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## PRIDE REVISITED: CINEMA, ACTIVISM AND RE-ACTIVATION

# 'What I was told about lesbians really did shock me. It can't be true, can it? You're *all* vegetarians?': Greywashing Gay Shame in *Pride*

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Celebrated by film journalists as the feel-good film of 2014 (Kermode, 2014; Osboldstone, 2014), *Pride* depicted the unlikely alliance between a group of London based gay activists and the miners from a small, Welsh village during the miners' strike of 1984. However, the film can also be read as a nostalgic representation of a specific agenda of British Gay Liberation politics in the early 1980s – a period in which one of the main trajectories of Gay Lib was to attempt to eradicate the stigma and shame from the identification of being gay. This article will argue that the film's inclusion of the fictional character of Gwen is an effective technique of focalising the gay pride mantra through the point of view of a very endearing, older woman whose unassuming and innocent perspective on gender and sexuality politics emphasises the key point made by a faction of Gay Lib at the time: sexual object choice should be no more remarkable than a preference for a specific type of gastronomic fare. This narrative technique can be identified as greywashing.

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In one of the laugh-out-loud moments in *Pride*, the character Gwen – an older woman from the mining town of Onllwyn – asks a charmingly innocent question of her new lesbian friends while they're enjoying a drink together in the village club. Gwen frames the question with a statement that this information was very shocking to her – thus leading the spectator to infer that her query will be something related to sexual acts. However, this expectation is reversed by Gwen merely inquiring about the lesbians' preferred choice of cuisine. Surely, they can't *all* be vegetarian?

This article will argue that this sequence is a key example of *Pride's* strategy of focalising gay liberation politics through the perspective of a charming, and most importantly, *older* character: a narrative technique that I shall label greywashing. While the main theme of *Pride* is that alliances can blossom between diverse communities, the film is also a nostalgic representation<sup>1</sup> of a specific agenda of British Gay Liberation politics in the early 1980s – a period in which one of the main trajectories of Gay Lib was to eradicate the stigma and shame from the identification of being gay. The film's inclusion of the fictional character of Gwen is an effective technique of focalising the gay pride mantra through the point of view of a very endearing, older woman whose unassuming and innocent perspective on gender and sexuality politics emphasises the key point made by a faction of Gay Lib at the time: sexual object choice should be no more remarkable than a preference for a specific type of gastronomic fare.

### **The Feel-Good, 'Alternative Heritage' Film of the Year: *Pride***

Celebrated by film journalists as one of the most uplifting films of 2014 (Kermode, 2014; Osboldstone, 2014), *Pride* narrates the events from the miners' strike of 1984 when a group of London based lesbian and gay activists raised money to support families that had been affected by the striking action. During the strike, it was pointless for support groups to send money directly to the miners' union - given that the Thatcher government froze the funds of the National Union of Mineworkers.

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<sup>1</sup> For a superb analysis of nostalgia in *Pride*, see Sharif Mowlabocus's article "No politics ... We're a Mardi Gras now": Telling the story of LGSM in 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Britain.'

One strategy to bypass this problem was that support groups could give financial aid directly to specific mining communities. Mark Ashton, a 24-year-old gay activist from London, founded the support group 'Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners' (hereafter LGSM) to raise money for the miners' strike. Ashton was a socialist, originally from Northern Ireland, who recognised that strategies of oppression were exercised by the ruling class against a range of minority groups. A key tenet of 1980s Gay Liberation was the belief that lesbians and gays were not merely united by a shared same-sex sexual desire but by 'the social experience of discrimination and prejudice' (Watney, 1994: 17). Ashton was aware that this discrimination was experienced by other socially disadvantaged groups and that, to challenge hegemony, it could be beneficial for disparate minorities, whom the ruling class would prefer to see disunited, to coalesce for effective politics. As Sherry Wolf has argued:

Homophobic, sexist, racist, nationalist, and other divisions in modern society reflect the interests of the dominant class in society. This class—the ruling class—constitutes a small minority of the population; it therefore must use the institutional and ideological tools at its disposal to divide the mass of the population against itself in order to prevent the majority from uniting and rising in unison to take back what is rightfully theirs.' (2009: 10)

As well as being the feel-good British film of 2014, *Pride* can also be seen as a development of a film genre that Phil Powrie has labelled 'alternative heritage cinema' (2000). Other films in this genre include *Brassed Off* (dir: Mark Herman, 1996), *The Full Monty* (dir: Peter Cattaneo, 1997) and *Billy Elliott* (dir: Stephen Daldry, 2000). The label 'alternative heritage cinema' is a response to 'heritage cinema': a film genre first identified by critics to describe period costume dramas - notably the cinema associated with the British studio Merchant Ivory (see Monk, 1995, 1999). These films were distinguished by their narrative focus on the upper-middle class echelons of Edwardian England who resided in grand country houses and/or attended elite institutions such as Oxford or Cambridge (see Hill 1999). Heritage cinema was also distinguished by the distinct aesthetic pleasures of its visual style (especially its

unanchored point of view shots to facilitate the pictorialist<sup>2</sup> indulgence of gazing upon beautiful architecture) and celebrated an understated acting style (in which emotion is expressed through small gestures) and performed by classically trained, theatre actors (Geraghty, 2002).

