

| Pride is Dead, Long Live Pride: A Study of the Commodification of Identity Politics Through an Analysis of Matthew Warchus' *Pride* (2014)

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Keywords: Identity Politics, class politics, left-wing melancholia, neoliberal capitalism, commodification

Mots-clés: Politique identitaire, politique de classes, mélancolie de gauche, capitalisme néolibéral, marchandisation

The transformation of pride from being a quality of economically disadvantaged groups that sought acceptable living standards to individuals engaging with a commodified ideal that rests upon celebrating uniqueness has created another element to be negotiated in the world marketplace, separating the haves from the have-nots. While certain forms of marginalization benefit the middle-classes who strive for recognition in an increasingly anonymous world, such diverse and beautiful colours do little to clothe and feed the multitudes that remain below poverty levels worldwide. Matthew Warchus's *Pride* (2014) tells the story of the mining and the LGBTQI+ communities' political support for each other during Margaret Thatcher's government, highlighting what was perhaps the last period in which such a coalition between two now distinct political groups was possible. The subsequent disintegration of class politics as the central focus of the political left, replaced by a new emphasis on identity politics, created an atmosphere where some previously marginalized groups became integrated into mainstream culture; therefore, the neoliberal capitalist system dismantled communal action through division that privileged distinct non-class-based identities as new commodities for exchange – eliminating the possibility of unity between those groups marginalized on the basis of race, gender, sexual orientation, among others and those structurally subordinated due to class. Warchus' *Pride* provides one alternative that may since have been lost. Still, if the political left is to regain its ability to prioritize equality, it must relinquish its bonds to the commodification that has begun to pervade its socio-political agenda.

La transformation de la fierté comme qualité des groupes économiquement défavorisés qui recherchaient des conditions de vie acceptables à un idéal marchandisé

reposant sur la célébration de l'unicité a encore une fois créé un élément à négocier dans le marché mondial qui sépare les nanti.e.s des démunie.s. Alors que certaines formes de marginalisation sont à l'avantage de la classe moyenne qui cherche à se faire reconnaître dans un monde qui est de plus en plus anonyme, des couleurs aussi riches et diverses sont peu utiles pour habiller et nourrir la population qui se trouve encore sous le seuil de pauvreté. Le film de Matthew Warchus, *Pride* (2014), raconte l'histoire du soutien politique mutuel entre la communauté LGBTQI+ et la communauté minière lors de l'époque de l'administration de Margaret Thatcher. Le film souligne ce qui est peut-être une des dernières périodes où une telle coalition entre deux groupes politiques aussi distincts aurait pu être possible. Suite à la désintégration de la politique des classes comme point focal de la gauche politique, la politique identitaire a pris sa place, ce qui a généré une atmosphère dans laquelle certains groupes – autrefois marginalisés – se sont intégrés dans la culture dominante. Par conséquent, le système capitaliste néolibéral a démonté l'action communautaire en employant la division privilégiant des identités distinctes qui ne sont pas fondées dans la classe. Ces identités sont aussi de nouvelles marchandises à échanger, éliminant la possibilité d'unir les groupes marginalisés à cause de leur race, leur genre, leur orientation sexuelle, entre autres raisons, ainsi que ceux et celles qui sont structurellement subordonné.e.s à cause de leur classe. Le film *Pride* de Warchus parle d'une possibilité qui est peut-être perdue à jamais depuis. Néanmoins, si la gauche politique veut retrouver sa capacité de donner la priorité à l'égalité, il faut qu'elle abandonne la marchandisation qui a déjà commencé à imprégner son programme sociopolitique.

Introduction

We are no longer spectators, we are 'embarked' [...] and can neither escape nor contemplate from a distant, secure observatory, the calamities that surround us; we belong to and participate in them.

- Enzo Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History and Memory*

The definition of the term 'pride' proves to be as diverse as the issues concerning it. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary's description, 'pride' can point to "a feeling that you respect yourself and deserve to be respected by other people" or "a feeling that you are more important or better than other people," and finally, "a feeling of happiness that you get when you or someone you know does something good, difficult, etc." (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). These various definitions of the word have in common the term 'feeling' as a prerequisite to meaning that places emphasis on the nature of pride as the experience of a subject. Simultaneously, they highlight the distinction (and, perhaps, thin line) between the assertion of one's worth and the recognition of others.

