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Working-Class Sissies: Analysing Class, Masculinity and Sexuality in *Pride* and *Billy Elliot*

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Abstract

A 14-year-gap separates *Billy Elliot* (2000) from *Pride* (2014), which despite sharing many similarities, also maintain some core differences. Even though both works concern the 1984-5 miners' strike and gender and sexual dissidence, *Billy Elliot* is less overt about the topic of LGBT issues, focusing on the story of a working-class boy's success in ballet, while *Pride* seems to put solidarity and mutual aid in the centre. The main aim of this paper is to analyse how class, masculinity, and sexuality intersect in the films. Being intersectionality and solidarity central ideas in both works, this paper will dissect the parallelisms between the depiction of homophobia and intersectional solidarity. It will also evaluate how both films prioritize personal success narratives over the collective cause, evoking a turn towards neoliberalism and homonormativity. Moreover, the masculinities featured in the films will be studied in relation to homophobia, the hypermasculine façade, and violence and aggression. Further, this paper will also delve into how the urban and the rural/industrial relate to these films regarding sexuality and class. Wales in *Pride* and Durham in *Billy Elliot* embody the rural space in which queerness is repressed while London represents the urban escape to which queer people migrate or exile.

In order to develop a detailed comparative analysis in relation to masculinity, class, and sexuality in the aforementioned films, this paper will be articulated by a close reading of them. Thus, it will consider queer and Marxian class theory, masculinity studies, and discourse and critical analysis.

Keywords: *Billy Elliot*, *Pride*, Masculinities, Class, Miners' Strike, LGBT, Capitalism, Rural-Urban Binary.

1.Introduction

1.1. Methodology and basic concepts

This paper aims to conduct an intersectional comparative analysis of the films *Pride* (Warchus, 2014) and *Billy Elliot*, (Daldry, 2000) which considers masculinity, sexuality, and class and how they intersect. Therefore, its objective is to propose an interpretation of how these items relate to each other, while developing an understanding of each of them. After a brief introduction to the films, some concepts relevant for the analysis will be delved into: Thatcherism, neoliberalism, homonormativity, intersectionality, masculinity and its forms and class. Then, a selection of the literature written about the films on the topics that concern this paper will be reviewed. The analysis will dissect the parallelisms between the depiction of homophobia within the working class and working-class solidarity with the LGBT community. This will be done by exploring the homophobic narratives that bring some of the characters to reject queerness as well as those that bring the working class and queer people together. The idea that these communities are mutually exclusive will also be navigated. Moreover, an analysis of the masculinities present in the films will be conducted, explored in relation to homophobia and the hypermasculine façade. It will also evaluate the neoliberal, homonormative tendencies in the films, investigating the protagonists, personal success narratives, and their significance. Later, space depiction in the films will be assessed considering class and sexuality and how the dichotomy between rural / industrial and urban is portrayed in relation to queer migration. Finally, the conclusion will put everything that has been navigated throughout the analysis in common.

Pride and *Billy Elliot* both regard issues of masculinity, sexuality, and class, which has resulted in them being analysed through these lenses by many critics. Therefore, this paper will take an intersectional approach to the films as a method of analysis. This is

rooted in the inevitably intertwining nature of the topics this analysis will discuss: masculinity, class, and sexuality, which only furthers the complexity of the subjects traversed by these factors. Nina Lykke deems intersectionality to be a tool to analyze normativities and power differentials and to understand how individuals negotiate their social relations, entrenched in these power dynamics and conditions. (2010: 51). She defines it as

a theoretical and methodological tool to analyze how historically specific kinds of power differentials and/or constraining normativities, based on discursively, institutionally, and/or structurally constructed sociocultural categorizations such as gender, ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, age/generation, dis/ability, nationality, mother tongue and so on, interact and in so doing produce different kinds of societal inequalities and unjust social relations.” (2010: 50)

Masculinity is at the very core of the films given that men are the protagonists in both. Masculinity studies approach men as gendered beings instead of emphasizing masculinity as the default in all of us, because “by denying implicitly or explicitly that men were gendered, they could escape close scrutiny and resist critique or the need to change” (Horlacher, 2015: 25). Masculinities are defined as those roles, behaviours and meanings socially imposed to men. This definition acknowledges that masculinities are culturally dependent but independent from biological sex as they are gender-based (Kimmel, 2000). This approach, which focuses on diversity within masculinity and highlights the existence of different masculinities coincides with Connell’s. He theorizes masculinities within a hierarchical system with four forms, which are crucial to this analysis: hegemonic masculinity, subordinated masculinities, complicit masculinities, and marginalized masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity embodies what he calls the “currently accepted strategy” (Connell, 2005: 105), representing the ideal man within a particular culture and time, which, in a patriarchal society, actively exerts male domination over women (and other men). However, most men fall into the complicit category: they avoid subordination by participating and engaging with the privileges of

hegemonic masculinity. Differently, subordinated masculinities are those that are dominated by the hegemonic type, a clear example of which would be openly gay men. Similarly, marginalized masculinities are subordinated to male hegemony too, but they also intertwine with other structures, such as class or ethnicity (Connell, 2005). Thus, Connell's classification only reiterates masculinity's inevitable connection to other factors such as sexuality or class, which cannot be ignored.

With the arrival of globalization, neoliberalism, social media, and the mingling of different classes, critics have redefined class accordingly. Along these lines, Pierre Bourdieu claimed that social class is not defined by relation to the means of production but by the possession of economic capital (wealth and income), cultural capital (education and 'good taste'), and social capital (connections, networks, club membership, etc.) (Bourdieu, 1986). This way, many critics such as Bauman, Anthony Giddens, and Ulrich Beck contend that class has become increasingly blurred, which implies a "death of class" (McManus, Butler, and Savage, 1996: 15). It can be claimed that neoliberalism is the backbone in *Pride* and *Billy Elliot* as the context of the miners' strike of 1984-85, depicted in both, represents the transition to neoliberalism in the United Kingdom. New Labour's neoliberalism substituted reducing social inequalities for an emphasis on the cultivation of individual talent as the basis of economic prosperity as well as the climbing up the social class ladder (Alderson, 2011: 2). Therefore, both films inevitably reflect the impact of neoliberalism on sexuality through homonormativity.