Alternative heritage cinema can be seen to rework the thematic paradigms associated with heritage. If heritage cinema focuses on southern England then alternative heritage is usually located in northern England; heritage represents upper (middle) class life but alternative heritage depicts working class communities and, most importantly, if heritage focuses on elite institutions and grand country houses, alternative heritage represents industrial life and working-class village communities. However, despite thematic differences, many of the aesthetic techniques are similar in both heritage and alternative heritage. Both genres offer a pictorialist pleasure of gazing upon images of bygone English life (whether this is the Edwardian country house of heritage or the charming, community of working class village life of alternative heritage) and maintain a similar acting style in that action and physicality are eschewed in favour of small gestures. Similarly, both genres maintain a respect for 'traditional' English culture whether this is heritage's adaptation of the 'great' novel to the screen or alternative heritage's celebration of traditional, English popular culture (such as the brass band in *Brassed Off* or Billy's dancing in *Billy Elliott* – a style which, although identified as ballet in the narrative, has more similarity to folk dancing (Hill, 2004: 104)). One key difference between the genres is the way alternative heritage will often challenge verisimilitude to include moments more akin to the film musical where characters will perform scenes of song and dance. This includes not only the tear-jerking moments of the brass band playing 'Danny Boy' in *Brassed Off*; Billy's spontaneous sequences of energetic dancing in *Billy Elliott* and the two musical interludes in *Pride*: the 'Bread and Roses' singalong and Jonathan's spectacular dance to 'Shame, Shame, Shame'. While it can be argued that there are similar scenes which challenge verisimilitude in heritage cinema (for example,

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<sup>2</sup> Pictorialism describes how a mechanical art form (photography, film) mimics the aesthetics of painting. The term was used in relation to heritage cinema by Andrew Higson (2003).

the cornfield kiss in *A Room with A View* (dir: James Ivory, 1985) which certainly heightens spectacular pleasures) these do not have the same effect of suspending the narrative through inclusion of music, song and even dancing. Most importantly, these musical interludes in alternative heritage also function to provide a meta-critical commentary on the film's themes. *Brassed Off's* 'Danny Boy' moment forces the spectator to acknowledge the importance of brass band music both to physical and community well-being; the choreography of Billy's impromptu dance in front of his father is a commentary on the miners' anger and the singing of 'Bread and Roses' in *Pride* locates the miners' strike within the history of socialist activism.

However, if there is one element that unites both heritage and alternative heritage it is the space that these films offer for the representation of *older* characters. As Sadie Wearing has argued, heritage,

'might even be said to be partially characterised by its inclusion of a recognisable "type" of older actors reproducing particular kinds of performances which draw attention to the proficiency and scope of the actor's craft.' (Wearing, 2012: 151)

Although the inclusion of older characters can be read merely as an element of (camp) comic relief (this reading could be made of the performances of Maggie Smith and Judi Dench in *A Room with a View* or the two older women in *Brassed Off* who are perhaps closer to the tradition of Shakespearian fools than offering a celebration of older femininity (see Monk, 2000)) both heritage and alternative heritage deserve credit for giving more screen time to older characters (especially older *female* characters) than can be found in most other mainstream, narrative cinemas. I have argued (Richardson 2018) that the foregrounding of older characters in heritage may be read as a strategy of age-affirmation in that the film texts draw a deliberate conflation between the heritage iconography of the films (the buildings, art and culture which the spectator is invited to celebrate) and the older people in the diegesis. I have even proposed that this denotes a specific ideology of heritage in that the older characters are read as 'exemplars of all that was good about the nation's

past' (Blaikie, 1997: 629). However, this foregrounding of the older character (both as a metaphor of the heritage we 'should' protect and as a cipher of the ideology of the film text) is a politically contentious narrative conceit that I have labelled greywashing (Richardson 2018).