Contemporaneously, 'pride' has expanded to include another dimension to its usage as the symbol of freedom and celebration of diversity found in the establishment of annual Pride Parades that began to be organized in the wake of the Stonewall riots of 1969 (Britannica, n.d.). This political movement forms the basis of Matthew Warchus's film *Pride* (2014), which explores the events that brought together a Welsh mining community and London gays/lesbians in the 1980s. The film forms the basis of my examination of how class politics have come into conflict with identity politics in the left-wing political sphere. While both areas have been associated with seeking equity and justice, their foundational premises prove reconcilable unless we broaden the meaning of identity in our society.

Building on examples from *Pride's* diegesis, I examine the issues of class and identity as they intersect to better understand the basis of current political movements of the left-wing party. Focusing on political developments in the last decades of the 20th century from a theoretical perspective, I then expand on the shift towards identity politics and the decrease of socialist ideology by exploring the literature on left-wing melancholia. My examination also observes the different forms of political struggle that are required by the miners versus the LGBTQI+ community through the lenses of "redistribution" and "recognition," respectively. In the last section, I use the theories of Jonathan Crary (2014) and Guy Debord (1970) to probe the role that neoliberalist capitalism has played in identity politics, the fashioning of identity as a new commodity, and the resulting undermining of the possibility of revolutionary political action.

Pride & value structures in the modern left

Eliminating class differences has become a problematic goal in 21st century neoliberal capitalism in view of the left's growing emphasis on identity politics. Social perceptions have begun to turn away from a definition of self-respect as stemming from underprivileged groups who find their worth in spite of class-based discrimination. Instead, self-respect becomes connected to a positive affirmation of marginalized identities that demand broader social recognition. However, these groups have already often been accepted into the middle-class on an economic level. This latter form of pride is concerning as it ultimately rests upon a process of self-commodification by basing its value on valorizing individual differences. As a result, persons are invited to market that difference in the realm of social exchange, partaking in - rather than challenging - the current neoliberal system.

In contemporary identity politics, even though marginalized identities have played a critical part in previous struggles against economic disparities, they have since become integrated into the mainstream. The shift in the meaning of 'pride in one's identity' from a unitary expression to a separatist one (in terms of both persons and collectives) is only one factor that signifies the intensity of current individualism and complicates the creation of an

equal post-capitalist society. Consequently, these developments interfere with the possibilities of finding common ground between traditionally discriminated groups (based on race, gender, sexuality, etc.) and class-based struggles. The left-wing – historically a predominantly class-conscious party – has begun to increasingly change its focus to these issues of recognition. Currently, the left-wing’s politics being “defined less by economic or ideological concerns than by questions of identity” seems to play into a broader theme of “lost socialism [being] replaced by accepted capitalism” instead of providing counter-hegemonic ideals with the potential of changing the very foundations that have led to class (and other) discriminatory practices (Fukuyama 2018; Traverso 2019, 15; Taylor 2016, 206); Hence these developments require a re-evaluation of the profound implications that focusing on identity as separate from class may entail and whether such a disjuncture is reasonable.

I propose that the two value structures – one based primarily on addressing class inequality and the other focusing on affirming identities – are in their current state incompatible. The discussions surrounding identity often neglect to view these issues from the perspective of not only a capitalist but consumerist society; However, the two value structures appear to be intimately linked. The idea of solidarity needed for embracing class equality finds itself directly opposed to the individualist and consumerist ideologies that fuel current identity struggles. Whereas forming coalitions is possible when the central purpose is achieving equality, solidarity is antagonistic to a culture that is founded on a constant desire to outpace others for one’s own benefit. An examination that not only focuses on one of these elements but on the complex interactions between class, identity, and commodification is essential to shedding further light on this problem.

The performance of identities is increasingly becoming the source of meaning and social power (Fisher 2013; Lilla 2016). As a result, striving for a state that benefits the entire community and is founded on eliminating differences is increasingly obsolete. The question remains open on whether today’s identity groups can still feel a kinship with class-based identities that aim for integration. However, it becomes clear that when seeking to find incentives for populations to pursue greater class equality, current movements will have to center their efforts on combating the commodification of culture. Without such an understanding, searching for answers in coalitions where interest groups may have foundationally dissimilar stakes may be innately futile.

