Issue 7: Dissertation Special Edition *September 2024*

SOUTHAMPTON JOURNAL OF UNDERGRADUATE HISTORY

Edited by Madelaine Watson, Jasmine Kelly, and Khairah Boukhatem



University of Southampton

Contents

Foreword by the Editors

Madelaine Watson, Jasmine Kelly, and Khairah Boukhatem..... 3

"Home offered to attractive young companion": Evaluating the impact of Queer print media on Queer community building in twentieth-century Britain

James Burnard.....4

The Cult of the Orgasm: how Britain's short sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s redefined the value of sex to homosocial relationships

Madelaine Watson.....14

AIDS: How did the British media influence and react to the Government 'Don't Die of Ignorance' campaign, 1981 - 1989?

Madeline Dalley.....29

Politicising Weather: What were the driving factors of changing attitudes towards weather modification between the 1950s and 2010s?

Joely Fake..... 45

Did The Thick Of It encourage a cynical public attitude towards British politics?

Ewan Lewis.....56

A Spoonful of Sugar: Exploring the Duality of Comfort and Challenge in Call the Midwife

Megan Jenkins Davies..... 68

"Anyone can cook aloo gobi, but who can bend a ball like Beckham?" An oral history project analysing the quality and value of representation in Bend It Like Beckham (2002) to the history of British Indians

Rhianna Saglani..... 81

The Composition of Atlantic Golden Age Pirate Communities as Escape Societies

Aaron King.....93

How and why did children become involved as witnesses in English witchcraft cases, 1560 - 1680?

Emma Shapland..... 104

Foreword by the Editors

Dear readers,

We are thrilled to present this special Dissertation Edition of the Southampton Undergraduate History Journal, a platform dedicated to showcasing the exceptional research produced by our undergraduate students. This edition marks an important milestone in the journal's history as we have successfully revived and renewed the SJUH after a period of inactivity.

As co-editors, we want to acknowledge the challenges faced by the previous team, which led to the journal being temporarily forgotten. While these setbacks were unfortunate, they have inspired us to take on the responsibility of breathing new life into the SJUH. We recognise the immense value that this journal holds in providing students with an opportunity to publish their work and contribute to the wider academic community.

The Dissertation Edition is a testament to the hard work, dedication, and intellectual curiosity of our students. It is designed to celebrate the diverse range of historical topics explored in their dissertations, offering them a well-deserved platform to share their insights with a broader audience. The papers included in this edition are not only a reflection of the individual authors' talents, but also as a result of the academic environment at the University of Southampton. This research is a true testament to the hard work and passion of our undergraduates and the excellent teaching across the History Department.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who has contributed to this edition - to our authors and supporters! Your commitment has made this revival possible, and we are excited to see how the journal will continue to grow in the years to come. Many thanks to James Baker for his invaluable guidance and support in helping us to establish an online home for the journal, and to Maria Hayward for seeing the potential in this new chapter of journal leadership.

We hope that this edition will inspire future students to engage deeply with history and consider contributing their research to future issues of the SJUH. Together, we can continue to build a strong tradition of undergraduate scholarship at our university.

Thank you for your support, and we hope you enjoy reading the 2024 Dissertation Edition of the Southampton Undergraduate History Journal!

Madelaine Watson, Jasmine Kelly, and Khairah Boukhatem
Co-Editors, 2024

"Home offered to attractive young companion": Evaluating the impact of Queer print media on Queer community building in twentieth-century Britain

James Burnard

Abstract: *As Lucy Robinson writes in Gay men and the Left in post-war Britain, presenting 'gay activism as spontaneously erupting in a fit of excitement at the Stonewall Riots' is potentially problematic – this 'detracts from the importance of particular national contexts.'*[1] *This chapter aims to contribute to the growing literature attempting to document the growth of the British Queer community, predominantly focusing on the period after decriminalisation. This will be achieved here by analysing the housing advertisements of several British Queer magazines, in the hope that this will illuminate the ways and extent to which different diverse LGBTQIA+ groups were catered to. The chapter will also uncover the exploitation that was occasionally present – though it should be noted that this was only in a minority of cases. The chapter concludes that these magazines were largely successful in protecting LGBTQIA+ people against homelessness, providing an important safety net to some of the most vulnerable in contemporary society. It is hoped that this analysis helps to demonstrate the importance of community-strength historically, and, in doing so, encouraging modern Queer people to unite in the face of a rising tide of hate crimes related to sexuality – the magazines used here were from 1987, chosen as this was a period in which Queer people similarly faced a rising tide of discrimination (a result of the AIDS epidemic).*

Queer communities have long been woven into the fabric of many major British cities, with London's 'homoerotic geography' being mappable to at least the 1700s.[2] However, in recent years Queer people have been experiencing an increase in discrimination: recent Office for National Statistics (ONS) research shows that 'hate crimes on the basis of sexual orientation are […] up by 112 per cent in the last five years,' with trans people particularly being targeted.[3] To protect these groups, it is important to ensure that Queer friendly spaces exist and are well-known, creating a place for Queer people free of discrimination, and allowing for 'higher levels of community connectedness' which can decrease the negative impacts of homophobic discrimination.[4] This chapter seeks to explore the ways in which Queer individuals helped others to find Queer friendly spaces, with a particular focus on housing –

[1] Lucy Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left in Post-War Britain: How the Personal Got Political* (Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 65 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt155jf8t> [accessed 24 April 2024].
[2] Matt Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885-1914* (Cambridge ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 6 <http://archive.org/details/londonculture0fh00matt> [accessed 13 January 2024].
[3] Stonewall, 'New Data: Rise in Hate Crime against LGBTQ+ People Continues, Stonewall Slams UK Gov "Inaction"', *Stonewall*, 2023 <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/about-us/news/new-data-rise-hate-crime-against-lgbtq-people-continues-stonewall-slams-uk-gov-> [accessed 21 March 2024].
[4] Raquel S. Craney and others, 'Bisexual Women's Discriminatory Experiences and Psychological Distress: Exploring the Roles of Coping and LGBTQ Community Connectedness', *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, 5.3 (2018), pp. 324–37 (p. 324), doi:10.1037/sgd0000276.

Queer people are more affected by homelessness compared to heterosexual people,[5] and also 'are often discriminated against and inadequately served' in non-LGBT-specific homeless youth services.[6] With this context, this chapter seeks to explore the ways in which the British Queer community used Queer print media to protect themselves and others homelessness and related risks during the twentieth century, in the hope that it can inform contemporary responses to increasing discrimination and violence against the community. This will be achieved by analysing the advertisement sections of four Queer magazines, aiming to understand how these magazines were important for ensuring Queer people were protected from a hostile contemporary society and the issues present in the adverts (particularly, the potential for desperate individuals to be exploited by predatory homeowners).

The first section of the chapter will focus specifically on *Gay Times (GT)* – this was 'perhaps the most mainstream' contemporary Queer magazine, and therefore the scale of the housing section of the Classified Advertisements was far greater than the other magazines surveyed here. A qualitative analysis into these adverts will demonstrate this scale and therefore importance of the resource but will also acknowledge the focus on predominantly Gay men (rendering the resource fairly useless for the rest of the Queer community). The second section will analyse the inclusion of other Queer groups through the advertisement sections of magazines that were not only marketed towards Gay men – particularly, *Capital Gay* and *Sappho*. This will further demonstrate the lack of resources for Lesbian women and attempt to understand why this was the case – finding that it was likely a combination of smaller, more local magazines and a greater acceptance of Lesbian women in the Women's Liberation Movement, and therefore ability to find housing through those means. The third section will attempt to similarly evaluate the inclusivity of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Queer people, and highlight the availability of housing support for these groups. Again, this section will emphasise the role of smaller magazines in ensuring these communities were accommodated to, particularly focusing on the *Black Lesbian and Gay Centre.* Finally, the chapter will explore the problem of exploitation throughout the magazines, whereby many young Queer people were potentially taken advantage of by older men as a result of the desperate need for housing during a hostile period for Queer people, and in the wider context of Queer people being more affected by homelessness than heterosexual people.[7]

The chapter will conclude that, despite some potential problems, magazines were a hugely important resource in ensuring that Queer people across Britain were protected from discrimination by ensuring they had a safe space. Though there are lessons to learn from the uncomfortable history of

[5] Geoffrey L. Ream and Nicholas R. Forge, 'Homeless Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Youth in New York City: Insights from the Field', *Child Welfare*, 93.2 (2014), pp. 7–22 (p. 8).
[6] Ream and Forge, p. 8.
[7] Ream and Forge, p. 8; Adam P Romero, Shoshana K Goldberg, and Luis A Vasquez, *LGBT People and Housing Affordability, Discrimination, and Homelessness* (UCLA Williams Institute, April 2020), pp. 1–40 (p. 3), California Digital Library <https://escholarship.org/content/qt3cb5b8zj/qt3cb5b8zj.pdf> [accessed 23 April 2024].

exploitation evident in these advertisements, the overwhelming image of this period is one of unity among Queer people in the face of oppression.

GT had a comparatively large advertisement section compared to other Queer magazines – a result of it being 'the longest-running gay magazine and perhaps the most mainstream, being available in many newsagents.'[8] As a result, their housing section was likely the most seen of any Queer magazines, and its analysis is therefore particularly important to understanding the importance of these sections for the average contemporary Queer person. To do this, I collected data from a sample of *GT* magazines (spanning from August to November 1987) featuring a total of 115 housing adverts (88 of which were *Accommodation Offered* adverts, the remaining 27 were *Accommodation Wanted* adverts). These adverts were then organised by the demographics of the posters (and in the case of *Accommodation Offered* adverts, the demographics of the preferred occupants) in order to understand who was utilising the resource, and who was being targeted by those offering accommodation (and subsequently, who was being excluded).

The main takeaway from this analysis was that most posters were male with the majority of accommodation being offered to only men. In the *Accommodation Wanted* section, posters are more likely to define their gender identity to allow prospective landlords to understand more about them (often the poster will also attempt to entice prospective landlords with other descriptors, such as 'attractive,'[9] though this will be further explored later in the chapter) – in these sections, 59 per cent of posts were by men, with only 4 per cent posted by women. In the *Accommodation Offered* section, posters are less likely to define their gender in the advert, as this is less relevant to the prospective tenants reading the advert – in these sections, 26 per cent of posts were by men (though this was representative of 100 per cent of all posters that identified their gender). This section also allows posters to specify the profile of person they would ideally rent their property out to – this was again not always specified, but 96 per cent of adverts that did specify a preference were ideally looking for male occupants. Only 4 per cent of these adverts were open to either male or female occupants – 0 per cent were open to only female occupants. Though it is important to stress the relatively small sample size, this clearly demonstrates the inequality of the housing adverts in *GT*, which were disproportionately used by and aimed towards Gay men as opposed to other members of Queer communities. From the perspective of Gay men, however, this was clearly an important resource: Queer people often faced discrimination in finding housing through conventional methods (for example, there are several reports of individuals being denied housing as a result of their sexuality, such as one couple being told that the landlord 'don't rent to your kind here,' while another suggested

[8] Paul Baker, 'No Effeminates Please: A Corpus-Based Analysis of Masculinity via Personal Adverts in Gay News/Times 1973–2000', *The Sociological Review*, 51.1 (2003), pp. 243–60 (p. 245), doi:10.1111/j.1467-954X.2003.tb03614.x.
[9] Mike Belsten, 'Classified Advertisements', *Gay Times*, October 1987, pp. 95–104, Bishopsgate Institute.

renting to a same-sex couple would 'disrupt her "low profile" in the community').[10] This is especially important, then, in the wider context of the AIDS epidemic and the disproportionate risk of homelessness for Queer people[11] (and the disproportionate risk of HIV for homeless people).[12]

The lack of LBTQI+ representation in the *GT* housing advertisements raises the question of the resources available to these groups. Though Lesbian women are not always represented equally to Gay men in AIDS discourse[13], the AIDS epidemic resulted in anti-LGBTQI+ behaviours generally. Lesbians, therefore, still encountered discrimination due to their sexuality during this period and were consequently disproportionately in need of housing compared to heterosexual people (due again to the disproportionate risk of homelessness among Queer people[14]). To try to examine the resources available to Lesbians, this section will focus on two further magazines: *Capital Gay (CG)*, which was designed initially as a complementary publication to *Gay News/Times* but was aimed at both Gay men and Lesbian women[15], and *Sappho,* an exclusively Lesbian magazine with a strongly political focus. After completing a quantitative analysis for *CG* identical to that used for *GT*, the main difference is the number of *Accommodation Offered* adverts open to both men and women: of the adverts that specified a preference, 14 per cent of them were open to both (compared to just 4 per cent in *GT*).[16] Outside of this, however, the housing adverts were otherwise male-centric: 78 per cent of *Accommodation Wanted* adverts and 26 per cent of *Accommodation Offered* adverts were posted by men (0 per cent of either were posted by women).[17] I had expected to find a large number of housing adverts targeted specifically at Lesbians in *Sappho*, but I was unable to find any in the issues I analysed. This was potentially because I had to use issues from 1973 and 1979 (at least 9 years before the *GT* and *CG* editions were published) because of availability issues, and it is therefore possible that this was a result of a less hostile contemporary society.[18] However, this was also likely down to areas having their own local Lesbian groups that would help people to find housing, such as the *Camden Lesbian Centre and Black Lesbian Group*, which stated on a flyer in the 1980s: 'Lesbians having problems with immigration? Custody? Housing? […] The Camden Lesbian Centre and Black Lesbian

[10] Romero, Goldberg, and Vasquez, p. 19.
[11] Ream and Forge, p. 8; Romero, Goldberg, and Vasquez, p. 3.
[12] Rashmi Gangamma and others, 'Comparison of HIV Risks among Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Heterosexual Homeless Youth', *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 37.4 (2008), pp. 456–64 (p. 1), doi:10.1007/s10964-007-9171-9.
[13] Diane Richardson, 'The Social Construction of Immunity: Hiv Risk Perception and Prevention among Lesbians and Bisexual Women', *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 2.1 (2000), pp. 33–49 (p. 33), doi:10.1080/136910500300859.
[14] Ream and Forge, p. 8; Romero, Goldberg, and Vasquez, p. 3.
[15] *History of Gay News and Capital Gay [27 Feb 2023]*, 2023 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=29M4C4YaPRQ> [accessed 21 March 2024].
[16] 'Capital Gay', *Capital Gay*, 7 August 1987, pp. 1–14, Bishopsgate Institute; 'Capital Gay', *Capital Gay*, 6 November 1987, pp. 1–18, Bishopsgate Institute; 'Capital Gay', *Capital Gay*, 2 October 1987, pp. 1–22, Bishopsgate Institute; 'Capital Gay', *Capital Gay*, 4 September 1987, pp. 1–18, Bishopsgate Institute.
[17] 'Capital Gay', August-November 1987.
[18] Baker, p. 257.