1.2. On the films

Pride (2014) is a British historical comedy-drama film written by Stephen Beresford and directed by Matthew Warchus. The film is based on a true story, that of the queer activist group named Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM), which raised money to help a mining community in South Wales and got involved in the miners'

strike in 1984. The film deals with the merging of two causes and communities: LGBT activism in Central London and the working class, represented by a mining community in Wales. Some of the LGSM members are Mark Ashton (Ben Schnetzer), who founded LGSM, Mike (Joseph Gilgun), Steph (Faye Marsay), Jonathan Blake (Dominic West), who is Gethin's partner (Andrew Scott), and Joe "Bromley" (George MacKay). The most prominent characters within the mining community are Dai Donovan (Paddy Considine), Cliff Barry (Billy Nighy) and Martin James (Rhodri Meilir), leaders of the men's union, and Hefina Headon (Imelda Staunton), Siân James (Jessica Gunning), and Maureen Barry (Lisa Palfrey), who are members of the Women's Support Group.

Billy Elliot (2000) is a British coming-of-age comedy-drama film written by Lee Hall and directed by Stephen Daldry. It depicts the story of Billy (Jamie Bell), a young working-class boy who becomes passionate about ballet. In the context of a small town in Everington, County Durham (North East England) during the 1984-85 miners' strike, the film deals with the mining community's struggle as well as the sexist and homophobic prejudices that siege Billy and his friend Michael (Stuart Wells). Other remarkable characters in the film are Sandra Wilkinson, the ballet teacher (Julie Walters), Jackie Elliot, Billy's father (Gary Lewis), and Tony Elliot, his brother (Jamie Draven).

1.3. Thatcher, neoliberalism and homonormativity

I think we have gone through a period when too many children and people have been given to understand 'I have a problem, it is the Government's job to cope with it!' or 'I have a problem, I will go and get a grant to cope with it!' 'I am homeless, the Government must house me!' and so they are casting their problems on society and who is society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first. [...] People have got entitlements too much in mind, without the obligations. There's no such thing as entitlement unless someone has first met an obligation (Thatcher 1987).

This section starts with an especially representative quote of Margaret Thatcher, a clear, vocal assertion of the individualism that characterized Thatcherism, tightly linked to neoliberalism: “there is no such thing as society” (Thatcher 1987). Thatcher’s use of the word “entitlements” instead of rights is worth noting, which explains how the neoliberal mindset operates: discarding the people’s needs and focusing on enriching the already rich but, at the same time, masking it as “looking to themselves first” (Thatcher 1987).

Conservative governments throughout the decades of the 1980s and 1990s are not only a feature of the period but a defining fact that had a great repercussion on culture and society. Thatcher’s disregard for socioeconomic equality, market intervention and public services, together with her embrace of austerity, authoritarianism, individualism, free market, celebration of Victorian values and privatization, among others, created a heavy instability in the UK. Consequently, social tensions arose, and labour revolts took place, such as the Brixton riots in 1981 or the miners’ strike in 1984-1985. Dealt with in the films to be studied, the strike was a nearly year-long response led by the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) to the pit closures that were being carried out by the National Coal Board.

Neoliberalism’s great impact reached LGBT issues through the capitalization of everything concerning the LGBT community, including pinkwashing¹. Neoliberal LGBT ideals and activism, based on heterosexual, monogamous, and capitalistic standards, is described by the term “homonormativity”, coined by Lisa Duggan. She defines it as “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay

¹ This term refers to marketing strategies that involve using LGBT inclusivity in order to promote a company’s products or services, e.g., integrating the LGBT flag in a company’s logo during Pride month.

constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (2002: 179).

1.4. Previous research on *Pride*

Unlike in *Billy Elliot*’s case, not much literature has been written on *Pride*. Nevertheless, some critics have analysed it from class and queer perspectives as these are salient topics the film presents. While Haslop highlights the film’s attention to class politics as well as its queer perspective (2018), some critics do find some aspects of the film neoliberal. Mowlabocus makes an analysis of nostalgia in *Pride*, which, according to him, allows it to be deemed, as many critics identify it, a “feel good film”. This way, following the British tradition of mystification and romanticization of the working-class life (Mowlabocus, 2019: 4) and through a lack of attention to Mark Ashton’s (LGSM activist) political activity beyond LGBT rights (Mowlabocus, 2019: 20), the current system is not questioned, thus making the film enjoyable and digestible for the middle-classes (Mowlabocus, 2019: 20). Different critics approach the other male protagonist, Joe (Bromley), in diverse ways, but they both identify him as a markedly classed character. Haslop discusses him as a depiction of a lower-middle class boy living a suburban life who gains a sense of acceptance through the rural working-class community in Wales he has been exposed to (Haslop, 2018: 309). Meanwhile, Mowlabocus states he is part of a story of personal success or improvement (2019: 14) which, together with Siân’s (2019: 21), who becomes the first female MP for Swansea East, reflect the individualistic and neoliberal undertones of the film. Haslop discusses the transitions in *Pride* between different types of classed, queer, and non-queer spaces: the predominantly heterosexual space of the Welsh village, the queer spaces of the bookshop and Central London, and the suburban homes. He emphasizes how “*Pride* is always ‘on the cusp’

(2018: 312) by its depiction of boundaries, which are blurred as well as constantly crossed through the spirit of solidarity when it comes to class, sexuality, and region (2018: 313).

The critic draws a parallel between *Billy Elliot* and *Pride*, as it, among others, has

championed British working-class cultures through feel good stories of resilience in the face of the social and cultural upheavals of Thatcherite politics. In some ways, *Pride*, as a comedy drama with a focus on the miner's strike, follows this tradition (2018: 307).

1.5. Previous research on Billy Elliot

Given its status of cult film because of its being part of popular culture, *Billy Elliot* has been extensively studied. Comparative studies of the film are especially common in relation to films such as *Brassed Off* (Herman, 1996) and *The Full Monty* (Cattaneo, 1997), which bear several similarities with it.

Sinfield analyses what he calls a “consolatory fantasy of personal escape” (2006: 170) within *Billy Elliot*. He claims the film has no prospect of transforming the system but instead reflects a struggle to maintain it, solidarity serving only as consolation and respect (2006: 169). Thus, according to him, it is individual opportunity that is addressed in the film rather than collectivism, as the miner's strike is, in fact, a material threat to Billy's future (2006: 169). Hence, his future is far away from the community, entailing a detachment from the working class in order to achieve west-end success (2006: 169). Evidencing a general agreement on the problematic nature of the film, McGlynn states that “*Billy Elliot* serves as an artifact of the new millennium's growing discourse of classlessness. While the film's backdrop is the collective strike, its title and its plot trajectory emphasize the individual” (2016: 323). Likewise, Wilkinson makes this evident by highlighting Billy's lack of concern for the political and economic situation. Being removed from the battle the miners are fighting, the narrative reinforces the unimportance of class and the idea that “we're all middle class” (2013: 70). Alderson's analysis of *Billy Elliot* is based in relation to neoliberalism and the individualistic culture that surrounds

it. Again, he states that the film is closely related to the New Labour politics, which emphasized class mobility rather than social inequality reduction (2011: 2). Therefore, the film's focus on individual talent is not accidental; the fact that Billy "ascends" in the social ladder is actually an escape from his own social class, the working class. Thus, he argues that this type of narratives forms a strong tradition within working-class literature: that of "the exceptional individual who leaves his class behind", which usually gives value to "bourgeois values of personal improvement" (2011: 11). Following this idea, Wilkinson defines this kind of narratives as a "place to display instances of conflict and suffering, ensuring the working class is in crisis and as a result is sympathetic to the middle-class gaze" (2013: 72).