An ideal comradeship in disarray

Warchus’ *Pride*, released in 2014, traverses London’s gay and lesbian urban spaces, as it follows the historical events that resulted in the LGBTQI+ collective’s support of the initially rigid and traditional community of Welsh coal miners who were striking under Thatcher’s conservative government. While LGBTQI+ culture remains at the center of many identity

debates today, the film presents the community at a very different historical point. *Pride* centers predominantly on the historical figure of Mark Ashton, a gay man and a member of the Communist Party, who initiates the LGBTQI+'s support of the miners. The second protagonist is Joe 'Bromley' Cooper, a young man from the suburbs who has still not come out to his parents. He serves as the film's essential link, oscillating between his gay identity and his middle-class suburban background. Similarly, a coal miner named Cliff is presented as a typical member of his community, but one who later reveals that he is gay. The film is created to represent the 1980s era, but it simultaneously acts as a reflection of the changes that have occurred between the time of the narrative events and the production of the film; Thus, *Pride* is a useful audio-visual text for helping understand the shifts in critical components of the various identities on and off-screen. By adding characterizations of people who come from varied intersections of identity, *Pride* adds a sense of hope and leverage to the possibility of finding common ground across unrelated marginalized populations. Anthony Appiah notes that identities "can expand our horizons to communities larger than the ones we personally inhabit" (2019). However, the terms of negotiating these identities have also led to problems that illustrate that such connective intersectionality may have been precipitous.

For Craig Haslop, who researches televisual representations of sexual identities and online harassment at the University of Liverpool, *Pride's* representations are a positive example of the interaction of queer and class identity, where the experience of the former is necessarily altered based on individuals' position within the latter. Raising several key concerns about this divide, Haslop writes, "multiple facets of identity, particularly across the queer/class axis, create specific subjectivities" (Haslop 305). Economic dependence/independence has distinct implications on how queerness will be experienced by individuals. Lacking financial autonomy can lead to not being open about one's sexuality because their family might be dismissive of their identity, which could result in being evicted from one's home. Blue collar employers also may have more 'masculine' values that make it challenging for LGBTQI+ members to be hired into a traditional gender-separated work culture (Finnigan 2020, 2). However, there is yet another important aspect of the queer/class axis found in the media image of queerness; Commenting on the middle-class glamourization that is steadily beginning to be associated with LGBTQI+ members, Haslop explains that the lifestyle of the LGBTQI+ community is often commodified. Perceiving LGBTQI+ community members as affluent in society is a result of "a mainstream media that is most interested in the best presented and 'marketable' aspects of LGBTQI+ culture" (Haslop 306). This emphasis on a queer lifestyle removed from the proletariat, despite the economic hardships experienced by many in the LGBTQI+ community, is symptomatic of a recent turn toward separating identity-based from class-based concerns.

As queer identity has gained social traction in the last decades, the developments in media images have led to it being opposed to class identity. Meanwhile, social class is necessary based on lack and hence cannot be positively affirmed. Samir Gandesha's work on the

interaction of capital with identity politics proves crucial here, as it exposes the underlying distinction between the groups' foundational premises. Writing on these distinct characteristics of identity groups, he comments, "race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and other identities demand recognition and affirmation" (Gandesha). Collectives based on economic disadvantage, however, are crucially different in this regard; instead of seeking recognition, collectives' class-based identity is utilized for unification in struggles, but those struggles ultimately strive to abolish the very basis of their categorization. Gandesha explains that the proletariat constitutes one such negative identity because it has "an interest in *its own self-dissolution*" (Gandesha). Consequently, identities that strive for broader recognition have conflicting needs from the self-negating proletariat, which seeks a redistribution of resources. The recognition-based paradigm sees justice as a system that is based on everyone gaining acceptance and respect for their uniqueness; meanwhile, redistribution is an approach that centers on establishing a difference-less society in pursuit of equality. In their book *Redistribution or Recognition?* (2003), Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth write that historically "questions of difference [were] usually relegated to the sidelines, [while] claims for egalitarian redistribution appeared to typify the meaning of justice" (Fraser and Honneth 2). The disappearance of dialogues surrounding negative identities is fairly recent; yet, with the rise of awareness of marginalized communities' struggles, Fraser and Honneth emphasize that in the contemporary sphere, "neither recognition nor redistribution can be overlooked" (2). However, the problem arises that the ideal future envisioned by these two approaches – current needs for individual recognition versus desire for redistribution and the creation of an egalitarian society – may be fundamentally incompatible.