Group are here for you.'[19] *Sappho* advertised a wide range of similar groups from across Britain and Ireland in their magazine, and therefore housing issues were potentially handled here, rather than needing to have a centralised advertising space for them. It is also possible that the Women's Liberation Movement was influential in helping Lesbian women find housing, particularly with women's communes often feeling that 'the struggle for lesbian housing was part of the same struggle as for single women's housing and for all women to have the right to choose how they would live and have autonomy.'[20]

Overall, these results suggest that there were some resources available to Queer women seeking housing in this period, though their resources were seemingly far more limited than those available to Queer men. This, though, was likely in large part a result of the influence of the Women's Liberation Movement and their inclusion of Lesbians in women's communes, therefore reducing the desperate need for housing in the community. In terms of magazines, though, they appeared not to be an important resource for those outside of Queer men in terms of finding housing.

It is also interesting to examine the ways in which BAME Queer people were able to get accommodation. BAME Queer people were (and continue to be) among the most discriminated Queer groups and are more disproportionately affected by poverty and low homeownership compared to most other LGBT groups[21]. This continues to be relevant today, as Britain's BAME communities often '[migrated] to Britain for a better life to find limited access to decent housing, getting access to council housing (creating a "good ghetto", a sense/space of belonging, that protected them and enabled their aspirations) but then being displaced by its redevelopment.'[22] This section seeks to explore the ways that BAME people were able to find housing outside of council houses in this period.

Like the previous section, some of the major resources for Queer BAME people were relatively specific, local groups and housing projects advertised in newsletters and magazines. This was most clear through the *Black Lesbian and Gay Centre* Newsletter, published from 1986 until the early 2000s, which included many events, job adverts, and other important notices aimed primarily at its predominantly London-based audience (though this specific issue – from summer 1986 – includes a plea for those outside of London to 'tell us anything that is going on out there'[23]). Of particular note

[19] Lucy Brownson, 'Feminist Housing Activism in the 1970s-1980s, #3: Community Organising and Mutual Aid', *Glasgow Women's Library*, 2021 <https://womenslibrary.org.uk/2021/08/19/feminist-housing-activism-in-the-1970s-1980s-3-community-organising-and-mutual-aid/> [accessed 22 March 2024].
[20] Jayne Egerton, 'Out but Not down: Lesbians' Experience of Housing', *Feminist Review*, 36, 1990, pp. 75–88 (p. 82), doi:10.2307/1395111.
[21] Romero, Goldberg, and Vasquez, p. 3.
[22] Loretta Lees and Phil Hubbard, '"So, Don't You Want Us Here No More?" Slow Violence, Frustrated Hope, and Racialized Struggle on London's Council Estates', *Housing, Theory and Society*, 39.3 (2022), pp. 341–58 (p. 354), doi:10.1080/14036096.2021.1959392.
[23] 'BLGC Newssheet', *Black Lesbian and Gay Centre*, 6 September 1986, pp. 1–8 (p. 2), Bishopsgate Institute.

to the issue of housing in this edition of the newsletter is an advert for *Brixton Housing CO-OP* – a group that claimed that 'with patience and 36 hours of voluntary work per annum (minimum) you could have your own flat!'[24] Resources such as this, then, were clearly useful in allowing specifically BAME Queer individuals to have a safe space free from discrimination based on either sexuality or race.

It is also important to note that some of the adverts in previously mentioned magazines (specifically in *GT)* also included race as an identifier in housing adverts. This was often only limited to a few adverts per edition – around 7 per cent of *Accommodation Wanted* and 3 per cent of *Offered* adverts mentioned the poster's race – but it is still interesting to investigate. Of the adverts that referenced the poster's race, they always identified as either 'Asian'[25] or 'Oriental,'[26] which raises the question of why this was specific to Asian Queer individuals (assuming it is not merely the result of a relatively small sample size). There is potential that the clear identification as an Asian male in these adverts is to avoid having to deal with racist homeowners who might reject a tenant if they later found out they were Asian, but there is equally potential that being Asian was seen as an attractive trait: there is evidence to suggest that, due to implications of nationality in pornography, contemporary Western Queer people had stereotypical sexual images of Asian people. For example, 'Filipino men may be imaged as sexually available while Japanese men are assumed to be sexually kinky.'[27] This may be enticing to some landlords, and therefore might result in a higher chance of getting accommodation – though it is hoped that this dissertation encourages further research into the intersectionality between race and Queerness in this way.

The access for BAME Queer people, therefore, is relatively mixed. BAME people in certain areas where there is a strong established community and culture (like in certain areas of London) had a better chance of having access to housing due to local groups such as the *Brixton Housing CO-OP*, and newsletters like the *Black and Lesbian Gay Centre Project* helped to spread the word about these initiatives and ensure they are taken advantage of. In terms of more mainstream magazines, though, there were few resources specifically for ethnic minorities when it comes to housing.

Lastly in this section on housing, it is important to note how these adverts could occasionally be exploitative towards young Queer people that were desperately in need of housing (because of the aforementioned wider context of disproportionate homelessness and consequent increased risk of HIV infection). This exploitation occurred in a minority of adverts (6 per cent of adverts on average in the

[24] 'BLGC Newssheet', p. 3.
[25] Mike Belsten, 'Classified Advertisements', *Gay Times*, August 1987, pp. 95–105 (p. 100), Bishopsgate Institute.
[26] Mike Belsten, 'Classified Advertisements', *Gay Times*, November 1987, pp. 95–104 (p. 101), Bishopsgate Institute.
[27] Shinsuke Eguchi, 'Gaysian Fabulosity: Quare(Ing) the Normal and Ordinary', in *The Routledge Handbook of Gender and Communication* (Routledge, 2020), p. 52.

GT appeared to be exploitative in some ways). Though the extent to which an advert is exploitative is subjective in some ways, some of the adverts that appeared in these editions of *GT* seemed to take advantage of the fact that there were many young Queer people in desperate need of housing (for example, due to being abandoned by their family as a result of their sexuality[28]) and tried to use the adverts 'as a sex service. They'd say they had a room to let and everyone who went round got grabbed.'[29] Some prominent examples of this from the editions analysed in this essay include: 'comfortable country home […] offered to attractive young companion by fit and active middle-aged gent'[30] (bear in mind the potential double entendre of 'active' here also referring to him being sexually active) and 'Luxury Wapping house. City guy 43 […] seeks discreet, educated slim, tidy guy under 30 to share. Reasonable terms for the right person. Photo, letter please.'[31] These both display a potential for exploitation as they describe an older (presumably relatively wealthy) individual hoping to exchange accommodation with a young Queer person for (presumably sexual) companionship. Other forms of exploitation in the magazines also include an advert offering 'overnight or very short stay […] in exchange for massage and polaroid photograph modelling sessions.'[32] This is exploitative in a different way – essentially exchanging accommodation for the creation of (presumably pornographic or sexual) images and a (similarly presumably sexual) massage. These adverts only seem more exploitative when contrasted with some of the *Accommodation Wanted* adverts, which clearly paint a picture of how desperate some individuals were – such as: 'impoverished non-smoking, cultured vegetarian music student. Seeks accommodation' (which, despite probably being humorous, still demonstrates that the individuals advertising were likely relatively desperate) and 'graduate, 24, seeks any form of accommodation immediately if possible.'[33] Similar forms of exploitation to these have been explored elsewhere too, such as in the Log Books podcast – which demonstrates that this was not just a problem with *GT* readers nor with housing adverts in magazines generally, but was potentially a wider issue throughout the community. In episode one, an accommodation offer advertised through Switchboard (an LGBTQ+ phone helpline) is discussed – this advert, posted by a 50-year-old male seeking one male between 18 and 25, specifically mentions that 'everything is shared […] There's a double bedroom to share, plus kitchen and bathroom […] it also says not effeminate.'[34] As Jonathan Izard, a man who was seeking accommodation during this period, notes on the podcast: ''that makes me quite angry […] there are a lot of hints there that somebody wants… the word that's coming to my

[28] Jason D. P. Bird and others, '"I Had to Go to the Streets to Get Love": Pathways From Parental Rejection to HIV Risk Among Young Gay and Bisexual Men', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 64.3 (2017), pp. 321–42 (p. 324), doi:10.1080/00918369.2016.1179039.
[29] Adam Zmith and Tash Walker, 'Crashpad Needed', The Log Books <https://www.thelogbooks.org/transcript/the-log-books-transcript-s1e1> [accessed 24 April 2024].
[30] Belsten, 'Classified Advertisements', p. 101.
[31] Mike Belsten, 'Classified Advertisements', *Gay Times*, September 1987, pp. 96–105 (p. 102), Bishopsgate Institute.
[32] Belsten, 'Classified Advertisements', p. 102.
[33] Belsten, 'Classified Advertisements', p. 101.
[34] Zmith and Walker.

mind is exploitation and that just feels […] dangerous. Very unfair. – very cruel.'[35] This exploitation, then, was not the fault of Queer magazines (or other advertisers like Switchboard) but was rather a response to the growing number of young, desperate Queer people. Analysing advertisement sections of Queer magazines has helped to illuminate the scale of this exploitation, demonstrating that (though it was present in a minority of advertisements) it was certainly a consequence of contemporary struggles brought about by a society becoming increasingly hostile towards Queer people.

In conclusion, this chapter has clearly demonstrated the different ways that several Queer magazines functioned to construct spaces, as well as highlighting the benefits and limitations of these resources. Though they were often limited in their ability to help Lesbians and BAME Queer people find accommodation, and occasionally exploitative towards some of the most desperate in the community, magazines generally offered an invaluable resource to Queer men – giving many a safe space to live and helping to protect them from AIDS and homelessness. More localised groups – advertised in both large national magazines like *Sappho* and smaller newsletters such as the *Black Lesbian and Gay Centre* Newsletter – helped to ensure Lesbians and BAME Queer people were not left behind, and again offered a valuable resource to ensure the community was safe from homelessness and related risks.

The advertising of Queer safe spaces across Britain was successful in ensuring a section of the community was brought together – however, this was not represented by a decrease in discrimination against the more unified community. It is hoped, therefore, that more research is completed into personal testimony of readers of these magazines to understand how Queer individuals were affected – this will help to further highlight the importance of Queer magazines to the contemporary Queer community. It is also hoped that this chapter encourages wider research into some aspects of intersectionality discussed throughout – especially between BAME Queer people and housing, as this is an incredibly important, yet relatively neglected, topic in Queer History.

[35] Zmith and Walker.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Belsten, Mike, 'Classified Advertisements', *Gay Times*, October 1987, pp. 95–104, Bishopsgate Institute

———, 'Classified Advertisements', *Gay Times*, August 1987, pp. 95–105, Bishopsgate Institute

———, 'Classified Advertisements', *Gay Times*, November 1987, pp. 95–104, Bishopsgate Institute

———, 'Classified Advertisements', *Gay Times*, September 1987, pp. 96–105, Bishopsgate Institute

'BLGC Newssheet', *Black Lesbian and Gay Centre*, 6 September 1986, pp. 1–8, Bishopsgate Institute

'Capital Gay', *Capital Gay*, 7 August 1987, pp. 1–14, Bishopsgate Institute

'———', *Capital Gay*, 6 November 1987, pp. 1–18, Bishopsgate Institute

'———', *Capital Gay*, 2 October 1987, pp. 1–22, Bishopsgate Institute

'———', *Capital Gay*, 4 September 1987, pp. 1–18, Bishopsgate Institute

Secondary Sources

Baker, Paul, 'No Effeminates Please: A Corpus-Based Analysis of Masculinity via Personal Adverts in Gay News/Times 1973–2000', *The Sociological Review*, 51.1 (2003), pp. 243–60, doi:10.1111/j.1467-954X.2003.tb03614.x

Bird, Jason D. P., Michael C. LaSala, Marco A. Hidalgo, Lisa M. Kuhns, and Robert Garofalo, '"I Had to Go to the Streets to Get Love": Pathways From Parental Rejection to HIV Risk Among Young Gay and Bisexual Men', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 64.3 (2017), pp. 321–42, doi:10.1080/00918369.2016.1179039

Brownson, Lucy, 'Feminist Housing Activism in the 1970s-1980s, #3: Community Organising and Mutual Aid', *Glasgow Women's Library*, 2021 <https://womenslibrary.org.uk/2021/08/19/feminist-housing-activism-in-the-1970s-1980s-3-community-organising-and-mutual-aid/> [accessed 22 March 2024]

Cook, Matt, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885-1914* (Cambridge ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 2003) <http://archive.org/details/londonculturefh00matt> [accessed 13 January 2024]

Craney, Raquel S., Laurel B. Watson, Jenna Brownfield, and Mirella J. Flores, 'Bisexual Women's Discriminatory Experiences and Psychological Distress: Exploring the Roles of Coping and LGBTQ Community Connectedness', *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, 5.3 (2018), pp. 324–37, doi:10.1037/sgd0000276

Egerton, Jayne, 'Out but Not down: Lesbians' Experience of Housing', *Feminist Review*, 36, 1990, pp. 75–88, doi:10.2307/1395111

Eguchi, Shinsuke, 'Gaysian Fabulosity: Quare(Ing) the Normal and Ordinary', in *The Routledge Handbook of Gender and Communication* (Routledge, 2020)

Gangamma, Rashmi, Natasha Slesnick, Paula Toviessi, and Julianne Serovich, 'Comparison of HIV Risks among Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Heterosexual Homeless Youth', *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 37.4 (2008), pp. 456–64, doi:10.1007/s10964-007-9171-9

History of Gay News and Capital Gay [27 Feb 2023], 2023 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=29M4C4YaPRQ> [accessed 21 March 2024]

Lees, Loretta, and Phil Hubbard, '"So, Don't You Want Us Here No More?" Slow Violence, Frustrated Hope, and Racialized Struggle on London's Council Estates', *Housing, Theory and Society*, 39.3 (2022), pp. 341–58, doi:10.1080/14036096.2021.1959392

Ream, Geoffrey L., and Nicholas R. Forge, 'Homeless Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Youth in New York City: Insights from the Field', *Child Welfare*, 93.2 (2014), pp. 7–22

Richardson, Diane, 'The Social Construction of Immunity: Hiv Risk Perception and Prevention among Lesbians and Bisexual Women', *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 2.1 (2000), pp. 33–49, doi:10.1080/136910500300859

Robinson, Lucy, *Gay Men and the Left in Post-War Britain: How the Personal Got Political* (Manchester University Press, 2007) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt155jf8t> [accessed 24 April 2024]

Romero, Adam P, Shoshana K Goldberg, and Luis A Vasquez, *LGBT People and Housing Affordability, Discrimination, and Homelessness* (UCLA Williams Institute, April 2020), pp. 1–40, California Digital Library <https://escholarship.org/content/qt3cb5b8zj/qt3cb5b8zj.pdf> [accessed 23 April 2024]

Stonewall, 'New Data: Rise in Hate Crime against LGBTQ+ People Continues, Stonewall Slams UK Gov "Inaction"', *Stonewall*, 2023 <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/about-us/news/new-data-rise-hate-crime-against-lgbtq-people-continues-stonewall-slams-uk-gov-> [accessed 21 March 2024]