### Strategies of Greywashing

My use of greywashing is inspired by the highly controversial debates about the 'strategy' of pinkwashing – a political narrative largely associated with the state of Israel. The term pinkwashing was, arguably, coined by Ali Abunimah in 2010 (see Shafie, 2015: 84) who argued that Israel's celebration of gay culture (particularly in tourist resorts like Tel Aviv) is an *insincere* co-option of LGBT rights into an elaborate PR strategy. Arguably, pinkwashing is a tenet of the 'Brand Israel'<sup>3</sup> campaign in that it has been Israel's attempt to represent itself as a gay oasis in the middle of the highly homophobic MENA (Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan, Pakistan) region<sup>4</sup> (see Jackman and Upadhyay, 2014; Schulman, 2012; Shafie, 2015). This foregrounding of Israel as a gay-friendly country is not only seen in legislation (for example, Israeli gays and lesbians can serve openly in the military) but is also suggested in Israeli popular culture ranging from the documentary film *Undressing Israel: Gay Men in the Promised Land* (dirs. Michael Lucas and Yariv Mozar, 2012) to Israel's version of the TV series *Dancing with the Stars (Rokdim Im Kokhavim)* which was the first version of the global franchise to feature a same sex couple in the competition.<sup>5</sup>

Given that LGBT rights are often viewed as the indicator of a liberal, progressive and Western society (Solomon, 2004: 636), Israel's celebration of LGBT rights *may* be read as Israel merely reinforcing Orientalist prejudices of the Middle East in which the surrounding Arab countries are identified as homophobic and therefore barbaric while gay-friendly Israel, by comparison, represents Western civilization and liberal

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<sup>3</sup> In 2005, Israel launched its 'Brand Israel' campaign which aimed to promote Israel as a country of first world luxury, an ideal tourist destination and, most importantly, a liberal and democratic state.

<sup>4</sup> In most of the surrounding Arab states, gays and lesbians are, at best, socially marginalised and, at worst, criminalised. Homosexuality even carries the death penalty in Saudi Arabia and Iran.

<sup>5</sup> In season 6, the openly lesbian-identified television presenter Gili Shem Tov was paired with professional female dancer Dorit Millman.

democracy. Arguably, this can further enhance existing Western hatred of Arab countries if not even overt Islamophobia. Therefore, pinkwashing is, arguably, not only a tenet of the Brand Israel campaign but *may* be read as an evolution of the 'Zionist colonialist narrative' (Elia, 2012: 50), which identified itself as an altruistic agenda that was bringing civilization to a primitive, barbaric land – 'a narrative that sanitises the violence of occupation while erasing indigenous experience, struggle, and resistance' (Elia *ibid.*).

Critics, however, have argued that not only is Israel's celebration of LGBT culture insincere, and reinforcing the *assumed* civilized/barbaric dichotomy of Israel versus the surrounding Arab countries, but that – more importantly - pinkwashing is also a way of cloaking Israel's problematic behaviour towards neighbouring Arab states – especially Palestine (see Elia, 2012; Puar, 2011, 2013; Shafie, 2015). Israel's overt support of LGBT rights *may* simply be the country's attempt to deflect international attention away from its behaviour towards Palestine and its violation of many international laws (see Shafie, 2015: 83; Puar, 2011: 133). If Israel identifies itself as the liberal state, with a high respect for the rights of (LGBT) minorities, then it appears to be the sympathetic player in the Arab-Israeli conflict irrespective of how many atrocities Israel *may* be committing against its neighbouring state. It is difficult for a Western onlooker to dislike the country that values human rights – especially those of vulnerable minorities.<sup>6</sup>

Pinkwashing is obviously a very sensitive political issue which is open to considerable debate. My reworking of the term as greywashing in my recent monograph (Richardson, 2018) was not, in any way, intended to be disrespectful of this important and highly fraught subject but simply to argue that similar 'washing' strategies have been utilised in recent age-affirmative narrative cinema. For example, the recent *Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* film series can be read as utilising greywashing

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<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that Israel is not unique in its strategy of pinkwashing. Arguably, similar political agendas have been mobilised in Western Europe. Various anti-Muslim and anti-immigration political parties, in countries such as the Netherlands and France, have attempted to co-opt the rights of white, Western gay people as a means of inciting further Islamophobia and anti-immigration public sentiment (see Schulman, 2011).