In addition to the intersectionality of identity, an essential characteristic exposed in *Pride* is how the experience of mutual suffering has previously enabled similar priorities for populations struggling with recognition or redistribution. In the 1980s, the LGBTQI+ and coal miners' respective communities both benefited from unifying their strengths because their experiences paralleled each other in discriminatory economic and social practices they had encountered. The gay and lesbian characters have felt similar oppression by media, police, and the state. Early in the film, Ashton uses this as a key argument to convince his fellow LGBTQI+ members to take up the miners' cause as their own. This empathy is necessary to understanding how disparate groups were able to feel solidarity due to their facing a common enemy under a conservative and restrictive government and consequently analogous challenges. As Ashton makes a speech in the coal miners' community hall, he remarks upon the similarity of his current address to a prior speech made by one of the miners in a gay London nightclub. The sequence highlights the comparable circumstances and priorities that lead them to join forces and, additionally, points to the need for coalitions to have a well-grounded basis for effective collaboration. Recently, this ability to identify similarities between discrete economically-marginalized groups has been disrupted by changes in members' perception of

what constitutes the basis for the bond between members, similarly to the severed link between Black and white workers in the United States (Taylor 2016, 215). The previously unifying experience of being destitute (or equally targeted by police brutality) is often replaced by a tribalism that centers on a collective need for recognition that rests on an imaginative, emotional identification as groups' fundamental premises (Chua 2018; Martineau 2012, 5).

Critiquing the divisions established by identity politics and advocating the unity that *Pride* features, Francis Fukuyama states that left-wing parties should be organized around universal goals instead of the interests of incongruent groups. He argues, "the remedy is not to abandon the idea of identity [...] it is to define larger and more integrative national identities" and to create a liberal democracy "built on the rights of individuals to enjoy an equal degree of choice and agency in determining their collective political lives" (Fukuyama). Nevertheless, while collectivity would indeed benefit liberal politics, the differences between these different interest groups' current values may be too disparate to foster unity.

Left-wing melancholia & liberal destiny

In her essay *Resisting Left-wing Melancholia* (1999), Wendy Brown observes the lethargy that had overtaken the left-wing following the disappointments accompanying the rise and fall of socialism in the 20th century. Unlike Fukuyama, Brown wonders whether or not the way forward might lie in reshaping the left to address new concerns, even if that means drawing away from class-based politics. She asks, "how might we draw creative sustenance from socialist ideals of dignity, equality, and freedom while recognizing that these ideals were conjured from historical conditions and prospects that are not those of the present?" (Brown 27-28). Brown's views on the fall of socialist ideals, the commencement of novel cultural-political movements, and poststructuralism enables at least a partial understanding of the complicity of the liberal party in regards to the current neoliberal system. Brown observes, "the Thatcher-Reagan Right was a symptom rather than a cause of failure" (19). Viewing the rise of neoliberalism as a result of left-wing failure is an apt observation explaining the recent shift in global politics. Still, Brown does little to justify the left's change in policy other than by emphasizing the need to accept the loss of a "crushed ideal, contemporarily signified by the terms *left, socialism, Marx, or movement*" (22).

Meanwhile, Enzo Traverso, whose work focuses extensively on political violence in the European context, debates whether such failures may instead lead to new beginnings in his essay *Left-wing Melancholia: Marxism, History, and Memory* (2019). For Traverso, socialist defeats can be defined as the "necessary premise for reacting, mourning, and preparing a new beginning" because even if socialism "failed in the twentieth Century [...] we cannot exclude the possibility that its utopia will be accomplished in the future" (Traverso 1, 7). However, despite Traverso's viewing of left-melancholia as a positive tendency that allows for rebirth, he

questions whether such a resurrection truly has potential. Concluding that after the fall of communism, "the coming neoliberal wave – as individualistic as it was cynical" (19) brought about the end for class-based change on the left, Traverso buries his remnants of hope for socialist utopias. Yet, the optimism for class-based revolutions remains the focus of many contemporary scholars' work, who have been able to connect the effects of class inequality with recognition-based forms of discrimination, seemingly reviving 20th-century socialist ideals.