Zmith, Adam, and Tash Walker, 'Crashpad Needed', The Log Books <https://www.thelogbooks.org/transcript/the-log-books-transcript-s1e1> [accessed 24 April 2024]

The Cult of the Orgasm: how Britain's short sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s redefined the value of sex to homosocial relationships

Madelaine Watson

Abstract: *A climax of cultural change characterised 1960s and 1970s Britain. At the core of this transformative era resides the rise of a sexual revolution, a social movement characterised by a shift towards liberalisation and increased freedom in sexual relations. The Cult of the Orgasm, coined by Sam Brewitt-Taylor, replaced religion as 'the opium of the people', redefining sexual norms and the fabric of homosocial relationships.[36] This figurative concept encapsulates the hedonistic behaviour that pioneered the explosion in pre-marital sex and the relaxation of societal attitudes towards entrenched norms and sexuality in the 1960s. This cultural phenomenon celebrated sexual liberation and pleasure, contrasting with pre-sexual-revolution views that the value of sex was procreation and marital duty. Research on homosociality is crucial to understanding how individuals form and maintain social bonds within same-sex groups, especially during periods of social change. This research aims to fill the significant gap in the scholarly exploration of male homosociality in the 1960s and 1970s. Most historiography rarely focuses on mid-twentieth-century concepts of homosociality; a surprising discovery given the magnitude of cultural change instigated by the sexual revolution. Additionally, sexual majorities, such as white men, are 'under-researched and rarely studied as a specially gendered and sexualised grouping,' necessitating this research.[37] This chapter was part of a dissertation providing a comparative study of male and female homosociality, which had yet to be undertaken at the time of writing. I argue that the value of sex to male homosociality increases with age through shared sexual experiences, redefined from the previous conservative attitudes of the earlier generations.*

Brotherhood in Bed: Male Homosociality

The 1960s and 1970s challenged traditional norms regarding the significance of sex within homosocial dynamics. Homosociality can be defined as 'the seeking, enjoyment, and/or preference for the company of the same sex'.[38] The value of sex became intricately intertwined with notions of friendship, intimacy, and personal fulfilment, representing a societal shift in attitudes away from Victorian morality that esteemed the sanctity of sex, chastity, and marriage. An extensive corpus of

[36] Sam Brewitt-Taylor, 'Christianity and the Invention of the Sexual Revolution in Britain, 1963-1967', *The Historical Journal,* 60 (2017), 519-546 (544).
[37] Mairtin Mac an Ghaill, 'Rethinking (Male) Gendered Sexualities: What About the British Heteros?', *The Journal of Men's Studies,* 8 (2000), 195-212 (198).
[38] Jean Lipman-Blumen, 'Toward a Homosocial Theory of Sex Roles: An Explanation of the Sex Segregation of Social Institutions,' *Signs Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 1 (1976), 15-31 (16).

scholarship has analysed the broader societal impacts of this era, however the nuanced experiences of men within homosocial networks remain relatively unexplored. Sharon Bird notes that a 'delineation of relations among masculinities is important because it facilitates a better understanding of how the structural order of gender is maintained.'[39] This chapter explores the multifaceted dimensions of the male experience of the sexual revolution, focusing on the redefined value of sex to homosocial relationships. A comparison will be made on three main bases: a) the childhood and adolescent experience, b) the influence of homosexuality, and c) the adult experience. Each axis is a lens to explore the intersections between masculinity, sex, intimacy, and friendship. The methodology employed takes a triangulated approach, utilising Mass Observation directive responses, oral history interviews, and diary entries as the main primary source base. Given the intimate nature of homosocial relationships, primary sources offering first-hand accounts and personal insights are invaluable. They serve to safeguard against the distortion of social consciousness and facilitate a nuanced analysis of homosocial dynamics. Mass Observation directive responses are characterised by their 'detailed, candid, [and] personal reactions', though these responses predominantly represent a left-wing demographic[40]. While this introduces a particular ideological perspective, this demographic was deliberately studied due to its greater engagement with progressive social issues; particularly relevant when examining evolving attitudes towards relationships and intimacy. Directives on 'Close Relationships' (1990) and 'Sex' (2005) were found to be most representative of the social experiences researched for this chapter of my dissertation. Carrie Hamilton notes that oral history interviews provide a 'wider range of emotional evidence than most written sources' encompassing 'gestures, non-verbal sounds such as laughter and crying, as well as silences'.[41] This quality makes them particularly suitable for bolstering written Mass Observation responses. Diary entries give contemporaneous records of emotions and events, complementing the preceding sources. To complete this comprehensive approach, legislation and social surveys provide contextual insights into societal changes and numerical data that reinforces the qualitative sources. The influence of class and religion is considered for its impact on morality and the experience of changing sexual norms. This chapter argues that sexual exploration during childhood and adolescence creates strong homosocial bonds, diverging significantly from the low value of sex to pre-revolution homosociality considered in Chapter 1. While sex is not prominent in childhood, the connections formed between boys through sexual exploration shape future perceptions of homosociality. Childhood and adolescent encounters intertwine with homosexuality, strengthening homosocial bonds through sexual interactions, albeit not

[39] Sharon R. Bird, 'Welcome to the Men's Club: Homosociality and the Maintenance of Hegemonic Masculinity', Gender and Society, 10 (1996), 120-132 (120).
[40] Penny Summerfield, 'Mass-Observation: Social Research or Social Movement?', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 20 (1985), 439-452 (441).
[41] Carrie Hamilton, 'Moving feelings: nationalism, feminism and the emotions of politics,' *Oral History Society,* 39, (2010), 85-94 (86).

conforming to expected heteronormativity. However, as men mature, many distance themselves from behaviours deemed to be homosexual.

The Childhood and Adolescent Experience

The formative years of childhood and adolescence are crucial to the evolution of male homosociality and the changing value of sex within these relationships. The construction of a masculine identity and the development of intimate bonds among peers begin 'in early childhood and [are] channelled and encouraged by the entire range of social institutions within which males live.'[42] Thus, influence from peers, teachers, parents, and religion was crucial in shaping the behaviour of young boys in their social microcultures.[43] A common theme throughout responses to the 2005 'Sex' directive is the lack of formal sex education provided by teachers and parents, leaving the boys to educate themselves; resulting from the failure of the 1944 Education Act to obligate the provision of sex education in schools. Observer A3153, born in 1963, experienced the sexual revolution as a child and adolescent. He recalled that 'sex education was handled in school [..] albeit briefly by an embarrassed teacher,' leading to his stunted knowledge of sex.[44] Similarly, B3438, born in 1955, remembers that his 'early memories are of a confused and embarrassed silence from parents who were unable to discuss sex or the facts of life.'[45] This is consistent with the aforementioned pre-revolution experiences that highlighted the lack of formal sex education. The reluctance of parents to discuss sex with their children is representative of the parents' conservative and often religious upbringing in which sexual and intimate topics were taboo.[46] Michael Schofield's 1965 study of *The Sexual Behaviour of Young People* revealed that 67 per cent of boys and 29 per cent of girls had never received any parental advice about sex, contradicting the notion that 'permissive parenting' was widespread.[47] Moral traditionalists, often in alliance with the Christian church, attacked the provision of sex education in schools for its 'morally corrupting' nature, and assumption that it 'encouraged promiscuous sexual behaviour among young people'.[48] Shifts in societal attitudes and the erosion of taboos were not immediate, especially for the older generation.

---

[42] Lipman-Blumen, p. 16.
[43] Mac an Ghaill, p. 201.
[44] *A3153's response to 2005 Autumn directive part 1 (2005), Mass Observation Project* <https://www-massobservationproject-amdigital-co-uk.soton.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Detail/a3153s-response-to-2005-autumn-directive-part-1/19505323?item=19505324> [Accessed 1 March 2024].
[45] *B3438's response to 2005 Autumn directive part 1 (2005), Mass Observation Project,* <https://www-massobservationproject-amdigital-co-uk.soton.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Detail/b3438s-response-to-2005-autumn-directive-part-1/19505403> [Accessed 2 March 2024].
[46] *B3570's response to 2005 Autumn directive part 1 (2005), Mass Observation Project,* <https://www-massobservationproject-amdigital-co-uk.soton.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Detail/b3570s-response-to-2005-autumn-directive-part-1/19505361> [Accessed 2 March 2024].
[47] Michael Schofield, *The Sexual Behaviour of Young* People (London, 1965), 18-19 as cited in Brown, p. 203.
[48] James Hampshire and Jane Lewis, 'The Ravage of Permissiveness': Sex Education and the Permissive Society,' *Twentieth Century British History,* 15 (2004), 290-312 (292).

A lack of formal sex education encouraged children to discover sex for themselves, often with their friends, beginning to redefine sex as important to homosociality. Szreter and Fisher's interviewees, representative of the pre-revolution generation, did not exhibit equivalent levels of sexual curiosity observed among the sexual revolution generation, nor did they indulge in this curiosity with their friends.[49] As a child in the 1970s, B3570 recalls his experience of finding and discussing the contents of a pornographic magazine with his male friends, though noting that he did not have 'any urges to actually do these things that we saw in the magazine with the opposite sex'.[50] Pre-teen conceptions of masculinity were therefore 'more capacious and less defensive than those generally prescribed by heterosexual discourse', in which looking at pornography together could be interpreted as transgressive and homosexual. [51] Sharing sexual experiences with friends reflects a broader spectrum of masculinity, less constrained by societal norms, and exemplifying characteristics associated with the ethos of a sexual revolution. Despite these conversations, the children 'failed to display investments in the explicit eroticisation and idealisation of girls that are frequently identified as central to teenage boys' sexual cultures, indicating that sex held minimal significance within homosocial relationships until they matured.[52] This is reasonable considering that pre-teens are too young to engage in consensual sexual experiences beyond innocent exploration. However, the intersection of childhood innocence with newfound sexual awareness resulted in conflicting messages about desire, pleasure, and propriety. Catholic Christianity constructed innocent sexual discovery and knowledge as shameful, believing that it was 'inherently and naturally private'.[53] Hera Cook argues that parents, much like their predecessors, also 'felt anxious about the impact on their children of new content.'[54] This concern was particularly pronounced among working-class parents who lacked access to formal sexual education growing up. Cook suggests that the embarrassment felt by parents and teachers was 'an expression of their uncertainty [..] to maintain the unspoken boundaries that separate adult sexual feelings from children's learning in this new context'.[55] The emergence of a permissive sexual culture brought freedom but also stigma and shame, particularly for individuals who deviated from Christian and heteronormative expectations.

---

[49] Simon Szreter and Katie Fisher, *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution: Intimate Life in England 1918-1963* (New York, Cambridge University Press: 2010).
[50] *B3570's response to 2005 Autumn directive part 1 (2005), Mass Observation Project,* <https://www-massobservationproject-amdigital-co-uk.soton.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Detail/b3570s-response-to-2005-autumn-directive-part-1/19505361> [Accessed 2 March 2024].
[51] Peter Redman and others, 'Boys Bonding: Same-sex friendship, the unconscious and heterosexual discourse', Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 23 (2002), 179-191 (182).
[52] Redman, p. 182.
[53] Hera Cook, 'Getting 'foolishly hot and bothered'? Parents and teachers and sex education in the 1940s', Sex Education, 12 (2011), 555-567 (560).
[54] Cook, 2011, p. 554.
[55] Cook, 2011, p. 565.

As children transition into adolescence, homosocial relations become more deeply rooted in sexual experiences. Several responses to the 2005 'Sex' directive allude to the centrality of informal sex education in their homosocial relationships. For B3252, sex education was gained 'behind the bike sheds', highlighting the centrality of 'rumour and gossip' as informal channels through which adolescents exchanged and constructed their understanding of sexuality and intimate relationships. The phrase 'behind the bike sheds' suggests a clandestine, coming-of-age ritual of gathering away from adult supervision, implying that the discussions were considered taboo by authority figures.[56] A separate location for sexual discussion indicates that adolescents sought out private spaces to engage with these topics away from formal education or parental oversight. B3252 notes that 'there was a lot of banter in the schoolyard during breaks about how we did the night before,'[57] reinforcing Flood's claim that heterosexual sexual experience was an 'important route to status among male peers' and a 'medium through which male bonding [was] enacted.'[58] Compared to pre-teen experiences, sex increases in value to homosocial relationships with age. Competitiveness emerged as some boys claimed to have 'got [to] fifth last night,' referring to 'fifth base,' or full sexual intercourse.[59] This response validates Sharon Bird's suggestion that the expression of competition in male homosocial groups supports an identity based on 'separation and distinction', providing 'a stage for establishing self both as an individual and as appropriately masculine'.[60] The competitive interactions allow each boy to assert his own individuality by distinguishing himself from others in the group (with less sexual experience), while simultaneously adhering to culturally defined norms of masculinity, such as dominance, physical strength, or verbal prowess, thus reinforcing both personal identity and collective masculinity, Nevertheless, the MO responses fail to substantiate Bird's claim that 'the objectification of women provides a base on which male superiority is maintained'.[61] This could be due to the absence of such behaviour during adolescence or its lack of explicit mention in the MO responses, highlighting a limitation of these primary sources. Details may be omitted due to memory, choice, perceived relevance, or construction of a narrative. Despite this, masculinity appears to be linked to experiences of shared rites of passage, competition, and camaraderie, laying the groundwork for their adult homosocial relationships and sexual experiences. Therefore, a positive correlation can be found between sex education and the perceived value of sex to homosociality.

---

[56] *B3252's response to 2005 Autumn directive part 1 (2005), Mass Observation Project* <https://www-massobservationproject-amdigital-co-uk.soton.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Detail/b3252s-response-to-2005-autumn-directive-part-1/19505394> [Accessed 1 March 2024].
[57] *B3252's response to 2005 Autumn directive part 1 (2005), Mass Observation Project* <https://www-massobservationproject-amdigital-co-uk.soton.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Detail/b3252s-response-to-2005-autumn-directive-part-1/19505394> [Accessed 1 March 2024].
[58] Michael Flood, 'Men, Sex, and Homosociality: How Bonds between Men Shape Their Sexual Relations with Women, *Men and Masculinities*, 10 (2008), 339-359 (345 and 342).
[59] *B3252's response to 2005 Autumn directive part 1 (2005), Mass Observation Project* <https://www-massobservationproject-amdigital-co-uk.soton.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Detail/b3252s-response-to-2005-autumn-directive-part-1/19505394> [Accessed 1 March 2024].
[60] Bird, p. 122 and p. 127.
[61] Bird, p. 123.