to mask the conservative and arguably chauvinist politics of the films' narratives. Both *Marigold* films represent a group of elderly, British people who, for a variety of reasons, are now residing in the Marigold Hotel in India and the films' narratives are basically extended slogans declaring that life can be fabulous when one reaches the third age (Gatling et al., 2017). However, like earlier heritage cinema they may also be read as a rather worrying exaltation of British jingoism. One distasteful narrative motif is that 'the British incomers always know better than the local Indian population' (Dolan 2016: 579) and so even a game of street cricket, played by some local boys, 'takes on a neo-colonialist hue' (Dolan 580) when one of the characters teaches the children 'proper' cricket technique. Perhaps most offensive is the way the character Sunni, the owner of the Marigold hotel, is infantilized and represented as utterly incapable of running the hotel. Sunni's business is successful only because the very elderly Muriel Donnelly (Maggie Smith) intervenes and takes over the management of the hotel. Therefore, the *Marigold* films may be read as suggesting that even an uneducated, British woman (who has worked as a cleaner/housekeeper her whole life) is more capable than a young, educated Indian man. This infantilization of the Indian characters (who apparently need the kind and generous English to look after them) is not dissimilar to the imperialist agenda depicted in British colonial films of the 1930s. *Sanders of the River* (dir: Korda, 1935), for example, represented Colonel Sanders as the benign, patriarch who took care of his native "children". Of course, the key difference is that the British colonial regime is now suggested in the *Marigold Hotel* series by charming, older characters and so something that could be truly offensive (the British sweep into town to sort out the problems of the ineffectual natives) becomes acceptable because it is performed by frail, elderly people.

However, on the other hand, greywashing may not only be employed to conceal conservative ideologies but has also been utilised to affirm progressive politics for minority groups – especially lesbian and gay identified characters. The period from 2010 - 2015 saw a variety of same sex marriage affirmation films produced in Anglophone cinema including *I do* (dir: Glen Gaylord, 2012), *Cloudburst* (dir: Thom Fitzgerald, 2011) and *Love is Strange* (dir: Ira Sachs, 2014). The narrative of these films stressed the importance of legalising marriage rights for all same sex couples in the

USA emphasising that marriage needed to be recognised on a federal level (rather than state-by-state basis) and that legal protections should be established against employment discrimination.<sup>7</sup> Although all three films have undoubtedly enjoyed a popularity with gay audiences, the most commercially and critically successful of the two films have been the texts which represented *older* couples: a 70/80-something lesbian couple in *Cloudburst* and a 60-something couple in *Love is Strange*. I have argued (2018) that not only do the films employ the heritage conceit of conflating the older couples with the beauty of the iconography (the iconic image of *Love is Strange* codes the older gay couple as representative of bygone romantic New York as they stroll along a sun-dappled boulevard in their exquisite suits) but that, most importantly, the narratives depict the relationship as one of love and commitment rather than sexualised desire. In a key scene in *Cloudburst*, Stella (Olympia Dukakis) tells her partner Dottie (Brenda Fricker) that she loved her when she grew fat, when she became blind and therefore will always love her. It is the films' foregrounding of same sex coupledness as an enduring relationship built on love, rather than lust, that is key to stressing the politics affirmed by same-sex marriage advocates at the time. Key to this strategy is the age of the couples – emphasising the longevity of their relationships. The fact that these couples have been together for decades emphasises that same sex marriage is a necessary legal protection for a committed couple.

It is this laundering of same sex desire through the iconography and performances of older characters that I argue is also facilitated in *Pride* by the inclusion of the fictional character of Gwen (Menna Trussler) and the other older women in Onyllwen such as Hefina<sup>8</sup> (Imelda Staunton). The inclusion of these older women offers the affirmative potential of greywashing in a number of ways. First, a charming character like Gwen can be read as the classic heritage symbol of the older person as an exemplar of all that is good about this bygone community. In this respect, there is a conflation between the wholesomeness of the mining village and the lesbian and gay characters

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<sup>7</sup> Same sex marriage was not legalised in all the states of the USA until the Supreme Court ruling in 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Although Gwen is a fictional character, Hefina was an activist from the village of Onwllyn who became famous for her work during the miners' strike (see Headon 2017).

whom Gwen befriends. Second, Gwen's innocent and unassuming perspective of the gay identified characters (a choice of cuisine seems more remarkable to Gwen than sexual object choice) is a key strategy within the film's representation of a facet of Gay Liberation 'pride' politics of the 1980s. Third, the film's conflation of older female desire with gay male desire draws a parallel between the shame that clings to female desire (especially the taboo of the desiring *older* woman) with the socially unsanctioned desire of gay male sexuality.