In her work on Black identity struggles, Keeanga Yamahtta Taylor describes how racism allowed capitalism to assert a moral right to subjugate black people. However, according to her, capitalism "would also come to use racism to divide and rule" (Taylor 206). By separating groups that were previously able to find strength through cooperation, the goal of such politics was to "blunt the class consciousness of all" (206). Taylor's words illuminate the connection between past class struggles and systematic discrimination of minorities and suggest the perils of divisions. Michael Powell similarly emphasizes the need to shift our understanding of racism in order to perceive its ties to issues of class inequality and, consequently, utilize greater political power. Arguing for the expansion of the current left-wing agenda, Powell asserts that "the most powerful progressive movements, they say, take root in the fight for universal programs" (Powell). Notwithstanding these connections between race and class, the surge in identity politics over the past decades has not only failed in developing enhanced class consciousness but resulted in placing class-related questions out of the spotlight of social and political campaigns. Turning to earlier work on inequality may help clarify these contemporary problems, bringing forward the internal differences that have begun to predominate class versus identity-based politics.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's theory on inequality provides a potential foundation for comprehending identity politics' lucrative and profitable aspects for individuals in a capitalistic system. He contends that inequality's cause is to be found in the establishment of a socio-political system early on in civilization's development, where "property, once recognized, gave rise to the first rules of justice; for, to secure each man his own, it had to be possible for each to have something" (Rousseau). The property concept can be found in capitalism's fashioning of identity in much the same way as those of intangible objects: through its exchange value and the necessitating of others' respect for one's supposed owned property; so having a particular identity recognized can be purely something of socially acknowledged value. In contrast, when identity value is redistributed evenly, it defeats that established sense of security that rests upon individual ownership. In the 20th century, identities formed a crucial part of global liberation movements that targeted the issues of economic discrimination and the effects of colonialism – epitomized by Franz Fanon's self-affirmation. Significantly, such affirmation of identity has persisted in our society beyond its class-based foundations, with no longer the final goal of a new uniform culture as the utopia on the horizon. Charles Taylor argues that the current measures urged on the grounds of ending discrimination have the goal not of bringing

"us back to an eventual 'difference-blind' social space but, on the contrary, to maintain and cherish distinctness, not just now but forever" (Taylor 40). To Taylor, misrecognition or difference-blindness is problematic because it leads to a state that accepts an existent hegemonic culture as normative (43). However, the alternative of embodying distinct identities may not provide the anticipated liberation but can merely obscure the deeply entrenched systems of property that ultimately are to the benefit of the bourgeoisie.

Critiquing the left-wing's embrace of identity-focused politics, Mark Lilla reveals that supplanting priorities from class to identity politics has negatively impacted news reporting. He observes that particularly the younger demographic of journalists and editors seem to assume that simply by focusing on identity politics, they are doing their work adequately (Lilla). This is a concerning trend, leading to the question of whether, through identity struggles, we are not sinking deeper into oppression. As Mark Fisher suggests in his essay, "Exiting the Vampire's Castle," left-wing liberalism ignores the persistent issues of poverty and identity politics have become a game for the bourgeoisie that precludes class consciousness. He further emphasizes that identity politics do little to aid minority groups – provided they do themselves not fall within the middle-class. Subsequently, in the purview of left-wing identity politics, "class has disappeared, but moralism is everywhere [...] solidarity is impossible, but guilt and fear are omnipresent" (Fisher). To Fisher, this only serves as an obstruction, as fundamentally, the implications of class are far-reaching, negatively impacting even those who appear to profit through the capitalist system.

Since the period in which *Pride* is set the LGBTQI+ and the Welsh coal miner communities have moved in opposing directions along the spectrum of need for redistribution and recognition. They form a typified example of the changing priorities of the left – with one on the rise in the party's focus and the other fringing on obscurity – that express a post-left-melancholia reality. With the improvement in social acknowledgement of LGBTQI+ community members, issues of poverty for that demographic have become largely eclipsed. In America and Europe, economically, individuals that are non-binary appear to be no longer discriminated against in the 21st century (though, as Haslop has pointed out, that may not be true for all members – especially trans-people). Nonetheless, *Pride* portrays a world existing in 1984, where economic plight and physical lack of security were still at the forefront of LGBTQI+ rights movements. Two scenes in the second half of *Pride* are representative of the vulnerability on these levels faced by the community at the time. In the first, the owner of a gay bookshop, Geffin, gets badly beaten up, landing him in the hospital. Meanwhile, the scene is paralleled by another illustration of hardship with being out as gay, when Joe's middle-class family finds out about his gay identity, leading him to leave home and to take refuge with a lesbian friend. Both events present the very physical and economic problems tied to being gay in the Thatcher era, which allowed for one of the commonalities for building a coalition between the LGBTQI+ and the coal miners. In the present, such an idealistic union is not be possible, with subcultures