Throughout adolescence, homosociality often crossed into homoeroticism. Lipman-Blumen asserts that 'men repeatedly find their behaviour influenced by the presence of other males,'[62] which is corroborated by most 2005 'Sex' directive responses noting their experiences of homoerotic exploration.[63] Growing up in an all-boys school, B3252 highlights the common practice of engaging in homosexual masturbation due to a lack of opportunities with girls.[64] A883 confirms this, suspecting that 'with teenage urges [he] expected it was common' behaviour; which the directive responses confirm.[65] A883 was aware that 'we would have been told it was degrading and beaten for it' had they been caught, implying an awareness that homosexual social stigma was prevalent.[66] In contrast, B3252 states that 'it never felt wrong or sinful. It was just boys exploring their own bodies and enjoying experiences', suggesting that homosexuality and negative connotations were ascribed by adult bias.[67] This is evidence of 'schooling processes [that] can be seen to form gendered sexual identities, marking out "correct" or "appropriate" styles of being.'[68] Though some boys engaged in this behaviour and did eventually come out as homosexual, for the rest, it was 'just something you did to be part of the crowd'.[69] Engaging in sexual acts to fit in with peers reinforces the heightened significance of sex within homosocial dynamics, particularly in comparison to the pre-teen age group and to pre-revolution homosociality. The absence of discussions on sex and homoeroticism in

---

[62] Lipman-Blumen, p. 26.
[63] See *B3438's response to 2005 Autumn directive part 1 (2005), Mass Observation Project* <https://www-massobservationproject-amdigital-co-uk.soton.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Detail/b3438s-response-to-2005-autumn-directive-part-1/19505403> [Accessed 2 March 2024]; *B3252's response to 2005 Autumn directive part 1 (2005), Mass Observation Project* <https://www-massobservationproject-amdigital-co-uk.soton.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Detail/b3252s-response-to-2005-autumn-directive-part-1/19505394> [Accessed 1 March 2024]; *B1442's response to 2005 Autumn directive part 1* (2005), *Mass Observation Project* <https://www-massobservationproject-amdigital-co-uk.soton.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Detail/b1442s-response-to-2005-autumn-directive-part-1/19505380?item=19505385> [Accessed 1 March 2024]; *A883's response to 2005 Autumn directive part 1* (2005), *Mass Observation Project* <https://www-massobservationproject-amdigital-co-uk.soton.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Detail/a883s-response-to-2005-autumn-directive-part-1/19505328?item=19505332> [Accessed 1 March 2024].
[64] *B3252's response to 2005 Autumn directive part 1 (2005), Mass Observation Project* <https://www-massobservationproject-amdigital-co-uk.soton.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Detail/b3252s-response-to-2005-autumn-directive-part-1/19505394> [Accessed 1 March 2024].
[65] *A883's response to 2005 Autumn directive part 1* (2005), *Mass Observation Project* <https://www-massobservationproject-amdigital-co-uk.soton.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Detail/a883s-response-to-2005-autumn-directive-part-1/19505328?item=19505332> [Accessed 1 March 2024].
[66] *A883's response to 2005 Autumn directive part 1* (2005), *Mass Observation Project* <https://www-massobservationproject-amdigital-co-uk.soton.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Detail/a883s-response-to-2005-autumn-directive-part-1/19505328?item=19505332> [Accessed 1 March 2024].
[67] *B3252's response to 2005 Autumn directive part 1 (2005), Mass Observation Project* <https://www-massobservationproject-amdigital-co-uk.soton.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Detail/b3252s-response-to-2005-autumn-directive-part-1/19505394> [Accessed 1 March 2024].
[68] Mac an Ghaill, p. 203.
[69] *B3252's response to 2005 Autumn directive part 1 (2005), Mass Observation Project* <https://www-massobservationproject-amdigital-co-uk.soton.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Detail/b3252s-response-to-2005-autumn-directive-part-1/19505394> [Accessed 1 March 2024].

adolescent relationships within the pre-revolution oral histories implies either a lack of significance to these topics or the presence of underlying shame associated with them.

The Influence of Homosexuality

The transition from adolescence to adulthood brought a heightened awareness of societal norms. Notably, homosexuality remained a contentious subject. Though the 1967 Sexual Offences Act decriminalised private homosexual acts between consenting adults over the age of twenty-one, the legislation 'was woefully ineffective in overturning social and sexual stigma' prevalent in British society.[70] Homosexuals continued to be viewed as 'promiscuous, often predatory, and a threat to the family.'[71] Externalised homophobia consequently perpetuated normatively gendered performances, preventing men from cultivating close homosocial bonds due to fear of being labelled as homosexual.[72] This hesitation is underscored by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's argument that intimacy between men has become suspicious in Western culture.[73] Judith Butler strengthens Sedgwick's claim, arguing that 'the homophobic terror over performing homosexual acts [..] is often also a terror over losing proper gender.'[74] Observer M1017 was born in the 1930s and experienced the emergence of the sexual revolution as an adult. M1017's experience reinforces both Sedgwick and Butler's concerns, noting that 'it has become more difficult to enjoy close friendship with someone of the same sex without the suggestion that there must be some sexual aspect involved.'[75] Alongside existing difficulties in forming emotional connections and friendships with age, homophobia also hinders male homosociality. The influence of internalised homophobia and denial is evident in M1017's claim that 'apart from the public schoolboy, homosexuality in this country was rare.'[76] He expresses disdain towards the liberal press for portraying homosexuality as 'perfectly wholesome and natural,' instead viewing homosexuality as evidence of 'moral collapse'.[77] M1017's moral opposition to homosexuality

---

[70] *Sexual Offences Act 1967* (1967), *UK Parliament* <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/relationships/collections1/sexual-offences-act-1967/sexual-offences-act-1967/#:~:text=After%20passing%20all%20stages%20in,the%20age%20of%20twenty%2Done> [Accessed 7 April 2024]; Teri Chettiar, 'Counselling for connection: making queer relationships during Britain's sexual revolution', *Med Humanit,* 49 (2022), 182-192 (184).
[71] Chettiar, p. 184.
[72] Flood, 2008.
[73] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial* Desire (New York, Columbia University Press: 2016).
[74] Judith Butler, *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of "sex"* (London, Routledge: 1993), p. 238.
[75] *M1017's response to 1990 Summer directive part 1* (1995), *Mass Observation Project* <https://www-massobservationproject-amdigital-co-uk.soton.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Detail/m1017s-response-to-1990-summer-directive-part-1/9438651?item=9438653> [Accessed 22 March 2024].
[76] *M1017's response to 1990 Summer directive part 1* (1995), *Mass Observation Project* <https://www-massobservationproject-amdigital-co-uk.soton.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Detail/m1017s-response-to-1990-summer-directive-part-1/9438651?item=9438653> [Accessed 22 March 2024].
[77] *M1017's response to 1990 Summer directive part 1* (1995), *Mass Observation Project* <https://www-massobservationproject-amdigital-co-uk.soton.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Detail/m1017s-response-to-1990-summer-directive-part-1/9438651?item=9438653> [Accessed 22 March 2024].

could be attributed to a likely working-class upbringing in the West Midlands, which I have inferred given the socio-economic context of the region in the mid-twentieth century. During this period, working-class communities in industrial regions like the West Midlands were often characterised by conservative social attitudes, shaped by religious influence, traditional gender roles, and limited exposure to progressive movements surrounding sexuality, exposing him to generational bias and fear of social ostracism.[78] In the 1930s, homosexuality remained illegal, so institutionalised discrimination legitimised and reinforced homophobic beliefs within working-class communities. Previous generations justified their homophobia using Christianity, claiming a subversion of traditional views on marriage as the union between one man and one woman. Other MO responses, B1442 and T2150, describe homosexuality as a 'perversion', 'a lack of moral fibre' and an 'urge to be different.'[79] In contrast to M1017, T2150's homophobia can be explained by his strong links to the Christian Church, exemplifying how religion has intertwined with social norms, including attitudes towards sexuality. As Hammarén and Johansson argue, this exemplifies 'the continuous boundary work being done to uphold and defend the heterosexual order'.[80] Ultimately, homophobia encouraged men to reaffirm their heterosexuality by prioritising prominent discussions of heterosexual sex within homosocial spaces.

Sex became valuable to male homosociality as a medium to reassert heterosexuality in the face of homosexual panic. Sedgwick defines homosexual panic as a 'form in which many twentieth-century western men experience their vulnerability to the social pressure of homophobic blackmail', implying male fears of homosocial bonds being perceived as homosexuality.[81] Male homosociality tends to be aggressively heterosexual due to fragile conceptions of masculinity, inhibiting men from comfortably expressing behaviours perceived as homosexual traits, such as emotional intimacy with other men. Nils Hammaren and Thomas Johansson argue that fears of male attention shifting into homosexual desire instigates a fear or hatred of homosexuals, and the development of misogynistic language to reaffirm heterosexuality.[82] This prompts consideration of how heterosexual desire for homosociality would impact homosexual homosociality. Despite their constant perpetuation of social stigma, heterosexual men viewed homosexuality as aberrant.

---

[78] Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800,* 3rd edn (London: Routledge, 2017).
[79] *B1442's response to 2005 Autumn directive part 1* (2005), *Mass Observation Project* <https://www-massobservationproject-amdigital-co-uk.soton.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Detail/b1442s-response-to-2005-autumn-directive-part-1/19505380?item=19505385> [Accessed 1 March 2024]; *T2150's response to 1990 Summer directive part 1* (1990), *Mass Observation Project* <https://www-massobservationproject-amdigital-co-uk.soton.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Detail/t2150s-response-to-1990-summer-directive-part-1/8316405?item=8316412> [Accessed 22 March 2024].
[80] Nils Hammarén and Thomas Johansson, 'Homosociality: In Between Power and Intimacy', SAGE Open, 4 (2014), 1-11 (4).
[81] Sedgwick, p. 89.
[82] Hammarén and Johansson, p. 2.

Homophobia became an organising force to encourage strongly heterosexual acts, such as the objectification of women, to prove heterosexuality to one another; a gender performance. This is evident in young adult male experiences of sex and homosociality.

The Adult Experience

The reification of sexual boundaries differs according to microculture, although hegemonic masculinity tends to prevail in the majority. R. W. Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as 'the maintenance of practices that institutionalise men's dominance over women' and is 'constructed in relation to women and to subordinate masculinities' such as homosexuals.[83] Hegemonic masculinity builds upon shared rites of passage, competition, and camaraderie that began developing in adolescence, perpetuating male dominance by objectifying women.[84] Men attempt to improve their position in masculine social hierarchies through sexual achievement, often influenced by the presence of other men.[85] Thus, sex is of a high value to young adult homosociality. Bird convincingly posits that these interactions 'reinforce existing self-notions of gender'.[86] Therefore, as hegemonic masculinity is regarded as the only legitimate masculinity, it suppresses other masculinities which could 'create a foundation for the subversion of the existing hegemony'.[87] Exemplifying these conceptions, Celia Hughes analysed the 1961 diary of John Hoyland, a young, lower-middle-class, left-wing activist, finding evidence of misogynistic masculinity in his attitude towards women.[88] Despite common methodological issues with diaries, such as their limited scope, subjectivity, and selective nature, here, more value comes from the topics emphasised in Hoyland's entries. Hoyland's diary entries reflect his priorities and what he considers significant. In particular, Hughes notes that Hoyland's diary often functioned as another opportunity to reaffirm his sexual experiences and to perform 'the subcultural heterosexual identity associated with the kitchen-sink male hero'.[89] He consistently reduced women to sexual objects, exemplified through his remark on Myra's 'delicious little body'.[90] London's leisure venues became 'spaces for experimentation, freedom from moral and social constrain, and the pursuit of male heterosexual desire' for Hoyland and his male friends.[91] For Hoyland, homosociality centred on shared sexual pursuits and was coloured by 'sexual innuendo,

[83] R. W. Connell, *Gender, and power: Society, the person, and sexual politics* (Stanford, Stanford University Press: 1987), pp. 185-6.
[84] Bird, 1996; Elizabeth Aries and Fern Johnson, 'Close friendship in adulthood: conversational content between same-sex friends', *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research,* 9 (1983), 1183-1196.
[85] Lipman-Blumen, p. 26.
[86] Bird, p. 122.
[87] Bird, p. 122.
[88] Celia Hughes 'The Struggle of the Male Self: A New Left Activist and His 1961 Diary', *Journal of British Studies,* 54 (2015), 898-925.
[89] Hughes, 2015, p. 916.
[90] Hughes, 2015, p. 916.
[91] Ibid., p. 918.

bravado, and voyeurism' thereby reinforcing hegemonically masculine behaviours through shared solidarity, as identified by Bird, Flood, and Lipman-Blumen. Despite engaging in these shared activities, Hoyland encountered an array of models for selfhood, suggesting that norms surrounding 'legitimate male emotional expression were far from uniform'.[92] This ambiguity compounded his confusion, as his sexual desires appeared at odds with mid-century moral codes designed to contain them, leading to feelings of guilt. The transition between mid-century morality and emerging sexual liberation was a period of redefinition of sex as a valuable way to form and maintain homosocial relationships.

Aside from hegemonic masculinity, sex also has a high value to male homosociality for the intimate nature of discussion and the experience of freedom it provokes. Sex is a valuable mechanism for bonding when discussed constructively. Hughes' oral history interviews with men who were previously involved in 1960s left-wing activist groups revealed the influence of activist group microcultures in promoting sexual freedom and behaviour characteristic of the sexual revolution.[93] Shared experiences of sexual liberation were valuable to homosociality, symbolising a departure from traditional Christian morality that previously governed sexual conduct. This shift represents the influence of 'tensions between older patterns of class and the modernising aspects of affluence and youth culture'.[94] One interviewee validates Hughes' analysis, recalling that 'the sense of sexual freedom was important because, in an earlier generation, you couldn't have done it.'[95] Young working-class men seemed caught between shifting, and often conflicting, models of class and gender identity. Crucially, involvement in left-wing political groups encouraged men to challenge societal norms that constrained their capacity for sexual mobility and pleasure. Elaborating more on sexual discussions, Elizabeth Aries and Fern Johnson analysed the conversational content between same-sex friends in the early 1980s. This study is significant for its insights into social interactions following the transformative effects of the sexual revolution. Although Aries and Johnson's study is grounded in an American context, Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory illustrates that fundamental aspects of human behaviour, such as the formation of social bonds and hierarchical interactions, are consistent across diverse cultural and geographical settings.[96] The insights derived from the American study has broader applicability to my research beyond its national context. Aries and Johnson found that although males may see a close friend as someone to confide in, 'sex-role pressures restrict the frequency and depth with which they can express themselves to other men.'[97] M1017 validates this in

[92] Ibid., p. 902.
[93] Celia Hughes, 'Young Socialist Men in 1960s Britain: Subjectivity and Sociability', 73 (2012), *History Workshop Journal,* 170-192.
[94] Hughes, 2012, p. 173.
[95] Ibid., p. 184.
[96] Geert Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values* (Beverly HIlls, CA: Sage Publications, 1980).
[97] Aries and Johnson, p. 1193.

his struggle to form strong emotional connections with other men.[98] Aries and Johnson's insight extends beyond verbal exchange, emphasising the significance of shared activities in maintaining close male friendships.[99] This approach aligns with a contemporary understanding of male friendships, where activities such as sports, hobbies, and shared interests serve as avenues for connection. Lucy Delap's oral history interviews with men involved in the anti-sexist movement give further insights into the evolving nature of male homosociality.[100] Hegemonic masculinity and homophobia had produced a 'deep male emotional dysfunction', which contrasts with the 'new and intense forms of comradeship' that were not centred on sex, provided by activist groups.[101]

Homosociality in activist spaces encouraged changing homosociality that did not rely on discussions of sex to form bonds, forcing men to discuss more emotionally intimate subjects. For example, The Islington Men's Group declared in 1974 that they felt 'excited by the sense of *freedom* that comes from beginning to throw off the whole "masculine" way of being a person,' suggesting that they felt confined by hegemonic masculinity and being defined by patriarchal discussions of sex.[102] Another activist describes his desire to change the 'impersonal, meaningless unemotionalism' that he has been taught to exhibit.[103] Although traditional gender norms restricted male emotional expression, the emergence of alternative homosocial spaces that prioritised shared experiences and values over conventional expectations highlights the evolving significance of sex within these friendships. Delap reinforces Aries and Johnson's findings that 'females spend more time alone with their friends, while males spent more time with friends in a group situation', suggesting that group settings were not typically a supportive environment for constructive sexual conversations.[104] From this, I can infer that conformation to conventional expectations and discussions of sex in a hegemonically masculine space created an unfulfilling homosocial bond. Thus, when men engaged with one another in different spaces, such as activist groups, they found it 'fantastically exciting'.[105] Differences in experience challenge the indifferent emotional habits of their fathers. The diminished value of sex to adult male homosociality persists from the pre-revolution era, though men during the sexual revolution must navigate more intense, patriarchal masculinity to foster meaningful friendships.

