, of which I was an admin. Through this, I helped to promote their events and converse with activist, LGBTQ+, and student union groups around the country who requested involvement from LGSM in their events and screenings of *Pride*. Working together with various activist groups resulted in LGSM forging new connections and friendships with people from all backgrounds, races, and sexualities who had found inspiration in *Pride*.

Accompanying a range of screenings of *Pride*, members of LGSM provided introductions and participated in Q&A sessions, discussing the politics of the film

and recounting their personal experiences of supporting striking miners. Due to a personal interest in the miners' strike and the portrayal of LGBTQ+ history, I had seen *Pride* on its initial cinematic release, on 12 September 2014, and then shortly after provided an introduction to a screening of *Pride* at No.6 Cinema, Portsmouth on 10 October 2014. Also attending this screening were several local activists who at the time of the film's release, were involved with trade union and socialist campaigns and who actively took part in supporting left-wing causes and protests both locally and nationally. The screening of *Pride* in this instance became a space for me to meet other fans of the film who had found in it a striking relevance to contemporary politics. As a result, I began to appreciate the film's broader social impact beyond my already firmly established academic interest in its portrayal of the strike.

Soon after, in February 2015, a screening of *Pride* opened Portsmouth's first LGBTQ+ film festival. LGSM members Mike Jackson and Dave Lewis attended the screening, with Mike Jackson providing an introduction and answering questions during the Q+A. It was here that I first met members of LGSM, after having spoken to them on social media in the months following the film's release, and it is where my involvement with LGSM's activism really began. At this screening, LGSM brought to attention the similarities that their story shares with groups supporting victimised workers and communities in more recent years, where exploited/striking workers or marginalised communities continue to fight to have their issues addressed. Furthermore, Mike Jackson drew attention to *Pride's* portrayal of the Conservative government of the 1980s, suggesting that it was not too far from the Conservative (coalition) government in power at the time of the film's release. He stated that the film was impacting and inspiring audiences to engage in political activism, but this raised the question of where to begin in supporting different causes. In this way, screenings of *Pride* provided a platform for LGSM to highlight the continuing political relevance of the film to contemporary audiences, something which was inspiring those who had seen *Pride* to become politically engaged. Furthermore, they encouraged audiences to consider that, whilst *Pride* has a somewhat positive

conclusion of the winning of LGBTQ+ rights, there are still communities facing persecution that LGSM aim to support.

Over the following months, *Pride's* popularity continued to grow, with LGSM attending a special Q+A screening at BFI Flare, followed by Mike Jackson accompanying archivist Stef Dickers and close friend of Mark Ashton, Chris Birch, in the BFI Library for a talk about the film. During the event, they discussed the media representations of the story behind *Pride* and the LGBTQ+ communities in the 1980s, exhibiting examples of newspaper clippings from the Lesbian and Gay Newsmedia Archives at Bishopsgate Institute. The success of *Pride* was particularly timely as 2015 marked the 30-year anniversary of both the end of the miners' strike and of the miners joining LGSM at the front of the London Pride march, a historic moment for both the miners and the LGBTQ+ community. As a result of both the success of the film and this particular anniversary, in the spring of 2015, LGSM were invited by the London Pride board to lead the Pride march alongside the miners in June of the same year. The planned march would be led by LGSM alongside the reformed Swansea, Neath and Dulais Valley Miners' Support Group, the Tredegar Town Brass Band (who appeared in *Pride*), the Mark Ashton Trust, and cast members of *Pride* and their supporters from around the world. The event would establish *Pride's* message of uniting with struggling communities to battle prejudices together, and LGSM were determined to involve activists and groups they had forged connections with in the months leading up to the event.

In March 2015, I became involved in supporting and discussing plans for the London Pride march with activists and members of LGSM. For many of the young people who became involved in LGSM's participation in London Pride, this was their first venture into political activism of any kind. I had never been particularly engaged with politics before seeing *Pride*, meeting LGSM, or being inspired by their story of unity and activism. *Pride's* release was very timely in how it explored political divide and the uniting of groups to support one another and fight back in response to that. Britain was, and still is, facing the reality of an economic and social crisis, witnessing how migrants have become scapegoats for this, being continually demonised by the

British media and Conservative government. *Pride* provoked a response in young people throughout the UK who identified with its portrayal of the struggle of marginalised groups and were inspired by its message of uniting together to become active in their fight against it. LGSM aimed to transform the spirit of the London Pride march (which they felt was promoted solely as a commercialised parade led by banks and tax-evading companies), into its original role a political march, demonstrating their support of those communities facing persecution in more recent years. Groups LGSM planned to support included migrants and workers fighting for their rights to a living wage and whose jobs or industries were under threat.