In agreement with Haslop's argument about the regional boundaries between rural / urban / classed / (non) queer spaces in *Pride*, Alderson discusses how urban zones in which capitalism thrives generate the anonymity in which queer culture is possible (2011: 11), which is depicted in *Billy Elliot* as well. He also points out the film's ambivalent attitude towards the miners. According to him, they are defined by their authenticity and hegemonical masculinity, characterized by "linguistic vulgarity, aggression, grittiness" (2011: 10). At the same time, the film portrays the working class as exceptionally noble, which relates to Haslop's claims on the romanticization of the working class.

Billy's father masculinity crisis has been largely discussed. For instance, Alderson claims: "Jacky is the embodiment of the decent, law-abiding, and principled union man, but the death of his wife and the state's assault on his industry represent complementary disturbances of his world" (2011: 7). Schreiber also comments on how men undergo a "post-industrial" masculinity crisis as women start having a place in the labour market and striking signifies the loss of the role of "family breadwinner", which results in a strong threat to male identity (2007: 2).

Being dance a key theme in *Billy Elliot*, it has been broadly analysed. Weber argues how ballet is not necessarily a queer space for men as she explains how it is based on highly heterosexual and patriarchal standards and ideas (2003). Differently, Wilkinson focuses on a conception of dance related to neoliberalism and escaping the working class, linking it to self-improvement narratives that are greatly appealing to middle-class audiences: “Billy’s frustration at being trapped within his working-class background is shown through his dancing. [It] is the means by which he will eventually make his escape, his frustrations fuelling the desire and constructed ambition to escape.” (2013: 22).

Many critics have addressed the complex topic of Billy’s sexuality. Alderson recognizes the indeterminacy of his sexuality acknowledging his presentation as asexual or sexually indifferent (2011: 13). While many share this impression of a lack of positioning of the film when it comes to Billy’s sexuality, Weber attributes the deferral of the question to protecting the cinematic narrative from being queer so Billy can still be read as heterosexual (2003). She argues that “the film winks at the queer audiences while, for mainstream ones, dulling radical queer performance and knowledge that heteronormative masculinity is often constructed through queer performances.” (2003).

2. Analysis

2.1. The protagonists

The placement of characters at the centre of *Billy Elliot* and *Pride* as protagonists is greatly representative as, although in different ways, the most remarkable characters have been carefully placed as such. *Billy Elliot*, note the title, makes clear that Billy is the protagonist of the film from the first moment. This is especially significant as it reflects the way in which the film revolves around him and his own story. Billy’s story is one of

improvement, a narrative of 'breaking free'. Unlike *Pride*, which combines personal and collective narratives, this film has a much deeper focus on an individual one, and, of course, it is Billy's that is thoroughly explored.

Billy's dissidence regards gender resides in pursuing ballet, a discipline traditionally associated with women by mainstream culture, instead of boxing, the sport his father wants him to practice. This depicts a break in some of the gender boundaries of his people and time, a mining community in 80s Northern England. However, besides his hobby he can be described as presenting a rather normative gender expression. His dancing is very significant in relation to this in the sense that, rather than being delicate, it is athletic and rough, and sometimes even aggressive (Weber, 2003).

Billy's masculinity is deeply complex due to the vagueness surrounding his sexuality and gender. However, his can be classified as a marginalized masculinity. This marginalization, stemming from his belonging to the working-class, is especially clear in the audition scene, "a brilliantly realized depiction of working-class discomfort in the presence of cultural prestige and authority." (Alderson, 2011: 15). Not only are Billy and his father in London, where neither of them has ever been, but they are also in the Royal Ballet School, a specially classed place for its prominence and status. This contrast between him and his surroundings, shown through accent, type of cultural knowledge, manners, and clothing, makes Billy feel so out of place that he attacks another auditioner, clearly middle/upper-class, in the dressing room. He does so through a slap and a homophobic insult, "you bent bastard" (*Billy Elliot*), which is greatly significant as this draws a parallel between being gay and upper-class, reinforcing a working-class demonization of homosexuality, an implication that working-class men are not gay, that homosexuality is inherently bourgeois.

The film can clearly be interpreted in light of Judith Butler's idea of gender as a performance, as taking on a role (1988: 527). Not only does Billy enact gender through his gender expression, but also, through ballet. Hence, this is what could be called a "metaperformance of gender": a performance of gender within another performance, that of dancing. He performs gender as it is constantly produced and reproduced (Butler, 1988: 528) through the individual's gendered acting and roleplaying, which is crucial to one's gender and that which one presents to the world. Gender expression is tightly linked to external perception as it is greatly determined by society's ideas and conceptions about gender. Billy's masculinity and gender performance is perceived differently by different people as the film depicts a clear clash between working-class and bourgeois expectations of men. Firstly, Mrs Wilkinson, the ballet teacher, as well as those in the examining table in the London ballet academy, not only are unsurprised by Billy's enjoyment of ballet, but they also admire it and validate it. However, these characters embody the bourgeois and the urban, they are not a part of the mining community and thus have different concerns. Therefore, their acceptance of Billy, a young, talented (masculine although working-class) white boy, makes absolute sense, as it fulfils the expectations of their ideals of masculinity. These allow room for sensitivity and artistic ambitions, but are, at the same time, classed and gendered. Secondly, his father and brother, Jacky and Tony, who embody "the working-class, trade union brute" type of man, reject Billy's ambitions in relation to ballet as they try to keep him in his "gendered place", policing his gender expression through rather violent attitudes. Hence, their ideals of masculinity are based on traditional Western masculine stereotypes: being a breadwinner, working hard, traditionally masculine jobs (physical, tough), aggressivity (but also male camaraderie), being bodily rigid and rejecting introspection and emotion: "[Billy]: Do you ever think

about death? [Tony]: Fuck off" (*Billy Elliot*). This way, Billy is constantly attacked by his father and his brother, to whom he must prove that "not just poofs" do ballet.