---

[98] *M1017's response to 1990 Summer directive part 1* (1995), *Mass Observation Project* <https://www-massobservationproject-amdigital-co-uk.soton.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Detail/m1017s-response-to-1990-summer-directive-part-1/9438651?item=9438653> [Accessed 22 March 2024].
[99] Aries and Johnson, p. 1193.
[100] Lucy Delap, 'Feminism, Masculinities and Emotional Politics in Late Twentieth Century Britain', *Cultural and Social History*, 15 (2018), 571-593.
[101] Ibid., p. 575 and p. 572.
[102] Men Against Sexism, Islington Men's Group, 1974, 7shr/e/1 Folder 1, box 9, SR as cited in Delap, p. 576.
[103] Ian Adams, 7SHR/E/2 Box 9, SR as cited in Delap, p. 576.
[104] Aries and Johnson, p. 1195; Delap.
[105] Paul Morrison, interview with the author, 29 March 2021, Unbecoming Men: interviews on masculinities and the women's movement, 1970-1991, British Library as cited in Delap, p. 571-2.

Overall, the value of sex to male homosociality evolves with age, transitioning from pre-teen innocence to adolescent exploration, highlighting the increasing value of shared sexual experiences to homosociality with age. The absence of formal sex education fostered homoerotic curiosity, contrary to the religious and moral views of their teachers and parents. Competitiveness shaped men's evolving perceptions of sex and friendship. Homosexual stigmas prompted the reaffirmation of young men's heterosexuality through the objectification of women and the centrality of sexual discourse in social interactions, maintaining hegemonic masculinity. Within left-wing activist groups, sex was a pivotal component of homosocial relationships, underscoring its importance across different social milieus. However, older men in men's groups sought to transcend the emotional detachment that characterised previous generations of homosociality. The conception of homosociality based on emotional connection challenged conventional masculinity; sex had less value to these friendships. Reflecting on the pre-revolution era, men's groups and activist circles continued to serve as vital spaces for fostering homosocial bonds. There is a greater value of sex to homosocial relationships than before the sexual revolution, though mostly for adolescents and young adults.

Acknowledgements

I would like to extend special thanks to Dr Eleanor Quince for her continuous support and enthusiasm throughout the research and writing of my dissertation. It truly made the process enjoyable! I also want to thank my wonderful friends and family for their unwavering support throughout the whole dissertation process, and for remaining enthusiastic throughout the many rounds of proofreading.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Sexual Offences Act 1967 (1967), *UK Parliament* <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/relationships/collections1/sexual-offences-act-1967/sexual-offences-act-1967/#:~:text=After%20passing%20all%20stages%20in,the%20age%20of%20twenty%2Done> [Accessed 7 April 2024]

Mass Observation Directive Responses

A3153's response to 2005 Autumn directive part 1 (2005), *Mass Observation Project* < https://www-massobservationproject-amdigital-co-uk.soton.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Detail/a3153s-response-to-2005-autumn-directive-part-1/19505323?item=19505324> [Accessed 1 March 2024].

A883's response to 2005 Autumn directive part 1 (2005), Mass Observation Project <https://www-massobservationproject-amdigital-co-uk.soton.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Detail/a883s-response-to-2005-autumn-directive-part-1/19505328?item=19505332> [Accessed 1 March 2024]

B1442's response to 2005 Autumn directive part 1 (2005), *Mass Observation Project* <https://www-massobservationproject-amdigital-co-uk.soton.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Detail/b1442s-response-to-2005-autumn-directive-part-1/19505380?item=19505385> [Accessed 1 March 2024]

B3252's response to 2005 Autumn directive part 1 (2005), Mass Observation Project <https://www-massobservationproject-amdigital-co-uk.soton.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Detail/b3252s-response-to-2005-autumn-directive-part-1/19505394> [Accessed 1 March 2024]

B3438's response to 2005 Autumn directive part 1 (2005), *Mass Observation Project* <https://www-massobservationproject-amdigital-co-uk.soton.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Detail/b3438s-response-to-2005-autumn-directive-part-1/19505403> [Accessed 2 March 2024]

B3570's response to 2005 Autumn directive part 1 (2005), *Mass Observation Project* <https://www-massobservationproject-amdigital-co-uk.soton.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Detail/b3570s-response-to-2005-autumn-directive-part-1/19505361> [Accessed 2 March 2024]

M1017's response to 1990 Summer directive part 1 (1995), *Mass Observation Project* <https://www-massobservationproject-amdigital-co-uk.soton.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Detail/m1017s-response-to-1990-summer-directive-part-1/9438651?item=9438653> [Accessed 22 March 2024]

T2150's response to 1990 Summer directive part 1 (1990), *Mass Observation Project* <https://www-massobservationproject-amdigital-co-uk.soton.idm.oclc.org/Documents/Detail/t2150s-response-to-1990-summer-directive-part-1/8316405?item=8316412> [Accessed 22 March 2024]

Secondary Sources

Articles

Aries, Elizabeth and Fern Johnson, 'Close friendship in adulthood: conversational content between same-sex friends', *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, 9 (1983), 1183-1196

Bird, Sharon R., 'Welcome to the Men's Club: Homosociality and the Maintenance of Hegemonic Masculinity', Gender and Society, 10 (1996), 120-132

Brewitt-Taylor, Sam, 'Christianity and the Invention of the Sexual Revolution in Britain, 1963-1967', *The Historical Journal,* 60 (2017), 519-546

Brown, Callum, 'Sex, Religion, and the Single Woman c.1950-75: The Importance of a 'Short' Sexual Revolution to the English Religious Crisis of the Sixties', *Twentieth Century British History,* 22 (2011), 189-215

Chettiar, Teri, 'Counselling for connection: making queer relationships during Britain's sexual revolution', *Med Humanit,* 49 (2022), 182-192

Cook, Hera 'Getting 'foolishly hot and bothered'? Parents and teachers and sex education in the 1940s', Sex Education*,* 12 (2011), 555-567

Delap, Lucy, 'Feminism, Masculinities and Emotional Politics in Late Twentieth Century Britain', *Cultural and Social History*, 15 (2018), 571-593

Flood, Michael, 'Men, Sex, and Homosociality: How Bonds between Men Shape Their Sexual Relations with Women, *Men and Masculinities*, 10 (2008), 339-359

Hamilton, Carrie, 'Moving feelings: nationalism, feminism and the emotions of politics,' *Oral History Society,* 39, (2010), 85-94

Hammarén, Nils, and Thomas Johansson, 'Homosociality: In Between Power and Intimacy', SAGE Open, 4 (2014), 1-11

Hampshire, James and Jane Lewis, 'The Ravage of Permissiveness': Sex Education and the Permissive Society,' *Twentieth Century British History,* 15 (2004), 290-312

Hughes, Celia, 'The Struggle of the Male Self: A New Left Activist and His 1961 Diary', *Journal of British Studies,* 54 (2015), 898-925

Hughes, Celia, 'Young Socialist Men in 1960s Britain: Subjectivity and Sociability', 73 (2012), *History Workshop Journal,* 170-192

Lipman-Blumen, Jean, 'Toward a Homosocial Theory of Sex Roles: An Explanation of the Sex Segregation of Social Institutions,' *Signs Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 1 (1976), 15-31

Mac an Ghaill, Mairtin, 'Rethinking (Male) Gendered Sexualities: What About the British Heteros?', *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 8 (2000), 195-212

Redman, Peter and others, 'Boys Bonding: Same-sex friendship, the unconscious and heterosexual discourse', *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 23 (2002), 179-191

Summerfield, Penny, 'Mass-Observation: Social Research or Social Movement?,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 20 (1985), 439-452

Books

Butler, Judith, *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of "sex"* (London, Routledge: 1993)

Connell, R. W., *Gender, and power: Society, the person, and sexual politics* (Stanford, Stanford University Press: 1987)

Hofstede, Geert, *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1980)

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York, Columbia University Press: 2016)

Szreter, Simon and Kate Fisher, *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution: Intimate Life in England 1918-1963* (New York, Cambridge University Press: 2010)

Weeks, Jeffrey, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800,* 3rd edn (London: Routledge, 2017

AIDS: How did the British media influence and react to the Government 'Don't Die of Ignorance' campaign, 1981 - 1989?

Madeline Dalley

Abstract: *In 1987 the Department of Health and Social Security delivered a leaflet to every household in the country detailing the danger AIDS posed to the public. Coinciding with this leaflet drop was a television advertisement. Voiced by John Hurt alongside ominous music, the advert depicted a large tombstone with the word 'AIDS' carved into it. Both the leaflet and television advertisement could be distilled down to one simple message: 'Don't Die of Ignorance.' It is these materials that would become the most recognisable, and infamous, elements of the government response to AIDS in the United Kingdom. This chapter examines the early years of the AIDS epidemic and the media response to AIDS before any real government action was taken to combat the disease. It focuses on two interconnected questions; what necessitated the government campaign and why no significant government response was initiated sooner. Ultimately the chapter concludes that the 'othering' of AIDS in the mainstream press as a 'Gay Plague' prevented any significant government response before 1987 as it was seen as a taboo subject among both government ministers and the public. Likewise, the later sensationalism, attention and hysteria around AIDS present in the mainstream media meant that it was an issue the Government could no longer ignore.*

AIDS before the Don't Die of Ignorance campaign 1981-1986

The first five years of the AIDS epidemic from 1981 to early 1986 can be categorised as a period of misinformation, lack of information and inaction from the British Thatcher government. Throughout this period and beyond, AIDS was viewed as a taboo subject and 'othered' owing to its early identification in gay men, drug users and other marginalised communities. At this time, the number of cases of HIV and AIDS were assumed to be low in the UK. Epidemiologist Malcolm Rees states that "by 1985 there were totals of only 220 diagnosed and 159 reported cases in the UK" although he points out the likely underreporting at this time.[106] An article in the journal *Daedalus* presents similar statistics stating, "by the end of 1983, 29 cases had been reported, and by the end of 1985, 271."[107] However, at a time when AIDS was seen as a "death sentence", these cases were not insignificant.[108] While it is true that not much was known about HIV and AIDS, the government had little interest in funding research or raising awareness about the virus. One small exception was several grants from

[106] Malcolm Rees, 'Official Estimates and AIDS Epidemiology', *International Journal of STD & AIDS*, 2 (1991) 240-245 (241).
[107] Fox and others, p. 95.
[108] Norman Fowler, *AIDS: Don't Die of Prejudice* (London: Biteback Publishing Ltd, 2014) p. IX.

the *Medical Research Council*. During 1983, "three special project grants for AIDS research were awarded" which totalled around £179,000 over three years.[109] However, these grants had little impact on the AIDS response at the time due to the low monetary sum and the MRC's "commitment to basic science rather than to the practical end of the research spectrum."[110] As such, it was gay communities that attempted to understand AIDS and spread awareness of its symptoms. The mainstream British media response was slow to begin with, however, by 1984 it began to cover AIDS extensively. The presentation of AIDS in the mainstream press had a significant influence on public opinion. Historian Peter Beharrell states "It was the early media coverage which provided the context within which the later government campaign had to operate - and against which it often had to work."[111] This chapter will focus on the relationship between the press, public opinion and government policy. Particularly, what prevented the government from responding sooner and how the press coverage eventually necessitated the *DDI* campaign in 1986. While there is some consideration of the role of television especially in the first chapter, the primary focus will be on newspapers. This is because unlike television, where "much of the reporting was framed within the confines of the liberal/medical approach to AIDS," newspapers, especially tabloids, offered much more explicit opinions about the epidemic.[112] For the most part, this chapter will focus on the right-leaning *Daily Mail* and left-leaning *The Mirror*, two of the most widely circulated newspapers during the 1980s. However, to give a more well-rounded view other newspapers such as *The Sunday Times*, *The Observer* and marginal gay publications such as *Gay News* and *Gay Times* will also be analysed. Likewise, to get perspective from those in government official archived communications between ministers, parliamentary debates and a 2014 book by Norman Fowler, Secretary of State for Health and Social Security at the time of the campaign, will be assessed. While all will be used with caution, extra care will be taken with Fowler's book as, due to his subsequent campaigning for AIDS and LGBT rights, he has likely constructed it in a way that presents his role in the government AIDS policies favourably.[113]

---

[109] *The Possibilities for Research on Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome in the UK* (1 April 1984) *Infected Blood Inquiry*, <https://www.infectedbloodinquiry.org.uk/evidence/mack0000945-possibilities-research-acquired-immune-deficiency-syndrome-uk-01-apr-1984> [accessed 4 April 2024].

[110] Virginia Berridge, *AIDS in the UK: The Making of a Policy, 1981-1994* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) p. 33.

[111] Peter Beharrell, 'News Variations' in *The Circuit of Mass Communication: Media Strategies, Representation and Audience Reception in the AIDS Crisis*, ed. by David Miller, Jenny Kitzinger, Kevin Williams and Peter Beharrell (London: SAGE Publications, 1998) p. 46

[112] Kevin Williams and David Miller, 'Producing AIDS News' in *The Circuit of Mass Communication: Media Strategies, Representation and Audience Reception in the AIDS Crisis*, ed. by David Miller, Jenny Kitzinger, Kevin Williams and Peter Beharrell (London: SAGE Publications, 1998) p.166.