being integrated into the opposite side of the capitalistic system. In Haslop's view, this is not necessarily the case, as he argues that *Pride* illustrates that sub-culture "can still be a place beyond neoliberal commodified consumption, a space to draw strength and unity as a community" (Haslop 314). But perhaps the world inhabited since the setting of *Pride* has altered too much for the negative class-based identity to have that equal position with affirmative sub-cultures. According to Fukuyama, while specific identities are welcomed, poverty remains dismissed and stigmatized. He observes, "economic distress is often perceived by individuals more as a loss of identity than as a loss of resources" (Fukuyama). Consequently, identity politics may only be possible as middle-class politics – not politics that benefit all. As the working class becomes integrated into the middle class in many industrialized countries, the implications of these developments become acute for the portion of the population that still remains in poverty (Fukuyama). To understand why and how deeply identity politics are linked to bourgeois ideology requires an inspection of affirmative identities' connection to commodification.

The commodification of our 'liberating' identities

In the new era following the failure of 20th century communism, the disillusioned left was presented with what Traverso referred to as the "innumerable outlets offered by the universal commodification of neoliberal capitalism" (Traverso 2). This shift created a state where the left's ideology began to grasp onto ideals beyond the exhausting pursuit of anti-capitalist utopias; hence the focus on identity and its associated commodification provided a crucial outlet. Following a period of tense battles for human rights that established meaningful change, giving a fresh purpose to the left, the progression to aiding populations facing discrimination seemed natural. However, requiring recognition gained further traction with digitalization, altering the objective of the movements from collective action to individualism in an online world. For Jonathan Crary, in this 24/7 landscape, "everyone, we are told – not just businesses and institutions – needs an 'online presence'" (Crary 104). This desire for exposure is an integral component of the interrelation between one's political and personal identity. The cultural changes that allowed for the merger can be found within the current reduction of separation between public and private, entertainment and work, living in the attention has become "overridden by a compulsory functionality of communication" (Crary 76). The effect of these increased and multi-relational communicative practices is that individuals increasingly derive personal meaning and social leverage by distinguishing themselves by ascribing to specific groups with the aid of social media platforms. Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt observe that identity – and its derivative of being offended at misrecognition – become trump cards in contemporary cancel culture. Lukianoff and Haidt describe that "opposing parties use claims of offence as cudgels" (Lukianoff and Haidt). Consequently, while a 24/7 landscape

provides a merger of political and everyday life, one's identity becomes a point of exchange and power for online – and, later, real-world – interactions.

In *Pride*, these issues become more apparent when viewing the previous era's interactions as a counterpoint to the existing political state. Both the LGBTQI+ member and coal miners wanted to achieve adequate economic and living conditions in much the same way, which could be summarized as a desire for *equal* participation in social life; the sought utopia was one of inclusion instead of segregation. Since then, the definition of identity as a comparative term for evaluating individuals' rights to participation has begun to dominate, displacing the idea of understanding group identities as labels for enabling structuring around a common cause of shared suffering. Simultaneously, new media allow for an abstracted visualization of these identities, impeding persons from fully grasping their material possessions. Instead, what is fostered is a craving for recognition of individual uniqueness, which obscures real-world problems, and in the contemporary world is a desperate task for the vast majority of the population (Urban, 2013).