Dissimilarly, *Pride* presents a conflict when it comes to protagonists. That is, it might be difficult at first to specify who the protagonist is as Mark Ashton is presented as the leader and founder of Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners, but the film dives deep into Joe Cooper, also known as "Bromley". The character of Mark Ashton is based on the real-life activist with the same name, who not only founded LGSM as a gay rights activist, but was also a member and later General Secretary of the Young Communist League, the youth wing of the Communist Party of Great Britain. In the film, he is the one to persuade a group of queer people that meet at "Gay's the Word", a gay-owned bookshop in London, after much reluctance, to organize themselves to help the striking miners, who are being heavily repressed by the state. A firm believer in intersectional solidarity, he links the oppression they suffer as queer people to the miners', representing an intersection of class and queer politics: "these mining communities are being bullied just like we are" (*Pride*). Thus, Ashton is a confident, charismatic leader, a metropolitan activist who lives in London but grew up in Northern Ireland, which shows in his accent. In terms of masculinity, Mark represents a subordinated and marginalized masculinity, being both gay and from the working class. Nevertheless, he also exerts dominance over others as he is the focus of attention in LGSM, leading not only men but also women. Further, he does not understand his power as a man over women and also dismisses the need for a women's group when he is confronted about it by one of the lesbians: "when are you going to address my question about my women's group?" (*Pride*). This leads to the lesbians' (except for Steph) secession into "Lesbians Against Pit Closures". Throughout the film, Mark as a character remains rather flat, that is, he presents practically no personal evolution.

On the contrary, Joe Cooper's personal life is the most explored one in the film, despite him being a fictional character, specifically crafted to fit in the film. His story revolves around being a lower-middle-class closeted gay young adult who tries to navigate his queerness and find his place by breaking free from his conservative family. He represents a subordinated masculinity as a gay man, which is greatly emphasized by his not having come out: he is shy, lonely, withdrawn, repressed and significantly self-conscious. His nickname, "Bromley", is certainly defining for him. With affection but certainly not without mockery, the name, given to him by other LGSM members, refers to the neighbourhood he lives in, which bears the same name. Bromley is a mostly suburban, markedly middle-class, predominantly conservative neighbourhood, which the members of LGSM, who are openly queer and from central London, find particularly funny. Thus, Bromley is anxiously on the cusp: on the cusp of sexuality as he has not come out of the closet with his very conservative, grey family, and on the cusp of class as an inbetweener, not belonging in the working class but also not entirely middle-class. His accent, further education as a chef, and strictly non-queer suburban family home, markers of the lower-middle class, at first mark him as an outsider in LGSM. At the same time, he is also an outsider in his own home and neighbourhood as a (closeted) gay man, which further accentuates his being constantly on the cusp. However, the film depicts his growth and development: from being closeted and extremely self-contained to being a happy, openly gay activist who rebelliously comes out in front of his family during a Christening celebration, a distinctly bourgeois, heterosexual event.

Accordingly, considering the development and the importance given to Joe's story, it is fair to say that *Pride* is led by him rather than Mark, who is certainly overpowered by Joe as a protagonist. Not without significance, this is rooted in a deeply

homonormative framework: the young communist, although gay, is overlooked in order to put the middle-class coming-out story in the spotlight.

Hence, it is clear that both films explore a main character's narrative of personal success, even though *Pride* does so less explicitly. In both cases these are individuals in conflict with their surroundings: Billy's family cannot accept his passion for dancing for its gendered connotation while Joe's rejects his homosexuality. In the case of *Billy Elliot*, the protagonist is from the working class while *Pride*'s is middle-class. Therefore, as they are political subjects in different ways, they represent a rather complex situation when it comes to the intersection of oppressions. Billy struggles economically but is not thought of as homosexual even if he suffers homophobic prejudices, while Joe is relatively economically privileged but a clear target of homophobia.

2.2. Straight men and homophobia: the working-class as inherently heterosexual

In this section I am going to explore straight men in *Billy Elliot* and *Pride*. Given that they are the ones to exert the most homophobic violence, they will be analysed in relation to it.

Jacky, Billy's father, exhibits a masculinity crisis rooted in two factors: the death of her wife and the socioeconomic effects of neoliberal capitalism. As his wife, mother of his two sons, dies, he is left with the "wife burden", the one that wives often carry: bringing up children, doing household chores and emotional labour, among others. The absence of the mother figure, in this case, in a traditional heterosexual marriage with two sons, translates into a decadent, dysfunctional family situation. Additionally, Jacky's masculinity crisis is heightened by the strike, which rids him of his traditionally "masculine" occupation, which, in turn, constitutes a great part of his identity not only a miner but also as a man. Because of that, he and the family he is supporting (his sons and

elderly mother), have to endure a very precarious economic situation, which furthers the father's aggressivity and anger outbursts. The piano is a great symbol of this decay: Jacky begrudges it as it reminds him of his loss. Moreover, the pain in relation to it increases as it becomes a commodity by destroying it and using the wood to light the fire. Therefore, an object which used to produce music, becomes strictly functional. As art needs to be substituted by necessity according to Jacky, embracing only what he deems to be masculine and pragmatic, he rejects the idea that his son practices ballet instead of boxing, which is also clearly rooted in classed gender expectations and policing.

He embodies the archetypal Northern English working-class man, with a masculinity that resembles hegemony within his community but is actually marginalized outside of it as a classed subject. Jacky's masculinity is complex and fluid as he reproduces strict gender roles and expectations, performing gender in a very hegemonic way: he is heterosexual, homophobic, white, aggressive, tough, drinks beer, does not address feelings and rejects what he deems to be "non-masculine", or "for poofs": "for your nana it's normal. For girls, not for lads, Billy. Lads do football or boxing or wrestling, not frigging ballet" (*Billy Elliot*). Nevertheless, his masculinity is certainly marginalized, as its classed nature marks it with stigma. An instance of this is Mrs Wilkinson's certainly stigmatizing comment on working-class men such as Billy's father: "He won't grow up to race whippets, or grow leeks, or piss his wages up the wall" (*Billy Elliot*). With her remark, the teacher, a bourgeois woman, clearly points out how men like Jacky are perceived by the middle/upper-class: as futile, disgusting, stupid beings who only serve a purpose, to work in order to earn a living so that they can maintain their unremarkable existence.