[113] John Johnson, *Lord Speaker Norman Fowler Is Stepping Down Early To Campaign On HIV And AIDS* (2021) *Politics Home* <https://www.politicshome.com/news/article/lord-speaker-norman-fowler-step-down-campaign-hiv-aids> [accessed 30 March 2024].

Berridge has identified the period as a time where policy "was being formed in a 'bottom-up' not a 'top-down' way… a period of 'self-help' for both gays and clinicians."[114] Similarly, historian Samuel Hallsor argues "the first response to the new epidemic was of self-help from within the gay community."[115] This characterisation from both historians are apt for the period. In the early years, much of the funding of research and attempts to increase awareness came from gay organisations. Likewise, the gay press aided these organisations by publishing their findings. For example, the *Terry Higgins Trust*, named after one of the first known people to die of an AIDS-related illness in the UK, was created in 1982 to raise money for research and awareness of AIDS.[116] The trust, renamed the *Terrence Higgins Trust* in 1983, gained charitable status in 1984 and began offering direct services such as a helpline, a 'buddy system' and support groups.[117] Correspondingly, gay magazines and newspapers such as *Gay News* and *Gay Times* wrote extensively about AIDS and included adverts and other information from the THT. During this early period, from 1981 to around 1984, AIDS information and awareness were primarily produced by and targeted towards gay men. While it was not the first article in the UK gay press to refer to AIDS, a 1983 article in *Gay News* was one of the first newspapers to offer a detailed list of symptoms and information on how to reduce the risk of developing AIDS.[118] The language used in the article is direct, explicitly listing sexual behaviours that were known to increase the risk of contracting STDs such as "Oral-anal contact ("rimming")", Fisting (both Giving and receiving)" and "Active or passive rectal intercourse (use of condoms may be helpful)."[119] This direct language is emblematic of the approach from gay communities which was centred on education and awareness. In an interview for the 1985 *Panorama* documentary *AIDS: The Race for a Cure* Tony Whitehead, first chair of the THT's steering committee, emphasised the positive feedback when "direct, straightforward advice" was given such as that present in the article.[120] Whitehead later reiterated this sentiment in a 2022 speech stating, "it was important to write [advice]

---

[114] Ibid, p. 12.
[115] Hallsor, p. 57.
[116] anon., *How it all began* (n.d.) *Terrence Higgins Trust* <https://www.tht.org.uk/our-work/about-our-charity/our-history/how-it-all-began> [accessed 17 March 2024].
Berridge, pp.15-16.
[117] *How it all began.*
Berridge, p. 21.
Anon. 'Worried or concerned about A.I.D.S.?' advertisement, *Gay Times*, November 1984, p. 76 <https://www.proquest.com/lgbtmashell/magazines/advertisement-terrence-higgins-trust/docview/2075496987/sem-2?accountid=13963> [accessed 18 March 2024].
Anon. 'The Human Face of AIDS', *Gay Times*, October 1984, pp. 6-8 <https://www.proquest.com/lgbtmashell/magazines/human-face-aids/docview/2075500256/sem-2?accountid=13963> [accessed 18 March 2024].
[118] Richard Fisher, 'Our Health: AIDS & Hepatitis', *Gay Times*, 31 March 1983, pp. 15-16 <https://www.proquest.com/lgbtmashell/newspapers/biggest-problem-is-ignorance/docview/2100272206/sem-2?accountid=13963> [accessed 19 March 2024].
[119] Ibid.
[120] anon., *Panorama AIDS: The Race for a Cure*, online video, Box of Broadcasts, 2 Dec 1985 <https://learningonscreen.ac.uk/ondemand/index.php/prog/RT403EB0?bcast=119778416> [accessed 20 March 2024].

in the way that reached the communities that needed to know."[121] This education-centred approach is also exemplified in the quote from Martyn Butler, a founder of the THT, "The biggest problem is ignorance."[122]

A *Gay Times* 'agony aunt' style article from 1984 argues similarly that "From other letters that we have received it is clear that, besides rational fears about AIDS, there is also a lot of ignorance about the illness amongst members of the gay community".[123] The article advocates for a more balanced and nuanced approach to AIDS without sensationalising the disease. Like many other articles in the gay press about AIDS in this period, the article ends with information on the THT helpline.[124] This education and awareness-based approach utilising direct language established a precedent for the later *DDI* campaign. Gay organisations and the press were aware of the effect that the stigma surrounding AIDS could pose to the UK's LGBT community. Early into the epidemic these gay organisations and press looked to the effect the stigma was having in North America where the scale of the epidemic was greater.[125] For example, a November 1982 article from *Gay News* presented the arguments from Canadian gay activists that "the real epidemic is 'gay panic.'"[126] The article later elaborates that "Far more dangerous for the gay community as a whole is the panic and paranoia that gay men are currently experiencing over health issues."[127] It is important to note that this was written at a time when the extent and danger of AIDS was not fully understood which explains the downplaying of the danger of AIDS present in the article. However, Michael Lynch's early calls for governments to educate against "the linkage of gayness or 'the Homosexual lifestyle' with illness" as well as the "fearmongering and anti-sexual politics" in the North American press is still significant.[128] The presentation of issues happening in North America shows an awareness that presenting AIDS as a 'gay disease' could do harm to gay communities. This, along with the goal of prevention, explains the use of an education-based approach to AIDS. Despite efforts from the gay press and organisations, this association with AIDS and homosexuals would remain among the general public and mainstream press.

---

[121] Tony Whitehead in Terrence Higgins Trust, *Tony Whitehead, former Chair of Trustees at our public archive launch*, online video recording <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N0wW84ldet4&ab_channel=TerrenceHigginsTrust> [accessed 20 March 2024].
[122] Ibid.
[123] anon., 'AIDS Fears', *Gay Times*, September 1984, p. 59 <https://www.proquest.com/lgbtmashell/magazines/aids-fears/docview/2075496942/sem-2?accountid=13963> [accessed 19 March 2024].
[124] Ibid.
[125] Fox, p. 104.
[126] anon., 'The real epidemic is 'gay panic'', *Gay News*, 11 November 1982, p. 8 <https://www.proquest.com/lgbtmashell/newspapers/real-epidemic-is-gay-panic/docview/2100287515/sem-2?accountid=13963> [accessed 12 March 2024].
[127] Ibid.
[128] Ibid.

While the gay press and organisations wanted to educate gay men about the dangers of AIDS they had to be careful not to be written off by those they intended to target as "killjoys", shame those for having gay sex or create a sense of panic.[129] In the 1983 *Gay News* article, a quote from Butler states that "there is no reason why people can't continue to go out, dance and have a good time."[130] Another 'agony aunt' style article from *Gay News* in 1984 also illustrates this tension clearly. A gay man who wrote in to *Gay News* states that they were thrown "into a complete panic" as a person they have "not slept with" had been diagnosed with AIDS.[131] They go on to say that they had "stopped sleeping with people recently because of this fear."[132] In response to the letter, the writer states if you can confirm that you have had sexual contact with someone who has slept with the AIDS sufferer then…go to your local clinic to be screened."[133] The writer goes on to say, "from your long letter which we have only printed in part, you seem to be using your fear of AIDS to inflict punishment on yourself for being gay" to which they encourage the person who wrote in to "confront [their]…feelings of guilt." [134] Here the writer attempts to ease the panic, shame and ignorance attached to AIDS as well as inform the person writing in and the reader of a more rational response. The *DDI* campaign would later have to deal with a similar tension.

Unlike the marginal gay press, mainstream newspapers, especially tabloid papers, had a far more significant reach. A report from Communications Management Inc. states that in 1985 daily newspapers had a circulation of over 15 million newspapers distributed daily.[135] Likewise, Sunday newspapers had just under 2 million newspapers distributed per week.[136] For comparison, the most popular UK gay newspaper of this period, *Gay News*, had a circulation of "approximately 18,000 copies" at its height in the 1970s.[137] The newspaper ceased publication in April 1983 and would be replaced by *Gay Times* in 1984. While the gay press does give an important understanding of how the LGBT community responded to AIDS, due to its widespread circulation, how AIDS was presented in mainstream newspapers had a more significant influence on the general public's understanding of the disease. In the mainstream UK press, AIDS was confined to short, passing mentions in the subject-specific sections such as 'World News' or 'Medicine' or was simply ignored. This continued until around 1983-1984. In the instances where mainstream newspapers did mention AIDS,

[129] 'Our Health: AIDS & Hepatitis', p. 15.
[130] Ibid.
[131] anon., 'Worried about AIDS', *Gay Times*, August 1984, p. 61 <https://www.proquest.com/lgbtmashell/magazines/worried-about-aids/docview/2075492679/sem-2?accountid=13963> [accessed 19 March 2024].
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Communications Management Inc., *Sixty Years of Daily Newspaper Circulation Trends* (Canada: Communications Management Inc, 2011) p. 17.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Nicky Hilton, *Gay News Photographic Archive* (2015) *Bishopsgate Institute* <https://www.bishopsgate.org.uk/collections/gay-news-photographic-archive> [accessed 7 April 2024].

misinformation, sensationalism and 'othering' was rife. For example, a March 1983 article from the right-leaning broadsheet newspaper *The Sunday Times* was published with the title "What killed gay plague man".[138] The term 'gay plague', and other adjacent terms such as 'gay cancer', were used extensively in media coverage of AIDS both in the UK and across the world after its origin in the United States press. The article correctly stated that "AIDS is caused by a virus transmitted sexually" and that "semen has been shown to be absorbed into the body from the rectum and to depress the immune system that provides the body's defence against invading germs."[139] While it is true that HIV can be passed on through semen, it can also be passed on through other bodily fluids such as blood, breast milk and vaginal fluids.[140] The newspaper was aware of the ability to transmit HIV via blood as it was mentioned several times in an article published seven months prior in September 1982.[141] The article specifically focuses in on a form of transmission via sexual acts commonly associated with gay men. As such, while the information in the article may not be incorrect, the decision to omit other forms of transmission implies AIDS is only a concern for the 'other', the gay community rather than the presumed heterosexual audience. As lawyer Phillip Thomas wrote in 1994, "Health and sickness, normal and abnormal, safety and danger: all are contained within the polarised frameworks of family and homosexuality."[142] The 1982 *Sunday Times* article does mention heterosexual people who have been diagnosed with AIDS, however, it is accompanied by the caveat that "most of the heterosexuals are heroin addicts who could well have been exposed to blood by needle-sharing."[143] Again, the article presents a 'us' and 'them' dichotomy of those belonging to 'high risk groups' and those who fit within social norms of the time to its readers. Historian and AIDS activist Simon Watney argues "In the early years of the epidemic so much attention was paid to the social groups that were affected first, that it was widely presented as if it were somehow a result of simply being" part of these 'high risk groups.'[144] Unlike many of the articles in the gay press previously discussed which attempt to educate on safer sex practices, many of the mainstream articles from this period are much more alarmist in their presentation. A 1983 article from the left-leaning, then broadsheet newspaper *The Observer* iterates Dr Ian Weller's assertion that "it is impossible not to scaremonger when talking about AIDS" due to the growing rate of infection in the United States and the increasing number of

---

[138] John Bames, 'What killed gay plague man?', *The Sunday Times*, 27 March 1983, p. 20 <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/FP1802227099/STHA?u=unisoton&sid=bookmark-STHA&xid=1dbdfee8> [accessed 12 March 2024].
[139] Ibid.
[140] Steven Deeks and others, 'HIV infection', *Nature Reviews Disease Primers,* 1 (2015) 1-22 (6-7).
[141] Will Ellsworth-Jones, 'Mystery new killer disease', *The Sunday Times*, 5 September 1982, p. 16 < https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/FP1800880812/STHA?u=unisoton&sid=bookmark-STHA&xid=4e60028c> [accessed 12 March 2024].
[142] Phillip Thomas, 'The Nuclear Family, Ideology and AIDS in the Thatcher Years', *Feminist Legal Studies* 1 (1994) 23-44 (26).
[143] Bames, p.20.
[144] Simon Watney, 'Taking Liberties: An introduction', in *Taking Liberties*, ed. by Erica Carter and Simon Watney (London: Serpent's Tail, 1989) p. 19.

cases found in the UK at the time.[145] The body of *The Observer* article is more sympathetic to gay men than other newspapers such as *The Sunday Times* articles. It does offer the perspective of the AIDS activist Mel Rosen's reminder that gay men "are victims not the cause, of that plague."[146] Despite this, the chosen title of the article "London gay plague alert", connotes a sense of sensationalism and 'othering' also present in *The Sunday Times* articles.

The 1983 BBC Horizon documentary *Killer in the Village* was one of the first mainstream television programs to engage with AIDS in detail. The documentary focused on the emergence and spread of the epidemic in the United States, investigating the cause of the disease. In the closing lines the narrator stated "AIDS has already arrived in Britain. Do we already have the hidden seeds of an epidemic?"[147] Already a popular documentary series that aired on the BBC, the documentary was able to reach larger and more diverse audiences than the gay press and the passing mentions of AIDS in mainstream newspapers could. The impact of this documentary is notable. On one hand it helped to raise awareness of AIDS at a time where there were relatively few cases in the UK. At the start of the documentary there is a brief mention of the THT and its work in research and education on AIDS. In the oral history podcast *Hearing Our Stories* a volunteer from the LGBT charity *Opening Doors*, states that, despite some issues in its presentation and messaging, in the documentary there is some "understanding and certainly an attempt to explain" AIDS to the largely heterosexual audience it was made for.[148] The program also brought information about AIDS to the mainstream press as many newspapers reviewed the programme. For example, the first two times the *Daily Mail* used the term AIDS, on the 25th and 26th of April 1983, was in a review of the documentary. The article by journalist Herbert Kretzmer, which goes into more detail, describes the documentary as "a sobering programme about the mounting sense of shock and incomprehension in the U.S. as the mysterious killer gathers force."[149] On the other hand, the documentary helped to fuel an increasing sense of 'othering' and especially a sense of panic about AIDS already present in the mainstream UK media that would grow significantly in the subsequent years. A volunteer on the podcast states that viewers and the media were "cherry picking" and "confirming…the homophobic thoughts and feelings and narratives they already had."[150] As such, they argue that "no matter how positive or non-sensationalist the story is

[145] Robin McKie, 'London gay plague alert', *The Observer,* 22 May 1983, p. 4 <https://www.proquest.com/hnpguardianobserver/historical-newspapers/london-gay-plague-alert/docview/476833156/sem-2?accountid=13963> [accessed 12 March 2024].
[146] Ibid.
[147] *Horizon: Killer in the Village*, online video, BBC iPlayer, 25 Apr 1983 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p01z2lbp/horizon-19821983-killer-in-the-village> [accessed 12 March 2024].
[148] Matthew Linfoot and others, 'episode 1', Hearing Our Stories: LGBTQ+ Lives and the BBC (2023) [accessed 7 April 2024].
[149] Herbert Kretzmer, 'A new plague hits the world', *Daily Mail*, 26 April 1983, p. 24 <https://link-gale-com.soton.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/EE1861642717/DMHA?u=unisoton&sid=bookmark-DMHA&xid=a2c276fc> [accessed 12 March 2024].
[150] Linfoot, "episode 1".

presented," the press and others "against" the gay community will pick and choose what they write about.[151] This picking and choosing can be seen in the Kretzmer article when it states "little wonder that some people of suspicious mind have taken to calling it the Gay plague."[152] This early press coverage in both right and left-leaning newspapers, especially the 'othering' and increasing sensationalism, present early in the AIDS epidemic lay the foundation of mainstream press coverage for AIDS in the UK which would later be responded to by the *DDI* campaign.