The initial request for LGSM to lead the Pride parade in 2015 resulted in conflict after the Pride board limited LGSM's supporter total initially to 50. After negotiation, they increased it to just under 300, with the understanding that the trade union contingent would be marching close by. However, after the structure of the parade was revealed, LGSM discovered that the trade unions were a mile or so behind them. For LGSM, this meant that leading London Pride would result in being unable to march with the unions and activists whose causes were integral to LGSM's values as a group. Therefore, LGSM made the decision to pull back and instead lead the trade union contingent in the middle of the march. By leading this section, LGSM would not be limited by the number of supporters joining them and could march in solidarity with all those groups whose causes they supported and wished to actively demonstrate solidarity with.

LGSM supported coalminers because the miners were striking and fighting to save their jobs, rights, communities, and livelihoods, and their union was based on a common experience of demonisation by the government, police, and press. In the lead up to London Pride, I accompanied LGSM in participating in various publicity events to promote their efforts. One event included a restaging of an infamous photograph of LGSM holding their banner during the 1985 London Pride. LGSM, alongside myself and other young activists, gathered in Hyde Park with the LGSM banner. The photograph and reports of the unveiling of their new banner appeared in a variety of media outlets such as *Pink News* (Payton, 2015) and *Morning Star*

(James, 2015) focusing on LGSM's aim to demonstrate solidarity with struggling communities in the upcoming London Pride.

On 26 June 2015, the night before the London Pride march, LGSM held what they nicknamed a 'Pints and Perverts' party at the London Welsh Centre to celebrate the new connections that LGSM had forged with activist groups around the UK and internationally. Furthermore, as with the 'Pits and Perverts' fundraising ball LGSM held on 10 December 1984, it aimed to bring together different communities for an entertaining event which carried a political and socially conscious tone throughout. For attendees, who ranged from fans of the film to UK and international activists through to the Onllwyn miners LGSM had supported during the strike, it was an emotional and inspirational night which consisted of celebratory speeches, powerful spoken word poetry, a fundraising raffle and stalls, and supporters joining LGSM in dancing to songs from the *Pride* soundtrack. This last aspect in particular was an effective way of incorporating aspects of the film into an event which felt like a realised Pits and Perverts fundraising event from *Pride*, and was a powerful reminder of how the politics explored in *Pride* were integral to this event. Meeting fans of *Pride* from different parts of the UK, as well as from places as far away as Turkey, I, like others, was able to forge new friendships with people who had been inspired by *Pride* and LGSM's story, and become involved in actively supporting causes important to them.

LGSM successfully raised money for their supported causes that night, both through selling their merchandise, including Pits and Perverts t-shirts, *Pride* DVDs, and badges, and through a raffle which gave away items such as a signed DVD of *Pride* and a full set of the *Pride*-inspired badges. The event was attended by LGSM and miners from Onllwyn (and their families), one of whom brought Welsh cakes for everyone to try. Further guests included people who were portrayed in the film, including Dai Donovan (portrayed in *Pride* by Paddy Considine) and Siân James (portrayed in the film by Jessica Gunning), fans of the film, and young activists from around the world. The emphasis that evening on solidarity was brought to the foreground when, as she performed it in *Pride*, Bronwen Lewis sang 'Bread

and Roses', accompanied by the South Wales Gay Men's Chorus and attendees of the party. The song was originally written in 1911 and it became an emblem of the solidarity expressed within the Lawrence textile strike (Piascik, 2012). The scene in *Pride* is particularly powerful and emotional, reaffirming the community's sense of unity and optimism that they are able to win the strike. During LGSM's pre-Pride party, Bronwen Lewis's rendition was accompanied in the second verse by the South Wales Gay Men's Chorus, followed by the audience joining in during the third verse, copying the structure of the performance in *Pride*. Lewis's performance was received with emotional, continuous applause and cheers, and the performance enthused attendees with a similar sense of optimism to that in *Pride*, readying them to march in solidarity with LGSM, the miners, and groups who identified with LGSM's politics the following day.

In the final scene of *Pride*, LGSM gather in Hyde Park, preparing to march in the London Pride parade. The emphasis on solidarity is captured in Joe's (George Mackay) statement that 'whether we march with banners or without, the important thing is that we march together'. This comment is swiftly followed by the unexpected appearance of coaches filled with miners from the Welsh mining communities who have come to support LGSM in the Pride march in return for the continual solidarity that LGSM demonstrated toward them during the strike. On 27 June 2015, LGSM were set to lead the trade union contingent of the London Pride march, joined by members of the mining community (including Dai Donovan and Siân James), numerous actors from *Pride*, its scriptwriter Stephen Beresford, and supporters from all over the world.

During the march, I joined LGSM and fellow supporters of their political activism for a day of celebrating the momentous impact *Pride* had on its audiences, inspiring them in ways which few other films have seen. It was evident, both by the overwhelming number of groups marching alongside LGSM, as well as responses from people in the crowd as we walked by, how significant the impact of LGSM's story had been, to invoke such a response in people of all ages, sexualities, and

nationalities. However, whilst the 1985 march was a demonstration of solidarity specifically between the mining and lesbian and gay communities, the 2015 march built on the role of unifying a diverse range of causes. By relating the 2015 London Pride march to LGSM's march with the miners in 1985, LGSM were able to draw attention to contemporary political struggles that benefit from similar expressions of support to that which LGSM gave the miners during the strike. In this way, LGSM ensured that the march was not simply a re-enactment of either the final scene in *Pride* or the 1985 march, but was instead a space to infuse the London Pride march with an undeniably contemporary political tone.