Tony's masculinity is similar to his father's in its gendered rigidity, that is, although he is more passionate and radical, his is also marginalized, despite exhibiting

male dominant features. Differently, Mr Wilkinson, the ballet teacher's husband, represents a complicit bourgeois masculinity. He is stuck up, undermining miners and their struggle: "just a few bloody commies stirring things up", "if it was up to me, I'd shut the lot of 'em (the pits) down tomorrow" (*Billy Elliot*). Yet, at the same time, he has been made redundant, drinks too much, does not have a satisfactory sex life and is deeply unhappy. This is the perfect picture of the middle-class dissatisfied man who defends conservative values. These neoliberal values are voiced through him when he claims: "if it costs more for you to pay everybody to dig the coal out than you get for the coal when you sell it, what does that tell you?" (Alderson, 2011: 5). Thus, while he cannot fulfil the ideal of the hegemonic masculinity, his is a complicit one, as he benefits from his privileges as a middle-class, white, heterosexual man by, in turn, oppressing others who are less privileged than him.

Homophobia in *Pride* and *Billy Elliot* is tightly related to parenthood and the transfer of (male) values in families. If in *Pride* Maureen uses masculinity to foster and justify her and their sons' homophobia: "your father would never have stood for it" (*Pride*) (referring to having queer people supporting the miners), in *Billy Elliot* it is also his father who, although alive, represses the protagonist's passion because of his homophobia. Nevertheless, it is the legacy of Billy's grandmother, who also did ballet, as well as his mother's, who enjoyed art, that enable him to escape the rigid gender roles that restrain him and pursue ballet.

In accordance with *Billy Elliot*, homophobia in *Pride* focuses especially on miners, notably Maureen's two sons. These men embody marginalized masculinities as striking working-class men. Therefore, they portray a complex network of oppressions: they are victims and perpetrators at the same time. Having been wounded, as Tony and Jacky have, by the State and the capitalistic system to which they are victims, they use

violence towards the LGBT community in order to assert their masculine power whereas they are powerless in other circumstances. The violence they exert, which is directed towards gay men, as they completely ignore lesbians, includes intimidation and a frequent use of homophobic slurs “bent bastards!” (*Pride*).

The miners’ masculinity in both films is portrayed through a set of elements and behaviours that represent stereotypical working-class masculinity: drinking beer, playing card games, not wearing colourful clothes, and a fear of engaging with gay men: “I might, you know, give them the wrong impression” (*Pride*). Nevertheless, a very powerful and representative image when it comes to masculinity takes place in *Pride*: a miner’s peace-making with Mark when he has proved to be devoted to their cause: “you’ll have a pint, will you Mark?” (*Pride*), followed by a handshake. This, along with Jonathan’s teaching how to dance to some miners, represents a conciliation of the two masculinities: subordinated and marginalized get closer, which leads to an increasingly tolerant community when it comes to queerness.

Completely different is the case of the *Pride* real-life-based character Dai Donovan, the Men’s Union spokesperson, who represents a new kind of masculinity. In spite of being a decent, respectable man who fulfils the ideal of masculinity in his context, he represents a marginalized masculinity because of his class. However, his masculinity is rather different from Tony’s or Jacky’s. Not only is he tolerant towards the gays and the lesbians but he is also openly accepting and supportive of them from the first moment despite being unfamiliar with gay culture. Thus, he is open to learning and does not feel his masculinity threatened by interacting with non-heterosexual people. Interestingly, despite his progressiveness, he is held in high esteem by his community, which is initially not very convinced about accepting LGSM’s help.

Thus, the portrayal of masculinities in the films present some differences. *Pride*'s is heavily polarized, while the film focuses on healthier masculinities through characters such as Dai, for whom there is no homologue in *Billy Elliot*, homophobic masculinities are more extremely and openly violent towards queer people. In that manner, the homophobes' acts in *Pride* resemble those of an organized crime band: they plot revenge, they plan violence in advance, sabotage the victims, etc. Conversely, it seems that in *Billy Elliot* homophobia is more quotidian, not very thought of but rather a cultural product, a lack of critical thinking. Thus, homophobia in *Pride* is presented as an inherent feature of "the villains" as the distance employed to present those who are explicitly homophobic increases the polarization between characters, leading to the idea that characters either are homophobic or aren't, which is overly simplistic. Meanwhile, *Billy Elliot* makes a more realistic portrayal of homophobic men, who are more complex characters that evolve throughout the film and whose lives are explored in more depth than the ones in *Pride*. Still, even though Joe's middle-class family in *Pride* is definitely homophobic, both films focus on working-class men as key perpetrators of homophobic violence, which is, in the end, reductionist and classist.

2.3. Queerness and sexuality

Needless to say, queerness is a central topic in *Billy Elliot* and *Pride*. The latter puts a whole queer community on the spotlight, while the former treats queerness in a subterranean, almost ghostly way, as it features only one explicitly queer character.

The only character whose queerness is confirmed in *Billy Elliot* is Michael, Billy's friend, who serves not only as a "representation token" in the film, but also as Billy's mirror. He is effeminate, gay, and gender-dissident as he cross-dresses, which makes for the stereotypical "sissy" boy. Therefore, a parallel is easily drawn between Michael and

Billy, who, despite being presented as “asexual”, is emphasized as a “straight boy who happens to like ballet”. Along these lines, Alderson claimed that “Billy’s narrative subsumes Michael’s, which is both subordinate to and traces that of Billy through to its terminus in London. In other words, Billy’s relationship to Michael is a token of his representativeness” (2011: 14).

This way, the film has been devised to be more digestible for bourgeois, heterosexual audiences while establishing itself as a symbol within the LGBT+ community, attracting thus all kinds of audiences. Billy’s sexuality remains a mystery but, however unclear that is, in a heteronormative society that places heterosexuality as the default, Billy is mostly read as straight. This dual opposition between the characters is really useful to the likability of Billy and the overall film. Even though he likes ballet, which is “for poofs”, he may be read as masculine and straight, in opposition to Michael, who would possibly be found to be too excessively queer to be the main character because of his confirmed dissident sexuality and gender expression. Consequently, Michael’s masculinity is subordinate as well as marginalized as he is not only subject to other men’s hegemony as a queer person but is also marginalized as part of the working class. Sinfield argues that “Billy may be inoculated by the fully-blown transvestism of his best friend, Michael.” (2006: 167) After that, he explains the term inoculation by Harry Benshoff, “the manifest queer masks or exonerates the others – you don’t expect to get two in one narrative” (Benshoff 1997: 188, as cited in Sinfield, 2006: 167).