### **'Shame, shame, shame': Gay Pride in the 1980s**

Prior to 1990s queer activism<sup>9</sup>, Gay Liberation politics in Britain were identified largely by a focus on asserting a pride in being gay. Arguably, there have been two distinct waves of Gay Liberation. While first wave Gay Lib was distinguished by its emphasis placed on sexual identity as fluid and a choice (see Lehring, 1997: 176–77), second wave Gay Lib argued for a reading of gays and lesbians as a distinct, quantifiable minority group – often employing the rhetoric of ethnic identification (see Epstein, 1989: 39) – who were united under the banner of oppression (Watney, 1994). Although second wave Gay Lib initially advocated for 'exploring new frontiers of sexual pleasure' (D'Emilio, 1992: xxvii), to offer a 'confrontational challenge to straights' (Jay and Young 1992: xlii), this was quickly succeeded by a politics which called for a mainstreaming of gayness – 'assuming a place for us within existing society' (Jay and Young, 1992: xl). In this respect, the fight for gay 'rights' became more important than the idea of a radical gay 'revolution' of sexual expression (see Jay and Young, 1992: xl). In gay rights politics, gays and lesbians were identified as exactly like their heterosexual counterparts - apart from their same-sex, sexual object choice. Arguably, the most important trajectory of Gay Lib was its attempt to eradicate shame from the label gay to be replaced instead by pride in the identification.

The problem with shame, however, is that it is not easily erased from subjectivity. Given that sexual activity is usually identified as shameful within most of the Western meta-narratives (Christianity is the most obvious example) establishing a politics

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<sup>9</sup> Queer activism was characterised by a rejection of assimilationist agendas and a reclamation of terms of abuse and 'negative' identifications (see Richardson, 2009).

of pride, based on an identification which is premised on sexual desire, is highly problematic. As David Halperin and Valerie Traub argue:

Gay Pride has never been able to separate itself entirely from shame, or to transcend shame. Gay pride does not even make sense without some reference to the shame of being gay, and its very successes (to say nothing of its failures) testify to the intensity of its ongoing struggle with shame. (Halperin and Traub, 2009: 3–4)

As Sally Munt has asked, 'Can there be a homosexual subject who is *not* formed from shame?' (2000: 536). While guilt refers to specific actions for which a person can atone shame is intrinsically connected to subjectivity (Sedgwick and Frank, 1995; Connor, 2001; Munt, 2000, 2008; Richardson, 2004). Bodies cannot be separated from shame in the way that they can disassociate themselves from the guilt of specific actions. In a court of law, for example, a person can plead guilty to a specific action and can then pay some form of penance after which they will no longer be guilty. By contrast, shame, because it refers to a sense of self, cannot be so easily identified and removed. Munt (2008: 2) describes this as the stickiness of shame in that it always clings to a person's subjectivity. The narrative of Christianity, for example, revolves on a never-ending cycle of shaming in which the subjects self-identify as ashamed of their sins in a vain quest to feel absolved of this 'shame'. Given this problem of Western culture's erotophobic conflation of *all* sexual expression with shame, the politics of 1980s gay pride was a difficult enterprise for Gay Liberation (Rand, 2012: 76). How can a minority identification that is premised upon sexual expression transform shame into pride?

I argue that part of the feel-good sensibility of *Pride* – especially for lesbian and gay spectators who remember the days of 1980s Gay Lib – is that the film manages to cloak the stigma of shame within gay identification politics in two main ways. The first is *Pride's* deliberate conflation of Gay Liberation activism with the politics of the miners' strike. Instead of offering a narrative that is focused only on the politics of a liberation of sexual expression, the film centres on a struggle against the oppression

of *two* minority groups. This is emphasised in the opening sequence that represents Mark Ashton in his London flat, on the morning of the 1984 gay pride march, watching Mrs Thatcher talk about the miners' strike on the television news. There is a close-up shot of Mark's face, denoting his recognition of shared strategies of governmental oppression for both gays and lesbians and the miners. However, in the background an anonymous man appears – presumably Mark's trick from the night before. Mark ignores this man – even when he tries to speak – thus suggesting that, having had sex with the man the night before, Mark is no longer interested in maintaining even an acquaintanceship with this person. Mark's cool indifference to his trick suggests that he regularly engages in the type of promiscuous sexual expression that a certain faction of assimilationist, Gay Liberation politics tried to condemn. However, *Pride* deliberately evades this issue by conflating Mark's disinterest in his trick with his newly discovered political passion for the dilemma of the miners' strike. The film is purposely ambiguous here. Is Mark ignoring his trick because he knows he will pick up another one later in the day, or is he too engrossed in the politics of the miners' strike to give the man any attention?