In the year which followed the release of *Pride*, the film's message of solidarity became an inspiration for both British and international audiences to found activist groups. Fans of *Pride* have actively supported a diverse range of issues, from LGBTQ+ rights, to fighting the increasing attacks against the working class and industrial workers, to supporting the rights of migrants. As a result, many groups have formed, using the LGSM acronym but substituting the M for whichever struggle they are supporting, for instance, Lesbians and Gays Support the Migrants and an activist group in Norway named Lesbians and Gays Support the Dockers. The ongoing activism of these groups five years after *Pride* was released is testimony to the film's continuing value as a platform for activism.

On 9 October 2015, towards the end of an eventful year for LGSM and *Pride*, LGSM made the decision to wind down their activities. This included attending fewer events (such as Pride marches and screenings of *Pride*) except where those screenings were linked to a cause that they supported and related to the political themes of their original group. An example of their continued activism includes a fundraising screening of *Pride* which LGSM held on 19 September 2016 to support Jeremy Corbyn during his re-election as Labour Party leader. The screening was followed by a Q+A with Corbyn, LGSM, and *Pride* actor George Mackay, with the profits donated to support Corbyn's re-election campaign. Furthermore, LGSM's presence at events directly related to the miners' strike, including the OTJC and the Durham Miners' Gala, would continue.

As LGSM wound down their activities not specifically linked to the miners' strike or those which shared its politics, they began instead to focus on archiving their collection of photos, documents, videos, personal stories, and other materials related to their activism during the strike, publishing it on their website for public access. Furthermore, they released a book wherein members of LGSM and the miners recounted their experiences during the strike, and detailed the relationship between the two groups (Tate, 2017). This account of their activism was released in August 2017, with book launches held by LGSM around the country, including a launch at Gay's the Word bookshop, London, where LGSM held their original meetings in the early stages of their activism. Here, LGSM signed copies of the book, meeting fans and activists inspired by their story. The release of their book, and the increased access to photos, documents, and their own collected archive online was a move to continue to support and inspire activism in younger generations. Moving away from an association as a re-enactment group, the group aimed to put precedence on making their material accessible, hoping to continue inspiring activism in future generations through LGSM's tale of solidarity with different communities.

Following the events they attended throughout 2015, LGSM marked the official end to a remarkable year, first with a public signing of Pits and Perverts t-shirts, posters, and *Pride* DVDs at Gay's the Word, and secondly through a final celebratory party. This party aimed to bring together LGSM, their supporters, and special guests, including Siân James, George Mackay, and Stephen Beresford. Aside from fundraising through merchandise sales and a raffle, interviews with LGSM and those who were closely involved with their activities were filmed. I was interviewed, recounting my experiences of accompanying LGSM in their events throughout the year and discussing the profound personal and academic influence that *Pride* and LGSM had had on me. At the end of what had been a remarkable year for LGSM, through my involvement in their events I had become more politically engaged, had forged connections and friendships with young activists across the world, and had been motivated to take the year's experiences into consideration when pursuing my future academic research. The evening's party included musical performances and a screening of a short documentary on LGSM's recent activity, celebrating LGSM's influence on

young activism, particularly related to the formation of Lesbians and Gays Support the Migrants. Whilst the party was in effect LGSM waving farewell to their activities surrounding a particular historic moment, it was likewise a celebration of how the year had inspired the formation of other activist groups whose values were integral to LGSM, but were related to causes whose fights were supporting current struggles.

The night came to an emotional close with a range of moving speeches in which members of LGSM spoke of their gratitude for the support they had received throughout the year and what messages could be taken from it. LGSM noted the importance of younger generations continuing to fight for the rights of groups persecuted through the prejudice, sexism, racism, and homophobia still evident in societies across the world. What made the already emotional evening more poignant was the date's unexpected clash with the final day of work in Britain's last colliery, in Kellingley, after a long-fought struggle (which LGSM and cast members of *Pride* including Faye Marsay and George Mackay had supported) to keep it running. The party's atmosphere was bittersweet. It marked not only the end for LGSM's association with public events that were not directly associated with their efforts during the strike, but additionally, it marked a defeat for the miners, who had fought long and hard to save the last remaining coalmining pit in the UK. Whilst the battle to save coalmining itself was lost, there are many aspects of *Pride* and LGSM's history which continue. The message that fans of *Pride* have taken from LGSM's tale of unity between the striking miners and the LGBTQ+ communities is that it is far better to fight together for our common causes. Ultimately, to support one and not the other is, as Mark Ashton (Ben Schnetzer) states in *Pride*, 'illogical'.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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