By viewing identities from the perspective of Louis Althusser's work on the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA), this incorporation of identities into the capitalistic system can be understood as a natural extension of the various systems in place for population control. Althusser writes, "if the ISAs 'function' massively and predominantly by ideology, what unifies their diversity is precisely this functioning" he continues "insofar as the ideology by which they function is always in fact unified, despite its diversity and its contractions, *beneath the ruling ideology*" (Althusser 98). Identity politics have been revered a place outside of capitalism, concerned with an administration of a certain form of partisan justice. However, Althusser's observation implies that while identity politics, as Charles Taylor suggests, counter a specific cultural western hegemony, they may continue to feed into consumer capitalism's broader ideology. More clearly, "the relative autonomy of the superstructure" is reliant on "the reciprocal action of the superstructure on the base" (Althusser 91). This process explains the incorporation of the 20th century's struggles for liberation that relied upon affirmation of their identity into the reciprocal 21st century neoliberal capitalism's superstructure. Identity as a product of the neoliberal system is further concerning when it not only works as part of the ISA but functions as a commodity that is desired for itself – allowing for manipulation of the people with a lucrative but elusive disavowal of their individual insignificance. In his work, Guy Debord explores the role of commodification, writing that we have entered upon the ground of "domination of society by 'intangible as well as tangible things,'" resulting in "the tangible world [being] replaced by a selection of images which exist above it" (Debord pp. 36). Perhaps identity has become another intangible thing that has begun to dominate us, grasping us not through force but by manipulating our desires. Akin to Althusser's theory, Debord observes that in the capitalist system, "*the humanism of the commodity* takes charge of the 'leisure and humanity' of the worker, simply because political economy can and must now dominate these spheres as

political economy" (pp. 43). The current amalgam of the private sphere with the political landscape finds particular prevalence on social media. As Mark Fisher observes, in the online world, "there is little protection from the psychic pathologies propagated by these discourses" (Fisher). As a solution, Fisher suggests we should strive in our struggles "towards the construction of a new and surprising world, not the perseveration of identities shaped and distorted by capital" (Fisher). However, achieving such a world may be a Herculean task, as it will require us to not only change our perception of what identity means, but to also redefine the meaning of 'us' and 'our' as concepts. The formation of the broader communal into our sense of self is crucial, as identities are negotiatory values by which individuals in society function. Appiah describes that not only do identities give us a personal sense of direction but that "because others, seeing who they think we are, call on us, too" (Appiah); accordingly, it is only through collective awareness and action that repurposing identity to fulfil once again the people's needs instead of the will of capital may be possible.

These complex interactions demonstrate a significant alteration of the meaning of 'identity' on the left, a topic that is aptly exemplified in *Pride's* final scenes. After the miners lose their strike yet solidify their new friendships with the LGBTQI+ community, the narrative ends with the main protagonists resolving their personal journeys. Following the outing by his parents that Joe experienced, Ashton encourages him to own his gay identity and to express pride when facing his homophobic parents. Subsequently, Joe gets dropped off by the LGBTQI+ van at his sister's engagement party, gathers his things and rebelliously takes leave of the family home. Despite the empowerment for gay pride that the scene would have had in the 1980s, it bears a double meaning in the 21st century. Whereas Joe's assertion is a free expression of who he truly is, it is unfortunately accompanied by a severing with everything that is other to it. Thus, the scene can also be viewed as a harbinger of cancel culture where Joe's gay identity unwittingly begins to dominate his social relations. Unlike the fellow gay activist Geffin, whose departure from his home in a mining community a generation prior was filled with shame but led to an eventual reconciling with his mother once new ideas infiltrated rural spaces, Joe's exit is filled with a pride that is not unlike a contemporary cancellation. By one definition, "being 'cancelled' means an individual, group, organization, or work has been shut down or silenced for a perceived wrongdoing or offence" (Ibrahim, 2021). The cancellation in this context is illustrated by Joe's abandoning a potential place of conversation with his parochial parents. In turn, the exchange inhibits a conversation that would allow both sides to place arguments that could be reparative or instill a mutual understanding. Still more troubling are Joe's interactions at the engagement party, where he resorts to personal insults addressed to his sister and his future brother-in-law, who seem to symbolize the middle-classes. This outburst is indicative of the general vilification of anyone who stands in contradiction to recognizing one's identity and leaves little space for future reconciliation – as had been possible in the case of Geffin. Despite the potential for interpreting the scene as a denouncement of the

bourgeoisie as a whole, it cannot help but also highlight the instigation of an era of identity polarization. Meanwhile, the well-meaning, though oblivious, questions posed by some of the coal miners bring back to mind the time that existed where ignorance was able to be met with enlightenment. In response to the miners, the LGBTQI+ members – particularly Ashton – engage with them and can forge friendships in spite of their initial skepticism and prejudice. Therefore, Joe symbolizes the contemporary gay man who defends his identity as a possession; meanwhile, Ashton is at the historical point where using dialogue and education, he overcomes the group's differences and unifies their forces. Establishing such common ground can only occur when a conversation is allowed to bridge differences instead of offence being taken immediately when one's identity is disputed.