From 1984 to 1986, fuelled in part by the realisation that AIDS could affect heterosexual populations as well as the increasing sensationalism of headlines, AIDS became a much more prominent news item in the mainstream press. As a result, there was an increasing sense of paranoia surrounding AIDS. As author and THT employee Colin Clews recalls, "I began work [at the THT] in September [1984] and things were incredibly quiet; we had only one telephone and it barely rang all day. "[153] They continue that "By the time I left the Trust, in October 1985, we'd expanded to two offices and a lot more telephones. Not because of any increased concern about people with AIDS but because of the hysteria generated by the Press." [154] This hysteria generated by the press can be seen in the extensively used sensationalist AIDS headlines. Examples between 1984 and 1986 include the *Daily Mail* headline "AIDS ALERT AFTER THREE BABIES DIE" accompanied with the tagline "Gay blood doner blamed for the tragedy", *The Sunday Telegraph* headline "BABIES OF THE 'AIDS CAPITAL'" and the *Sunday Mirror* headline "AIDS PRIEST'S DOUBLE LIFE".[155] While many newspapers recognised AIDS as a disease that disproportionately affected gay men, most of the articles focused on heterosexual victims of the disease. For instance, *The Sunday Telegraph* article mentions the "alarming rate" AIDS was spreading to the "heterosexual community."[156] Stories focusing specifically on homosexual AIDS patients were notably lacking during this period despite numerous in-depth articles focused on heterosexual victims, such as the August 1985 *The Sunday Times* article about haemophiliac John Coffee's fight against AIDS.[157] Perhaps one the most overt

[151] Ibid.
[152] Kretzemer, p. 24.
[153] Colin Clews, *1984-85. Media: AIDS and the British Press* (2013) *Gay in the 80s* <https://www.gayinthe80s.com/2013/01/1984-85-media-aids-and-the-british-press/> [accessed 27 March 2024].
[154] Ibid.
[155] Richard Shears, 'AIDS alert after three babies die', 16 November 1984, p. 2 <https://link-gale-com.soton.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/EE1861418653/DMHA?u=unisoton&sid=bookmark-DMHA&xid=f4675519> [accessed 30 March 2024].
Carole Dawson, 'Babies of the 'Aids capital', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 13 April 1986, p. 3 <https://link-gale-com.soton.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/IO0701512782/TGRH?u=unisoton&sid=bookmark-TGRH&xid=9e2d125f> [accessed 29 March 2024].
Tony Bushby, 'AIDS Priest's Double Life', *Sunday Mirror*, 3 February 1985, p. 5 <https://link-gale-com.soton.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/ZJHDYS683725424/DMIR?u=unisoton&sid=bookmark-DMIR&xid=ecb153be> [accessed 30 March 2024].
[156] *The Sunday Telegraph,* 'AIDS alert after three babies die'.
[157] Tim McGirk, 'One man's fight against Aids', *The Sunday Times*, 11 August 1985, p. 15 <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/FP1801726653/STHA?u=unisoton&sid=bookmark-STHA&xid=672148c2> [accessed 29 March 2024].

examples of this is the first front page *Daily Mail* story about AIDS. Published on 19th November 1984, the article focused on the AIDS related death of a haemophiliac. The headline "AIDS VIRUS KILLS MAN IN BRITAIN" implies that this was one of the first deaths, however, as the article states on the next page, at this time there had been "about 90 [cases] in Britain, including 37 deaths."[158] The presentation of the article suggests that this victim was one of the first to die in the UK, de-emphasising the prior deaths of largely homosexual men. As a result, the overall presentation in the mainstream press was that gay men suffering because of AIDS were less of a concern than heterosexual AIDS patients. In 2014, Clews reflected that presentations in the mainstream press, along with many similar articles at the time "was an interesting exercise in establishing a hierarchy of concern. Gays were at the bottom of the list".[159] The 1985 *Panorama* documentary *Race for a Cure* had a similar effect. The documentary, like much of the newspaper representation, emphasised that AIDS could be spread among heterosexuals. Early in the program, there is an interview with AIDS patients Lauren and Patrick Burk. The narrator states "their baby son, Dwight, caught AIDS from his mother Lauren in pregnancy. She had been infected in normal sexual intercourse."[160] The choice to present a traditional nuclear family affected by AIDS is significant as it challenges the perception presented in the mainstream media that AIDS was not a concern for heterosexual populations. This was reflective of a wider change in the mainstream presentation of AIDS. After 1984 there was an increasing interest in the threat AIDS posed to the heterosexual community. In a review of the programme, the *Daily Mail* stated, "All those hopeful prejudices we've been sharing about AIDS – that this ghastly plague is mainly in America and mainly among homosexuals – no longer stand up."[161] Here the *Daily Mail* makes explicit the implied 'othering' of homosexuals in its previous coverage of AIDS. When AIDS was thought to be confined to homosexuals and Americans, the paper largely ignored the disease. However, once the *Daily Mail* believed it could affect heterosexuals, AIDS was now a concern to the newspaper. As the graphs in Appendix A show, in both the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Mirror* the use of the word AIDS in separate articles increased significantly in 1985 and remained or increased until 1987. The rising hysteria and increased awareness that AIDS could be transmitted to heterosexuals made AIDS an issue that was much harder for the government to ignore than when it was limited to historically marginalised communities.

Fowler suggested that "by the beginning of 1986, AIDS cases were beginning to increase alarmingly," and that "we [the government] were struggling to explain to the public the danger they

---

[158] John Illman, 'AIDS VIRUS KILLS MAN IN BRITAIN', *Dail Mail,* 19 November 1984, pp. 1-2 <https://link-gale-com.soton.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/EE1861617039/DMHA?u=unisoton&sid=bookmark-DMHA&xid=e0259d09> [accessed 27 March 2024].
[159] Clews, *Gay in the 80s.*
[160] *Panorama: AIDS, the Race for a Cure*.
[161] Elizabeth Cowley, 'Panorama', *Daily Mail,* 2 December 1985, p. 26 <https://link-gale-com.soton.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/EE1861186291/DMHA?u=unisoton&sid=bookmark-DMHA&xid=8103d68c> [accessed 20 March 2024].

faced." To Fowler, these were the primary reasons why the campaign was implemented in 1986. [162] While Fowler's claim that AIDS cases were increasing rapidly in 1986 is accurate, as Rees points out, several factors could have caused this increase. Rees suggests "The introduction of the HIV test during 1984 meant that doctors were subsequently able to diagnose AIDS with greater confidence" and increasing "AIDS Awareness" could have affected these statistics.[163] The increasing AIDS cases certainly could have incentivised the government to act, however, the role of the hysteria in the press and the understanding that AIDS could be transmitted to heterosexual people was a more significant factor. Historian John Street argues similarly that "The spread of AIDS came to be seen as a 'threat' for which crisis action was needed. This impression was fostered in the pages of tabloid papers, and in a wave of television documentaries. The government had to be seen to act."[164] Likewise, Berridge argues "against this backdrop of growing fear about heterosexual spread… political interest was finally ignited."[165]

Alongside the growing fear of transmission among heterosexuals and the hysteria of the press, pressure to act was placed on the government from the gay press and organisations, calls from the Chief Medical Officer Donald Acheson and members of parliament. For example, the THT held its second national AIDS conference in January 1986. An article in *Gay Scotland* stated that during the conference the THT argued "'too much is being done by gay people' – they want the Government to do more, and spend much more."[166] However, the marginality of the THT and the conference, which only 270 attended, meant that their calls were largely ignored by the government. Perhaps more significant was the role of Acheson and of members of the House of Commons and House of Lords. Acheson was an important advisor and driving force of the *DDI* campaign. In a keynote address at the 1986 AIDS International Symposium, Acheson stated "Now let us turn to the question of public policy which must be directed, first of all, at the control of the spread of the infection, and secondly, at provision of care for those who are affected."[167] Acheson and other public health officials saw the necessity for the government to act on AIDS. As Fox and others state, "there was a strong public-health lobby, headed by Acheson, pressing for action."[168] Similarly, in parliamentary debates, the issue of AIDS was first raised in 1985 by Conservative MP Raymond Gower who asked the government, "Does my hon. Friend agree that information from other countries…shows that there is a

[162] Fowler, AIDS Don't Die of Ignorance, p. 1.
[163] Rees, p. 241.
[164] John Street, 'A fall in interest? British AIDS policy, 1986–1990' in *AIDS and Contemporary History*, ed. by Virginia Berridge and Philip Strong (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) p. 224.
[165] Berridge, p. 100.
[166] Simon Taylor, 'AIDS and its Management', *Gay Scotland*, January 1986, p. 3 <https://www.proquest.com/lgbtmashell/magazines/tht-meeting/docview/2216024482/sem-2?accountid=13963> [accessed 13 April 2024].
[167] Donald Acheson, 'Keynote Address: AIDS in the United Kingdom' in *AIDS Impact on Public Policy,* ed. by Robert Hummel and others (Plenum Press: New York, 1986) p. 132.
[168] Fox and others, p. 96

terrifying possibility that this disease will spread? Does he also agree that there is probably far too much complacency about the matter in this country?"[169] Queries into the government's action on AIDS both in the House of Commons and House of Lords increased in frequency throughout this period as public interest and the number of cases grew. As such, while the hysteria of the press and understanding that AIDS was spreading to heterosexuals was an important reason the government reacted when it did, the lobbying of other organisations and political interest in parliament were also powerful factors.

An important reason why the government did not react sooner was because HIV was predominantly transmitted via taboo behaviour such as sexual intercourse and injecting drugs. Likewise, it meant acknowledging homosexuals despite the "prevailing notions that tolerance was contingent on privacy, discretion, and a certain invisibility."[170] There was no vaccine or cure to HIV and AIDS, therefore, the government response would have to focus on public behaviour. This meant that politicians would have to interact with uncomfortable subject matter. As Berridge states "For politicians, it meant entanglement with areas and forms of behaviour which were normally regarded as unacceptable."[171] In Fowler's view, the government "needed a direct advertising campaign explaining how the virus was contracted and warning that there were no drugs or vaccinations that could be used to counter it."[172] Fowler goes on to state that "history had, in fact, already proven the efficacy of blunt sexual health advice."[173] Fowler uses examples from the campaigns against venereal disease during the First and Second World Wars. However, a much more recent precedent of messaging was present in the gay press and the tactics of the THT. Such blunt messaging was resisted by a significant part of the government, including Margret Thatcher herself. Fowler convincingly wrote that "standing in the way of such a blunt approach was the Iron Lady herself."[174] Likewise, a 1992 article from *The Guardian* stated that "Baroness Thatcher was kept out of the fight against AIDS as Prime Minister because she found the issue to be so distasteful."[175] The article also discusses how Thatcher and other ministers feared "that there would be a public backlash against the frank advertising."[176] This public backlash was feared due to the taboo nature of AIDS and its links to the gay community which many ministers, including Thatcher, did not want to be associated with. Additionally, in a letter to Norman Fowler from Nigel Wicks, they state "the prime minister…remains

[169] Raymond Gower, *House of Commons, Hansard's Parliamentary Debates: The Official Report* (11 February 1985, vol 73, col. 14) ((London: Hansard).
[170] Cook, 'AIDS, Mass Observation, and the Fate of the Permissive Turn', p. 246.
[171] Berridge, p. 100.
[172] Fowler, *Don't Die of Prejudice* p. 1.
[173] Ibid, p. 4.
[174] Ibid, p. 2.
[175] Chris Mihill, 'Sensitive' Thatcher kept out of drive against Aids, 27 August 1992, p. 6 <https://www.proquest.com/hnpguardianobserver/historical-newspapers/sensitive-thatcher-kept-out-drive-against-aids/docview/187239508/sem-2?accountid=13963> [accessed 31 March 2024].
[176] Ibid.

against certain parts of the advertisement."[177] It goes on to say, "to place advertisements in newspapers which every young person could read and learn of practices they never knew about, would in her view, do harm."[178] In a 1987 speech at the Conservative Party Conference, Thatcher made the infamous claim that "Children who need to be taught to respect traditional moral values are being taught that they have an inalienable right to be gay."[179] This, along with Section 28 that was introduced by her government in 1988 suggests that she believed young people could be influenced into being LGBT. As such, this again supports the idea that Thatcher and other ministers were opposed to blunt messaging.

Despite the slow response and resistance from some in the government, the first stages of what has come to be known as the *DDI* campaign, in the form of newspaper adverts, began in March 1986. The question of why there was no significant government response to AIDS implemented sooner can largely be distilled down to the belief that AIDS was a taboo subject for both government ministers and the public. The 'othering' of AIDS as a gay disease as well as the transmission of HIV through sexual intercourse is likely the primary reason that there was much resistance to reacting within the government. Due to this slow response, the work from the gay press and organisations proved to be vital for education in this period of the epidemic. In terms of what eventually necessitated the government to react, this can largely be explained by the sensationalism and hysteria of the mainstream press which grew especially after 1984. The recognition that HIV could be transmitted in heterosexuals helped to incite this hysteria and sensationalism in the press further. As a result, AIDS became an issue that could no longer be ignored. In the historiography, much attention has been focused on government policy or the press. While there is some consideration of the interconnected nature between the Government and the press, it is not the focal point. As such this chapter attempts to bridge the gap of the historiography in this area.

[177] Nigel Wicks, 'AIDS', 6 March 1986 in Norman Fowler, AIDS: Don't Die of Prejudice (London: Biteback Publishing Ltd, 2014) p. 4.
[178] Ibid.
[179] Margaret Thatcher, *Speech to Conservative Party Conference* (9 October 1987) *Margaret Thatcher Foundation* <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106941> [accessed 21 October 2024].