This way, it is not Billy but Michael who ever gets to wear a tutu, a femininely gendered garment, which is an instance of him being marked as “the gay one”. In comparison to Billy’s athletic and energetic nature, he remains the “gay best friend”, which allows for gay representation to exist within the film, but not enough to place overt sexual dissidence at the front by having Michael as the main character. Therefore, Billy

is queer coded so that different audiences, LGBT+ or not, are attracted towards him. If he is read as straight, the film reinforces the idea that enjoying ballet is not intrinsically for gay men, but instead, that boys like Billy, strong, athletic, and stereotypically masculine, also do it. That implies that ballet is only acceptable if it doesn't threaten the masculinity of the male dancer, which entails a disdain of the feminine. Differently, if he is read as queer, the film serves as food for the LGBT+ community, which, at the time, were considerably starving for representation. Despite not fulfilling what his community expected from him (initially), it is clear that Billy's gender performance, as well as his sexuality, is not a threat to the patriarchal, homophobic, capitalistic establishment. However, Billy is presented as a radically rebellious character, which, while playing it safe by not disclosing his sexuality and not being "too much of a sissy", makes him especially likeable and endearing to the audience.

In regard to *Pride*, Jonathan Blake, who embodies a real-life LGSM activist, is a central character when it comes to discussing queerness in the film. He represents the figure of "the flamboyant one", as he is called at one point during the film, but unlike other characters such as Bromley, his unapologetic nature stands out. He's unapologetic about his sexuality and "femme" gender expression as opposite to Joe, who is rather anxious and socially awkward.

Concurrently, in *Billy Elliot*, despite the short screen time the adult version of Michael gets at the end of the film, it seems like he has become as confident and unapologetic as Jonathan, as he is completely comfortable with Jacky and Tony's presence, whose homophobia he remembers from childhood. Similarly, in *Pride*, when the LGSM initially arrive in South Wales Jonathan does not seem to feel threatened by the potentially conservative values the community might have, but rather, he seems to be bored. This defiant attitude may be rooted in Jonathan's class background, him being

decidedly middle-class, as can be appreciated through his references to theatre and literature, accent, and manners. Thus, his masculinity is definitely subordinate as a gay man but not marginalized as he is socioeconomically privileged.

On another note, Bromley's is not the only coming out story *Pride* offers its public as Cliff, an older trade union gentleman in *Pride*, confesses at the end of the film he is gay to Hefina. Throughout the story, he is presented as a shy, withdrawn, marginalized masculinity, a working-class man who, at the same time, does not behave like some of his other male counterparts do. This means his masculinity is closer to Dai's than to the beer-drinking miners. His reserved nature is probably linked to his repressed homosexuality, which draws a clear parallel between him and Bromley, being the latter his young, urban, middle-class counterpart. Again, like Bromley, he comes out as a result of the development of a supportive queer community that surrounds and embraces him.

Thus, the films' treatment of queerness present similarities as well as differences. It is evident that *Pride* discusses sexuality more openly, note the LGSM's van name "Out and Loud", while shame and indirectness seem to surround *Billy Elliot*. Further, *Pride* exhibits a celebration of gay culture inexistent in *Billy Elliot* as it features dildos, gay clubs and constant jokes on vegetarian lesbians, among others. Still, this celebration also plays into reductionist stereotypes about the queer community. A common feature in both films is dancing, linked to queerness and used as a symbol of acceptance. On the one hand, *Billy Elliot* revolves around Billy's passion for dancing, which marks the external perception of him as inherently queer. On the other, Jonathan enlivens the welfare hall in Onllwyn by dancing with the women and teaching some men to dance to the rhythm of pop 80s music. Finally, Billy is accepted through his realization of dance as well as Jonathan, whose dance moves impress the mining community, even those who were initially hesitant about accepting gays and lesbians.

2.4. Neoliberalism

Alderson claimed, “If this film does not directly endorse New Labour, it certainly draws on the narratives New Labour has told about itself and the values it has sought to promote, and it also suppresses the same alternative histories and inconvenient truths.” (2011: 20). Even though the author refers to *Billy Elliot*, this statement is also accurate for *Pride* due to its deeply neoliberal undertones, which will be the topic discussed in this section.

Neoliberalism in *Billy Elliot* is expressed through various elements. Firstly, it is so through the narrative of social mobility and individual success that it features: Billy’s story focuses on his own personal journey towards a success that far oversteps his community. Thus, the film revolves around the protagonist’s escape from his own class, which rids belonging to the working class of any pride or sense of community as it is perceived as something one must escape. Therefore, while the miners go back to work as the strike has reached its doomed end, Billy starts his prestigious career in London (Sinfield, 2006: 169), which emphasizes the personal over the collective. Hence, Alderson asserts that

Billy’s success constitutes a kind of revenge on that remark, a proof that, though the strike is doomed, working-class people can triumph — or, rather, that a talented individual can do so, since the irony is that that triumph is on the terms of an emergent system the miners were struggling against (2011: 16).

Another instance of the insistent presence of neoliberalism in the film is Jacky’s progress. Despite his former constant assaulting on Billy due to his highly rigid vision of gender, he undergoes a process of change in relation to his masculinity as he becomes accepting, even proud of his son, regardless of the gendered implications ballet may have for him. Schreiber claims Jacky distances itself “from a concept of northern English working class masculinity based on tradition and stereotype towards a more open and flexible perception of themselves and their altered surroundings” (2007: 81).

Nevertheless, this view seems to ignore the intricacies of class, reducing working-class men to animalistic subjects that should be somehow “refined”. Moreover, it is only fair to be suspicious about Jacky’s development: is it based on true acceptance, or is it subject to Billy’s success as a dancer? Acceptance may be thus subordinated to personal mobility, that is, his alienated happiness might be dependent on his son’s escape from the working class. Hence, he is only able to overcome his wounded masculinity through the neoliberal fantasy, his son’s success despite collective failure.

Yet, the individual success narrative is not restricted to *Billy Elliot*. On *Pride*, Mowlabocus asserted that “while the film celebrates the politics of solidarity within the specific context of the miners’ strike, the narrative works to contain this approach to social justice by foregrounding the story of suburban Joe and his personal journey.” (2019: 20). The choices the film makes are not coincidental: the exclusion and inclusion of narratives respond to particular reasons, and in the case of *Pride*, they respond to a rather neoliberal background. While the film focuses on individual success stories, it neglects and discards Mark Ashton’s political involvement outside queer activism, avoiding his Communist activism and affiliation, which are hardly mentioned.

Joe’s narrative draws on the rather neoliberal and homonormative story of the middle-class gay man who breaks free from his home by coming out to his also middle-class homophobic parents. Thus, this is the leading line of the film: the strike fails, but at least Joe has developed individually. This is clearly exemplified at the end of the film, when in his twenty-first birthday, he tells his LGSM friends: “Just for future reference – my name is Joe” (*Pride*). This represents an assertion of his individuality in front of the group, his personal journey is completed.