This establishes the narrative strategy for the rest of the film in which the politics of gay liberation are encapsulated within the political agenda of supporting the miners' strike. Arguably, *Pride* is evading the core problem of Gay Liberation (a politics of pride premised upon the acknowledgement of sexual shame) by featuring relatively little same-sex sexual activity and instead focuses on the political alignment of LGSM and the miners. However, I would argue that the film's main narrative strategy of absolving shame from gay pride is its greywashing of gay rights activism through the character Gwen and the other older female characters from Onllwyn such as Hefina. It should be noted that coding the older women as the most gay-supportive in the narrative, is particularly emotive given that *Pride's* early scenes represented older people as exemplars of homophobia. During the Pride march at the start of the film, the camera shows the pride marchers' point of view of a 'Christian' campaigner, standing by the side of the road and holding a placard which is advising the marchers that they are most likely going to burn in hell. This 'Christian' person is not only female but older – thus suggesting a

conflation between older femininity and homophobia. This, however, is challenged when LGSM contact Onllwyn.

***'What an entrance! Even Dietrich couldn't have worked that one better.': Enter Gwen***

In the audio commentary section of the DVD release, both the screenwriter (Stephen Beresford) and the director (Matthew Warchus) are effusive in their praise for the scene that introduces Gwen to the film. Both Beresford and Warchus not only enthuse about how 'masterly' Trussler's acting is in this moment (claiming that even Dietrich (arguably one of the greatest of gay icons (see Caron, 2009)) could not have made a better entrance) but they also feel inspired to note 'what a gorgeous face... she's just so beautiful'.<sup>10</sup>

Gwen's entrance is, arguably, one of the first tear-jerking moments of *Pride's* narrative as it is the first scene in the film in which LGSM have received any approval of their actions. Prior to this sequence there has been a montage sequence featuring members of LGSM trying to contact several mining communities, to offer their financial support, only to be dealt rude rejections. Finally, the group decides to contact Onllwyn and the short sequence with Gwen not only suggests that LGSM's project of supporting the miners could be successful after all their setbacks but is also the first moment to represent the film's key theme: that friendships and a sense of community may be shared by disparate groups (Joannou, 2016: 109).

The film subtly suggests this connection between LGSM and Gwen (the ambassador of Onllwyn) through representing both scenes with similar lighting. The sequence takes place in summertime and both 'Gay's The Word' bookshop and the Onllwyn Miners' Welfare Hall are lit by sunshine streaming from windows on the right of the screen. However, while the shots of 'Gay's The Word' are lit with high key, diffused lighting this assumes a more beatific quality in the Miners' Welfare Hall as the light streams from high up windows in order to back light Gwen and create the halo effect of edge (or rim) lighting. Similarly, there is a change in cinematography

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<sup>10</sup> Later in the commentary, Beresford even remarks 'I can't speak over Menna Trussler. She deserves the reverence that you would accord to any masterpiece.'

when the film edits from 'Gay's The Word' (filmed in medium shot and low angle to suggest how frustrated and oppressed LGSM members are feeling) to a wide angle, deep focus shot of Gwen, walking across the club hall, in order to suggest that LGSM's project of supporting the miners is finally being allowed freedom to develop. Gwen ambles across the floor in a single, long take with no camera movement until the very final seconds when the camera tracks in to show Gwen's sweetly smiling face. Unlike the other intended recipients of LGSM's money, Gwen does not slam the phone down in disgust but merely pauses for a second and then responds with 'I see', followed by a charming smile. Non-diegetic music (a punk version of the union anthem 'Solidarity Forever') starts to play and then there is a straight cut to the members of LGSM jumping for joy because, for the first time in the film, they have attained some success.

This sequence establishes a precedent for coding Gwen as an ambassador of everything that is good and, most importantly, deserving of respect in the mining village of Onllwyn. Although some of Gwen's key moments are intended simply to provide comic relief to break the tension (Gwen's announcement to Dai that 'Your gays have arrived' is one of the laugh-out-loud points in the film) other Gwen-isms are intended as metonyms for the theme of gay pride – the mainstreaming of gay desire beyond the stigma of shame. For example, when the group visit Onllwyn for the second time, the villagers and the activists enjoy a drinks party in Hefina's house. Gwen, after watching Stella (Karina Fernandez) slow-dance with her girlfriend Zoe (Jessie Cave), asks Steph (Faye Marsay) if she has a sweetheart. After Steph replies that she is single, Gwen opens her necklace locket and tells Steph 'That's my William. 44 years I had him with me and I wish you as many with someone – and just as happy.' It is noteworthy that the film doesn't offer a close-up of the photograph of William in Gwen's locket to emphasise that the gender of the life partner is not as relevant as Gwen's proclamation of the happiness that comes from long term monogamy. In this respect, Gwen is voicing the politics of assimilationist Gay Lib in which gays and lesbians argued for their right to be included in normative relationships.