Today, finding allies for lower-class citizens is difficult because class equality not only consists of better living conditions but a commodified ideal of equal participation in social life for citizens. Yet because all citizens' equal status would run contrary to what current affirmative identification practices seem to imply – with the desire for recognition not only of being human but unique – class struggles remain on the margins of the left's progressively more neoliberal priorities; thus following the epoch of socialist idealism, there may indeed be a "loss of viable alternatives to the political economy of capitalism" (Brown 1999, 22). The result is a system where instead of freely experiencing and asserting our own identities, affirming those identities become processes that have become directed by a socio-economic system that promises individual fulfillment at the cost of both collective and, ultimately, individual liberty. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's definition of consciousness illuminates why the assertion of identity may be less empowering than anticipated. For Hegel, it is the slave who does not require recognition and the master who cannot be without it, whereby "the master is the consciousness that exists for itself; but no longer merely the general notion of existence for self." Of the master, he explains, "it is a consciousness existing on its own account which is mediated with itself through an other consciousness" (1807). When applying Hegel's power structure to contemporary identity, we can wonder whether we have not all been given the illusion of believing ourselves to be masters who are speciously in control of our identities, while being inherently reliant on recognition of the 'other'. However, through such an illusion, we would end up being reliant upon the system surrounding us for recognition – being masters who are, in truth, slaves. Following Hegel's reasoning, we can understand that while the old ideals of socialism fought against the corporate machines that engulfed workers, for the next part of the journey, we may have to fight against the desires that engulf ourselves. A new political force is needed to counter neoliberal capitalism that targets not only the power of the ruling class but the very desire for identity instilled in the people under the guise of empowerment. Thus, the issues of redistribution have been placed in a polar opposite direction of recognition, where the former demands equal respect, but the latter a uniqueness that has become a marketable self-value configuration that rests upon competition.

Conclusion

As *Pride* ends, the coal miners become assimilated into the large crowd of the London Pride Parade, having lost their own battle for equitable living standards. This ending foretells the future story of identity politics, leading to questions about what means can be employed to unify these interest groups in the present neoliberal world. Crucially, the film's title may provide one of the answers: 'pride' comes in two forms within the narrative. The first meaning of the word can be viewed as internal, coming from the self-dignity in facing adversity, and is accepted by oneself for oneself. However, the second meaning – which Joe ultimately adopts – is a need for respectful treatment and recognition that is not internal but from others, bringing back our reliance on the Hegelian conundrum. By examining these issues in relation to *Pride*, I described the foundational elements that are the basis of the respective class and non-binary based identities (which stand in for a broader set of affirmative identities). Since then, the divisions in these two identity groups' priorities may have become too segregated to enable coalitions today, necessitating a deeper look into the functioning of identity politics if expanding communities is to be possible in the future. Contemporary LGBTQI+ culture has become integrated into the bourgeois model; meanwhile, lower-class individuals have become increasingly abandoned, even by the left-wing party. Viewing identity politics as a symptom of left-melancholia following the failed idealism of the 20th century may be needed to understand identity's increasing connections with neoliberalism. Lastly, the fetishism of identity results in a self-commodification that is a symptom of integration into a broader market system rather than rebellion against capitalist structures – perpetuating the very systems that earlier insurrections fighting for recognition had sought to overturn in the 20th century.

To provide a sense of meaning, social change is needed in individuals' approaches to their own desires for recognition in order for greater class equality and collective well-being. At present, the foundation of identities and self-worth has become tied to a comparative model, where status has once again become relative and remains tied to existing class discrimination. Examining these effects requires further research that addresses not only how the two definitions of identity and pride have become incompatible but how to combat that incompatibility within our complex global and digitalized world. Increased governmental control provides one alternative to dealing with capitalism's effects; however, such an option hardly seems viable following the socialist realities of the 20th century. Perhaps the impetus ultimately rests in self-reflectivity instead of self-recognition and gaining a deeper understanding of our motivations for belonging to identity groups; However, the difficulties remain. How can we begin to find a way to control our own conceptions and relations within an overwhelmingly digital landscape? What would we have to do to avoid being ensnared by our desire for external recognition? Finding a way to approach identity is a daunting task; it requires imagining a future where we take pride in ourselves without the requirement of others' recognition.

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