However, this is not the only neoliberal fantasy narrative in the film: Siân, as Billy does, escapes her class by becoming the first woman MP in Swansea. Although this is a

real-life fact about Siân James, it is the treatment of her career-to-be that is significant. In a conversation she has with Jonathan, she tells him her life “goes back to normal now” (*Pride*), to which he answers “well you shouldn’t, you have a first-class mind, you should do something. Go to college, don’t waste it, Siân” (*Pride*). This is greatly representative of the politics of the film as it differentiates Siân from the other members of the mining community, she is going to “do something”, otherwise she would be wasting her life. Further, it is not a coincidence that this meritocratic, individualistic view of success comes from Jonathan, a middle-class man. Along these lines, Mowlabocus adds, regarding the announcement that Siân came to be a Swansea MP, that “its appearance at the end of the film is also deeply ironic given that Britain’s engagement with neoliberal individualism can be tied to the very same government the film sets up as its unseen antagonist” (2019: 21).

Thus, as it is individual success, as seen in *Billy Elliot*, that is prioritized in the end, it is only fair to say that homonormativity is at the very core of the films. That is, despite the central event the film concerns, the miners’ strike, fails, there is a happy ending, which contrasts with the real story. Consequently, the defeat of the miners is significantly buried in order to celebrate an eventually plastic solidarity, as it is individual social, economic and geographic mobility that prevails, which results in “an enjoyable and uplifting story about the politics of solidarity, without that history raising uncomfortable questions about the path that lesbian and gay politics in Britain subsequently adopted” (Mowlabocus, 2019: 3).

The end of *Pride* is crucial as there is an explicit reference to the depolitization of LGBT mobilizations in the context of the 1985 London Pride march: “There was a general feeling [...] amongst the committee, that people have become tired of politics and that this year the tone should be celebratory, with affirmative slogans and a positive

atmosphere” (*Pride*). While there’s a dispute between a pride organizer and Mark, who disagrees on not being allowed to march with LGSM banners at the front, the argument ends with the former saying “congratulations, but it’s time for a party” (*Pride*), implying that pride revindications now revolve around having a good time instead of politics. In addition, Joe asserts “whether or not we march with banners or without, the important thing is that we march together” (*Pride*), which is greatly representative of how LGBT activism in the film has become almost symbolical. Although the depolitization of LGBT revindication as a result of the instauration of homonormativity is presented as an existing fact, it is not deemed to be exceedingly problematic, not even a serious issue, by not openly condemning it. Again, as *Billy Elliot* does, the film intends to be politically ambiguous in order to avoid risks and remain within the mainstream, which is ultimately deeply neoliberal.

Finally, it is clear that both films draw on Britain’s nostalgia of the working class, playing on sentimentality. They do so through feel-good stories which are, in the end, at the expense of the miners’ failed cause, which is relegated to a second plane in their individualism-embracing happy endings.

2.5. Space and migration: queerness, the urban and the rural/industrial

Eribon wrote about the “flight to the city” by queer people, rooted in the threat, violence, and stigmatisation suffered by them in small towns (2004). This way, LGBT people seek the city in order to find a more welcoming place to live, in which they can find queer communities and live more freely. This phenomenon is accurately represented in *Billy Elliot* and *Pride*, in which space and migration are key. Therefore, these films present a clear dichotomy between the urban and the rural/industrial, which will be explored in this section.

The rural/urban dichotomy in *Billy Elliot* revolves around London and Everington. These spaces are presented within a binary opposition: the former is related to sophistication, the bourgeois, aesthetics, status, and RP/southern accents, while the latter is associated to industry, mines, police brutality, the working class, decadence, poverty, and northern accents. Billy, Michael and his father are shown to be rather clueless and inexperienced in regard to the city, as Billy asks “What’s it like? London”, to which Jacky answers “I don’t know son, I never made it past Durham” (*Billy Elliot*). People like Jacky and Tony, working-class men who live in industrial England, are shown to be misfits in the city, unaccustomed to the city ways, as shown at the end of the film through their struggle with navigating the London tube. At the same time, film seems to communicate that art and gender / sexual dissidence cannot exist within rural, industrial, working-class environments, that people like Michael and Billy can only thrive in the city, London. However, an illusion of the opposite idea is found in the beautiful scene where Mrs Wilkinson explains the story of the *Swan Lake* to Billy. As Tchaikovsky’s Swan theme plays, the docker landscape seems to dance to the rhythm of the music, as different elements in the industrial setting move. Nevertheless, Michael’s question to Billy “Can’t you be a dancer here?” (*Billy Elliot*) is eventually answered by the film itself: art and gender / sexual dissidents belong in the city, where they can fully develop (of course, within a homonormative framework). In fact, the second and final time when the aforementioned theme is played is at the end of the film, when Billy is shown performing the lead in a contemporary version of *Swan Lake* in a prestigious London West End theatre. The question is also answered by Mrs Wilkinson, who says to Billy “This is when you go and find life and all those other things” (*Billy Elliot*). This is also the case for Michael, who emigrates to the city, where the anonymity it guarantees allows him to

express himself with his gender-non-conforming presentation and dissident sexuality, an accurate example of queer urban exile.

The spatial dichotomy in *Pride* revolves around London and the Dulais Valley, yet, unlike *Billy Elliot*, this film presents an increased mobility between the two opposites. These movements are of a classed nature: while the LGSM members are able to move freely, the mining community remain in the Dulais Valley for most of the film (Mowlabocus, 2019). *Billy Elliot*'s exploration of London is far more superficial (few scenes take place there) than *Pride*'s, which, in addition, presents the city as a non-uniform space, as the district of Bromley, where Joe lives until the end of the film, is differentiated from Central London. While Bromley is depicted as a classed, non-queer suburban space with its typically associated blandness, middle-class heterosexual family environment. Differently, the LGBT community revolves around Central London, which is represented as diverse and colourful, overall an epicentre of gay culture, with gay businesses such as gay bars or the bookshop. Moreover, sex is openly talked about in Central London, even sex toys and porn are featured when the Women's Group visits the city. During their visit, they are euphoric as London presents before them as an exotic party: "we want to see everything!" (*Pride*), there is even a sapphic kiss between Gale, who has a husband back in Onllwyn and Steph, a member of LGSM. Regardless of this, Central London is not all freedom, still homophobic violence occurs as a graffiti that reads "queers" appears in the bookshop and street violence is frequent, whether verbal or physical. Clear instances of this are Gethin's assault and a skinhead's spitting on some members of LGSM while they ask for donations in the street.