However, although *Pride* mobilises Gwen as a point of focalisation, directing the spectator's reading of gay life as comparable with heteronormativity, the film avoids

falling into the trap of attempting to desexualise same sex relations.<sup>11</sup> Instead, *Pride* uses Gwen (and other older women of the village – notably Hefina) to emphasise that if there is an indignity and shame to sexual activity then we are *all* in it together – whether straight or gay. This is made most explicit in the sequence in which Gwen and the other village women enjoy a night out in London's gay scene after the 'Pits and Perverts' dance. While it has been easier for heteronormative culture to accept gays and lesbians who resemble straight people in everything other than their sexual object choice, there has always been less acceptance of queers who challenge conventional expectations of gender expression and sexual propriety (see Warner, 1999: 32). Gwen, however, tells Dominic (Jonathan Blake) that she and the women from Onllwyn want to see everything – 'even the rubber scene'.

First, they visit a dance club filled with a variety of gay men in which they all dance gaily to 'You spin me right round' and then they venture to a male-only fetish club filled with leather and rubber fetishists. Gwen and Gail (Nia Gwynne) are ordering drinks at the bar and they ask the barman how he manages to squeeze into his leather gear. He tells them that his trick is lots of talc to which Gwen replies 'Ah yes - Lilly of Valley, I use' – a statement identified in the audio commentary as forging a 'solidarity of people who use talc'. Yet again, this exemplifies Gwen's innocent and unassuming perspective on the extreme iconography on display in the club and, as in her introductory scene, her pronouncement is filmed by the camera tracking to a close-up of her innocently smiling face. Rather than query the fetish and kink connotations, Gwen simply reads the leather gear as a sartorial expression that might look distinct from hers but instead focuses only on the shared similarity rather than the difference. She uses talc in her preparatory ablutions in the same way as the barman employs it as an aid to squeezing himself into his leotard. This acceptance of queer sexual expression is further emphasised in the next sequence where the Onllwyn women are sleeping in Dominic's bedroom and

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<sup>11</sup> There has been a specific branch of gay rights activism (particularly in the USA) which has advocated for what Michael Warner has dismissed as a 'desexed gay movement' (41). Key advocates for this type of gay politics, arguably, have included the journalist Andrew Sullivan (1995) and, to a certain extent, the playwright and author Larry Kramer (1997).



the film draws a parallel between the shame of gay male sexuality and the stigma of older female desire.

From the early days of women's and gay rights campaigns there have been shared similarities in the political agendas of both groups (see Richards, 1996). Both women and gay men have campaigned for the right to sexual self-expression and to challenge the shame of an identification premised on sexuality. While it can be argued that recent identifications within the sensibility of postfeminism do argue for feminine sexual subjectivity rather than objectivity, this privilege is afforded only to privileged, *young* women (Gill, 2007; Jermyn, 2016). The sexually desiring older woman is still identified as shameful (Estes, 2005; Greer, 1991; Segal, 2014; Whelehan, 2010). Recently, sociologists have discussed the cultural similarities that may exist between older femininity and gay men (see Jones and Pugh, 2005) – not least the shared stigma of both gay male sexuality and older, female sexual desire.

In the bedroom scene, Hefina (Imelda Staunton) discovers pornographic magazines and a huge, rubber dildo in Dominic's bedside cabinet but, instead of being shocked, the women roar with laughter and announce that the erotic material 'takes them back'. The articulation of mutually shared erotic desires (both the older women and the gay men enjoy sexy images of masculinity and dildos) again challenges the stigma of gay sexual expression – especially taboo acts of auto-eroticism. In many ways, this sequence can be read as expressing the type of Gay Lib sexual politics advocated to challenge the shame of same sex sexual expression. As Michael Warner has argued, it is 'only when this indignity of sex is spread around the room, leaving no one out, and in fact binding people together, that it begins to resemble the dignity of the human' (36). The word 'dignity' is used many times in *Pride* – both to refer to the miners' cry for 'coal not dole' and the gay activists' campaign to be allowed a right to sexual expression. *Pride* not only draws a comparison between the political activism of the two minority groups but focuses the sensibility of dignity-within-shame through the greywashing strategy of having Gwen and other older female characters as a point of focalisation.

## Conclusion: A Greywashed Hyper-History

Critics have argued that a key pleasure of heritage culture (both cinema and the heritage industry) is nostalgia (Higson, 2014; see also Davis, 1979). Yet, heritage nostalgia is not a naïve longing for the past but a highly self-aware and ludic nostalgia that Stuart Cosgrove describes as a type of 'hyper history', an obviously 'processed history rather than a history of social process' (quoted in Hill 1999: 76). In heritage industry, a country house is not so much an archaeological find as an element of performative history in which the antiques of the house may well be combined with a fabricated tea room on the estate grounds which serves an 'authentic' Edwardian afternoon tea to the visitors. As such, heritage is emblematic of the ludic playfulness that is so characteristic of postmodern culture.

Heritage and alternative heritage cinema, in the same way as heritage industries, can be seen to create a hyper-history in that the films may be narrating historical events but these are filtered through the political sensibility of the current period in which the films are produced. For example, the Merchant Ivory films of the 1980s may be read as a revisioning of the past filtered through Thatcherite politics of extreme conservatism and neoliberal personal enterprise (Hill, 1999). Similarly, *Billy Elliot* may be read as an allegory celebrating New Labour's focus on education as a reward in itself, given that the theme of the film is how dance education inspires Billy (the climax of the film is Billy's speech about the transcendence he attains via dance) rather than a focus on how this discipline can support neoliberal, entrepreneurial progress. In this respect, heritage can be seen as a type of palimpsest, in which eras are conflated. *Chariots of Fire* (dir: Hudson, 1981) collapses the politics of the 1980s Thatcherite government with the ideology of Edwardian England while Blairite policies are superimposed on the 1980s industrial politics in *Billy Elliot*.

Arguably, *Pride* can be seen to offer the same nostalgic revision of 1980s Gay Liberation politics by conflating the current agenda of Gay Rights (especially the importance of same sex marriage and the mainstreaming of gay desire) with the struggle for Gay Liberation in the Thatcherite decade. In recent years, contemporary Gay Rights have focused on assimilation into the heteronormative framework – with an emphasis on the recognition of equal (or sometimes

called same-sex) marriage (see Eskridge and Spedale, 2006). Recent decades have seen arguments for the importance of including gays and lesbians in the heteronormative structure not only because gays and lesbians are identified as different-but-similar to their heterosexual neighbours, but that same-sex marriage will actually strengthen and reinforce traditional, conservative ideas of monogamous unions rather than challenge these.<sup>12</sup> These politics seem to have been relatively successful in the Western world as evidenced by the Irish referendum (2015) and the Australian plebiscite (2017) in which the 'people' – as opposed to the government – voted overwhelmingly in favour of granting marriage rights to same sex couples.<sup>13</sup>

It has been my argument that one of the reasons *Pride* may be identified as such a feel-good film – especially for contemporary lesbian and gay identified spectators – is the way it maps the success of contemporary Gay Rights activism onto the ideologies of 1980s Gay Liberation through a focus on how this activism is read by Gwen (and the other older characters) in Onllwyn. Not only does Gwen personify the Gay Rights argument that sexual identification should be no more remarkable than an identification in terms of cuisine choice but she, and the other older women of the village, demonstrate that there is a shared indignity in sexual expression in order to challenge the stigma of gay shame. *Pride* does, of course, include moments of acute shame in its narrative – not least the storyline dealing with Gethin's (Andrew Scott) return to Wales and Joe's (George MacKay) very painful coming-out to his family. However, I have argued that these highly upsetting moments are countered by the film's greywashing strategies which, although not eclipsing the moments of acute shame experienced by the characters Joe and Gethin, help to

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<sup>12</sup> Arguably, the most famous ambassador for these politics was the former conservative Prime Minister David Cameron who, in an often-quoted speech, argued that he was in favour of equal marriage not in spite of being a conservative but *because* he was a conservative.

<sup>13</sup> Although the absorption of gay relationships into the mainstream framework of marriage does indeed challenge the shame that is attributed to sexual expression, by granting it the socio-legal legitimacy of marriage, this arguably only side-steps the issue of sexual shame and, in years to come, it will be interesting to note if an even greater division occurs between homonormative politics and the anti-assimilationism of more radical queer activism (see Warner, 1999 and Halberstam, 2012).

mitigate what could otherwise be a very pessimistic and depressing film narrative. It is *Pride's* mainstreaming of gay sexuality, focalised through the perspective of the older characters of Gwen and Hefina, that help to create the film's feel-good conflation of contemporary gay rights with gay activism of the 1980s. Many people in contemporary culture may well, like Gwen, find the lesbians' choice of cuisine much more remarkable than their sexual desires. Accepting lesbianism as part of the normative framework of sexual relationships is now perfectly fine in 2014, but surely they can't *all* be vegetarian?

### Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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