Conflictingly, the Dulais Valley, home to the mining community, is represented as a classed, apparently non-queer space which clearly resembles Everington. It is gray, poor, defined by police brutality, and untouched by urban trends and fashion.

Nevertheless, the film features two queer characters belonging to the rural sphere: Cliff and Gethin. Gethin Roberts, who is Jonathan's partner, is key for an analysis of space in *Pride*. A Welshman living in London, he corresponds to a LGSM real-life activist. He embodies a subordinated, marginalized masculinity, heavily marked by homophobic family trauma as well as a displacement conflict. Belonging to the rural working-class, he had to leave Wales and emigrate to London because of his family's rejection of his homosexuality, which left a deep wound regarding his homeland. Through LGSM he reunites with his mother, who finally accepts him, which brings about his healing: "I'm in Wales and I don't have to pretend to be something that I'm not! I'm home! I'm gay and I'm Welsh!" (*Pride*). In a different manner, Cliff, who has not left Wales, comes out upon contact with the urban lifestyle of LGSM.

The boundaries between these two spaces are blurred (Haslop, 2018: 309) as a result of the LGSM support campaign, which generates a mingling and an exchange between the two communities. Firstly, the music in the Onllwyn welfare hall when LGSM arrive is initially folk, but evolves into "Chameleon" by Karma, pop music. Further, Jonathan leads the dancing scene in the hall in which he enlivens the room by dancing. This can be interpreted as a queering of the mining community, in which men do not dance, just like in *Billy Elliot*. Thus, dancing may be interpreted as a symbol of acceptance. Despite that, the community's essence is definitely not lost, as can be seen when the miners and their wives sing the traditional song "Bread and Roses", which deeply moves the LGSM members.

All in all, it is clear that while spatial differences are irreconcilable in *Billy Elliot* as the urban and the rural are presented as two static, unchanging entities, *Pride* challenges this very immobility, blurring the lines of queerness in rural and urban spaces. In the end, however, both films provide an image of the rural/industrial that is tightly

linked to the past. They seem to imply that the future is found in the urban areas, as the action finally abandons the rural space with the defeat of the miners: Billy emigrates to London, where he performs, and the LGSM go back to London, where the pride march is celebrated, even though the miners support them by attending.

3. Conclusion

The analysis conducted demonstrates several resemblances between *Billy Elliot* and *Pride* when it comes to their individualistic approach, which clearly alludes to a neoliberal framework. Nonetheless, the films also present clear-cut differences when it comes to their treatment of masculinities, sexuality, and class.

The issue of protagonists in both films is certainly significant. While *Billy Elliot* explicitly focuses on Billy's journey, *Pride* seems to revolve around the collective and power struggle. However, this is only true on the surface, as demonstrated by the clear dispute between Joe and Mark Ashton as protagonists. In the end, Joe, who is middle-class, is the one favoured by the film, dismissing Mark Ashton, who embodies the revolutionary working class, and his communist activism. Further, Siân and Joe's personal success stories resemble that of Billy, which highlight the films' individualistic undertones. In the case of *Billy Elliot*, the film revolves around the protagonist's professional and social mobility narrative while the miners' strike is not only secondary but also an obstacle for his success. These narratives ultimately overpower that of the collective fight against the establishment as the happy endings of both disregard the importance of it. Consequently, the films have clearly neoliberal undertones through their social mobility narratives. Therefore, homonormativity is central in the analysis of both films because, even though they seem to tackle LGBT issues, they definitely do not

contest hegemonic power when it comes to class, their tone being clearly celebratory and nostalgic.

Regarding masculinity and sexuality, the films present some key differences. Billy is a remarkably ambiguous character when it comes to gender and sexuality. This ambiguity is, for a fact, not coincidental given that the film profits from it. While he can be considered as dissident in terms of gender for pursuing ballet, his masculinity is carefully crafted in order to be likeable: perceived as heterosexual and fairly “masculine”. Conversely, Michael, represents the “token gay”, a character that operates for the sake of representativity as well as Billy’s mirror in order to differentiate the two boys in terms of sexuality, making Billy appear increasingly heterosexual. Sexuality and gay culture are discussed openly in *Pride*, while *Billy Elliot* seems to tackle the topic but, in the end, altogether avoids it. This makes for a rather conservative portrayal of sexuality, created in order to appeal to a broader audience.

Jacky and Tony in *Billy Elliot* and the homophobic miners in *Pride* represent a shared masculinity crisis, rooted, in part, in being victims of the capitalistic, neoliberal system. Although their masculinities are not hegemonic as they are marginalized because of their class, they embody homophobic, highly traditional and bounded visions of masculinity, tightly linked to violence, especially homophobia, and also triggered by their socioeconomic situation. However, their portrayal in the film is fairly stereotypical, homophobia in both films focusing on working-class men as perpetrators.

When it comes to masculinity models, *Pride* presents a more optimistic view of heterosexual working-class men and masculinities through characters such as Dai, who embodies a secure and healthy marginalized masculinity. Nevertheless, there is a great polarization among characters in this film, in which those who are homophobic are, at the same time, flatly represented villains. Further, homophobia is overly simplified,

characters are either decidedly homophobic or not, which is rather reductionistic. Differently, *Billy Elliot*'s treatment of homophobia is more realistic and complex, featuring Jacky and Tony, round characters with homophobic attitudes whose personalities are relatively deeply explored.

Concerning space, both films present the rural / industrial and the urban as a dichotomy with shared features that relate to class and sexuality: the former is linked to poverty, lack of future, and heterosexuality, while the latter relates to the bourgeois, the future, and LGBT culture. The films represent queer exile, although *Pride* addresses this explicitly through Gethin (from rural to urban) and Joe (from suburban to urban). In *Billy Elliot*, queer exile is portrayed through Michael and Billy. However, Billy's migration remains ambiguous, just like everything concerning him: it is not known whether or not Billy is queer, but he is performing gender in a dissident way through his dancing, which fosters his leaving his hometown. Moreover, ballet being a traditionally bourgeois activity, the film hints at its inability to thrive in a working-class, rural environment. Thus, while *Pride* seems to blur out the boundaries of space, in the end, London still is in the foreground. Conversely, *Billy Elliot* makes it clear that the rural/urban differences remain insurmountable.

All in all, *Pride* and *Billy Elliot* are undoubtedly representative of a neoliberal, homonormative framework. While the former exoticizes gay culture, the latter avoids it. Both generally reductionist and simplistic in their representations of working-class men, they embody a film genre that intends to represent social action from a rather ideologically equidistant but, at the same time, nostalgic perspective in order for it to still be digestible to the general audience, without contesting hegemonic values.

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