Bibliography

Primary sources

Books

Fowler, Norman, *AIDS: Don't Die of Prejudice* (London: Biteback Publishing Ltd, 2014)

Nigel Wicks, 'AIDS', 6 March 1986 in Norman Fowler, AIDS: Don't Die of Prejudice (London: Biteback Publishing Ltd, 2014)

Newspapers

anon. 'Worried or concerned about A.I.D.S.?' advertisement, *Gay Times*, November 1984, p. 76 <https://www.proquest.com/lgbtmashell/magazines/advertisement-terrence-higgins-trust/docview/2075496987/sem-2?accountid=13963> [accessed 18 March 2024]

anon. 'The Human Face of AIDS', *Gay Times*, October 1984, pp. 6-8 <https://www.proquest.com/lgbtmashell/magazines/human-face-aids/docview/2075500256/sem-2?accountid=13963> [accessed 18 March 2024]

anon., *How it all began* (n.d.) *Terrence Higgins Trust* <https://www.tht.org.uk/our-work/about-our-charity/our-history/how-it-all-began> [accessed 17 March 2024]

anon., *Panorama AIDS: The Race for a Cure*, online video, Box of Broadcasts, 2 Dec 1985 <https://learningonscreen.ac.uk/ondemand/index.php/prog/RT403EB0?bcast=119778416> [accessed 20 March 2024]

anon., 'AIDS Fears', *Gay Times*, September 1984, p. 59 <https://www.proquest.com/lgbtmashell/magazines/aids-fears/docview/2075496942/sem-2?accountid=13963> [accessed 19 March 2024]

anon., 'The real epidemic is 'gay panic'', *Gay News*, 11 November 1982, p. 8 <https://www.proquest.com/lgbtmashell/newspapers/real-epidemic-is-gay-panic/docview/2100287515/sem-2?accountid=13963> [accessed 12 March 2024]

anon., 'Worried about AIDS', *Gay Times*, August 1984, p. 61 <https://www.proquest.com/lgbtmashell/magazines/worried-about-aids/docview/2075492679/sem-2?accountid=13963> [accessed 19 March 2024]

anon., *The Possibilities for Research on Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome in the UK* (1 April 1984) *Infected Blood Inquiry*, <https://www.infectedbloodinquiry.org.uk/evidence/mack0000945-possibilities-research-acquired-immune-deficiency-syndrome-uk-01-apr-1984> [accessed 4 April 2024]

Bames John, 'What killed gay plague man?', *The Sunday Times*, 27 March 1983, p. 20 <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/FP1802227099/STHA?u=unisoton&sid=bookmark-STHA&xid=1dbdfee8> [accessed 12 March 2024]

Bushby, Tony, 'AIDS Priest's Double Life', *Sunday Mirror*, 3 February 1985, p. 5 <https://link-gale-com.soton.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/ZJHDYS683725424/DMIR?u=unisoton&sid=bookmark-DMIR&xid=ecb153be> [accessed 30 March 2024]

Cowley, Elizabeth, 'Panorama', *Daily Mail,* 2 December 1985, p. 26 <https://link-gale-com.soton.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/EE1861186291/DMHA?u=unisoton&sid=bookmark-DMHA&xid=8103d68c> [accessed 20 March 2024]

Dawson, Carole, ‘Babies of the ‘Aids capital’, *The Sunday Telegraph*, 13 April 1986, p. 3 <https://link-gale-com.soton.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/IO0701512782/TGRH?u=unisoton&sid=bookmark-TGRH&xid=9e2d125f> [accessed 29 March 2024]

Ellsworth-Jones, Will, ‘Mystery new killer disease’, *The Sunday Times*, 5 September 1982, p. 16 < https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/FP1800880812/STHA?u=unisoton&sid=bookmark-STHA&xid=4e60028c> [accessed 12 March 2024]

Fisher, Richard, ‘Our Health: AIDS & Hepatitis’, *Gay Times*, 31 March 1983, pp. 15-16 <https://www.proquest.com/lgbtmashell/newspapers/biggest-problem-is-ignorance/docview/2100272206/sem-2?accountid=13963> [accessed 19 March 2024]

Hilton, Nicky, *Gay News Photographic Archive* (2015) *Bishopsgate Institute* <https://www.bishopsgate.org.uk/collections/gay-news-photographic-archive> [accessed 7 April 2024]

Illman, John ‘AIDS VIRUS KILLS MAN IN BRITAIN’, *Dail Mail,* 19 November 1984, pp. 1-2 <https://link-gale-com.soton.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/EE1861617039/DMHA?u=unisoton&sid=bookmark-DMHA&xid=e0259d09> [accessed 27 March 2024]

Johnson, John, *Lord Speaker Norman Fowler Is Stepping Down Early To Campaign On HIV And AIDS* (2021) *Politics Home* <https://www.politicshome.com/news/article/lord-speaker-norman-fowler-step-down-campaign-hiv-aids> [accessed 30 March 2024]

Kretzmer, Herbert, ‘A new plague hits the world’, *Daily Mail*, 26 April 1983, p. 24 <https://link-gale-com.soton.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/EE1861642717/DMHA?u=unisoton&sid=bookmark-DMHA&xid=a2c276fc> [accessed 12 March 2024]

McGirk, Tim, ‘One man's fight against Aids’, *The Sunday Times*, 11 August 1985, p. 15 <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/FP1801726653/STHA?u=unisoton&sid=bookmark-STHA&xid=672148c2> [accessed 29 March 2024]

McKie, Robin, ‘London gay plague alert’, *The Observer,* 22 May 1983, p. 4 <https://www.proquest.com/hnpguardianobserver/historical-newspapers/london-gay-plague-alert/docview/476833156/sem-2?accountid=13963> [accessed 12 March 2024]

Mihill, Chris, 'Sensitive' Thatcher kept out of drive against Aids, 27 August 1992, p. 6 <https://www.proquest.com/hnpguardianobserver/historical-newspapers/sensitive-thatcher-kept-out-drive-against-aids/docview/187239508/sem-2?accountid=13963> [accessed 31 March 2024]

Shears, Richard ‘AIDS alert after three babies die’, 16 November 1984, p. 2 <https://link-gale-com.soton.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/EE1861418653/DMHA?u=unisoton&sid=bookmark-DMHA&xid=f4675519> [accessed 30 March 2024]

Taylor, Simon, ‘AIDS and its Management’, *Gay Scotland*, January 1986, p. 3 <https://www.proquest.com/lgbtmashell/magazines/tht-meeting/docview/2216024482/sem-2?accountid=13963> [accessed 13 April 2024]

Speeches/parliamentary debates

Acheson, Donald, ‘Keynote Address: AIDS in the United Kingdom’ in *AIDS Impact on Public Policy,* ed. by Robert Hummel and others (Plenum Press: New York, 1986)

Gower, Raymond, *House of Commons, Hansard's Parliamentary Debates: The Official Report* (11 February 1985, vol 73, col. 14) ((London: Hansard)

Thatcher, Margaret, *Speech to Conservative Party Conference* (9 October 1987) *Margaret Thatcher Foundation* <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106941> [accessed 21 October 2024]

Video/audio

Horizon: Killer in the Village, online video, BBC iPlayer, 25 Apr 1983 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p01z2lbp/horizon-19821983-killer-in-the-village> [accessed 12 March 2024]

Linfoot, Matthew, and others, 'episode 1', Hearing Our Stories: LGBTQ+ Lives and the BBC (2023) [accessed 7 April 2024]

Whitehead, Tony in Terrence Higgins Trust, *Tony Whitehead, former Chair of Trustees at our public archive launch*, online video recording <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N0wW84ldet4&ab_channel=TerrenceHigginsTrust> [accessed 20 March 2024]

Websites

Clews, Colin, *1984-85. Media: AIDS and the British Press* (2013) *Gay in the 80s* <https://www.gayinthe80s.com/2013/01/1984-85-media-aids-and-the-british-press/> [accessed 27 March 2024]

Secondary Sources

Articles

Cook, Matt, 'AIDS, Mass Observation, and the Fate of the Permissive Turn', Journal of the History of Sexuality, 26 (2017) 239-272

Hallsor, Samuel, 'A Comparison of the Early Responses to AIDS in the UK and the US', Journal of the Royal Medical Society, 24 (2017) 57-64

Deeks, Steven, and others, 'HIV infection', *Nature Reviews Disease Primers,* 1 (2015) 1-22

Fox, Daniel, Patricia Day and Rudolf Klein, 'The Power of Professionalism: Policies for AIDS in Britain, Sweden, and the United States', *Daedalus,* 118 (1989) 93-112

Rees, Malcolm, 'Official Estimates and AIDS Epidemiology', *International Journal of STD & AIDS*, 2 (1991) 240-245

Thomas, Phillip, 'The Nuclear Family, Ideology and AIDS in the Thatcher Years', *Feminist Legal Studies* 1 (1994) 23-44

Books

anon., Communications Management Inc., *Sixty Years of Daily Newspaper Circulation Trends* (Canada: Communications Management Inc, 2011)

Beharrell, Peter, 'News Variations' in *The Circuit of Mass Communication: Media Strategies, Representation and Audience Reception in the AIDS Crisis*, ed. by David Miller, Jenny Kitzinger, Kevin Williams and Peter Beharrell (London: SAGE Publications, 1998)

Berridge, Virginia *AIDS in the UK: The Making of a Policy, 1981-1994* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996)

Street, John, ‘A fall in interest? British AIDS policy, 1986–1990’ in *AIDS and Contemporary History*, ed. by Virginia Berridge and Philip Strong (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)

Watney, Simon, ‘Taking Liberties: An introduction’, in *Taking Liberties*, ed. by Erica Carter and Simon Watney (London: Serpent's Tail, 1989)

Williams, Kevin and David Miller, ‘Producing AIDS News’ in *The Circuit of Mass Communication: Media Strategies, Representation and Audience Reception in the AIDS Crisis*, ed. by David Miller, Jenny Kitzinger, Kevin Williams and Peter Beharrell (London: SAGE Publications, 1998)

Politicising Weather: What were the driving factors of changing attitudes towards weather modification between the 1950s and 2010s?

Joely Fake

Abstract: *For a millennium, weather has been a driving force in human history, sparking wars, witch hunts, and revolutions as an object beyond human control. However, technological advancements in World War II flipped the script and brought weather control to the forefront of scientific innovation, with uses in both civilian and military spheres. Following a period of experimentation in the early Cold War, the weaponization of cloud seeding through Operation Popeye in Vietnam caused once optimistic attitudes to turn sour. This operation exposed the negative implications of weather modification, forming a key part of the wider revisionist movement of the 1970s due to a growing consciousness of humanity's relationship with the climate as well as deepening distrust in the US government. This article will explore how public, government, and international attitudes towards weather control were shaped in the years following the exposé of Operation Popeye, pinpointing the driving factors and exploring its importance in the wider context of 1970s revisionism.*

Morality on the International Stage

3 July 1972. One of the most significant days in the history of human manipulation of the weather. Operation Popeye, the classified weaponization of cloud-seeding, was exposed to the public and the 'science-and-technology-can-fix-anything approach' was left behind.[180] Environmental modification is a murky field of research, muddled with conspiracy theories, popular culture references, and classified military operations. One of the most pertinent techniques of weather modification, amongst scientists and politicians alike, is cloud-seeding: the insertion of dry ice and silver iodide into clouds to produce precipitation.[181] Extensive research into this technique culminated in Operation Popeye, ultimately leading to public disapproval of weather modification and further fuelling anti-war sentiment. As the anti-war movement progressed, journalists played a key role in exposing the unethical warfare being carried out by US forces, alerting the public to the My Lai massacre, the use of napalm, and, eventually, the use of weather modification.[182] The late 1960s and early 1970s was the revisionist era, with beliefs in American exceptionalism beginning to waver as the public realised how

[180] Fleming, *Fixing the Sky*, p. 3.; S.M. Hersh, 'Rainmaking is Used as Weapon by US', *New York Times*, 3 July 1972, p. 1.

[181] General Electric. *History of Project Cirrus* (New York, 1952) pp. 3-12.; K.A. Brownlee, 'Statistical Evaluation of Cloud Seeding Operations', *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, 55.291: (1960) 446-53 (p.446).

[182] J.L. Aucoin, 'The Re-Emergence of American Investigative Journalism 1960–1975', *Journalism History*, 21.1: (1995) 3-15 (pp. 6-7).

unethical the Cold War and other US actions were, often due to revelations about Government misconduct, such as the Watergate scandal.[183] The environmental movement also played a role in attitude changes towards human modification of the weather, as understandings of human impacts on the earth, particularly through warfare, were realised. These revelations have remained dominant in the field of weather control, driving attitudes in the twenty-first century and gaining weight as the world seeks a solution to the climate crisis. The techno-solutionist ideals of the twenty-first century were developed in the post-war period and have become ever-present in the global fight against climate change. However, as shown through the public articles and debates over weather modification in the 1970s, there is another way forward. The history of environmental manipulation is inextricably intertwined with colonialism, meaning that it cannot be a part of our response to climate change if the future is to be sustainable. Understanding the history of the climate, and humanity's relationship with it, is crucial to informing this response, and the widespread pushback against weather control in the 1970s is a key part of this story.

The common theme that unites the impact of the environmental and anti-war movements on attitudes towards environmental modification, however, is the media and how they were publicised. The growth of investigative journalism was a key part of the Vietnam War – often dubbed the first 'television war' – and early 1970s, thus implying it has significance in the weather modification sphere too due to Operation Popeye.[184] Seymour Hersh was a prominent investigative journalist, exposing the My Lai massacre in 1969 and Operation Popeye in 1972, providing further details after Jack Anderson's initial disclosure in an article in 1971.[185] The prominence of investigative journalism in this period contributed to the growing negativity towards weather modification on ethical grounds due to the social and environmental unknowns that it caused. Whilst weather modification was not the most shocking weapon used by the US in Vietnam, it signalled the secrecy and disregard for ethics by the US forces. Weather is indiscriminate – as scientists stated before Operation Popeye went ahead – and therefore the effects would be felt by civilians and military alike.[186] This outraged the public in the context of growing anti-war sentiment and distrust in the US Government.[187] Hersh's condemnation of Operation Popeye marked the clear turning point for opposition towards weather

[183] Ibid, p. 3.
[184] A. Hoskins, *Televising War: From Vietnam to Iraq* (London: Continuum, 2004) p. 16.; J. Aucoin, *The Evolution of American Investigative Journalism* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007) pp. 48-49.; D. Hallin, 'The Uncensored War', *Peace Review*, 5.1: (1993) 51-57 (p. 51).
[185] S.M. Hersh, 'Lieutenant Accused of Murdering 109 Civilians ', *St Louis Post-Dispatch*, 13 November 1969, p. 1.; Hersh, 'Rainmaking is Used as Weapon by US', p. 1.; J. Anderson, 'U.S. Rainmakers Proving Success over Ho Chi Minh Trails', *The Washington Post,* 16 May 1971.
[186] 'Memorandum from the Deputy under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Kohler) to Secretary of State Rusk', 13 January 1967, p. 548.; Harper, *Make It Rain*, p. 218.
[187] Pew Research Center, *Trust in Government 1958-2015'*, p. 18.

modification and, in the age of Détente, sparked international cooperation for the regulation of weather modification.

Articles from journalists such as Anderson and Hersh – and responses to them – offer a clear indication of public attitudes towards weather modification, as do wider movements of the era. Environmentalism and human rights are synonymous with the early 1970s, especially in relation to the Cold War and its impacts. Paul Bock, a professor of hydrology, responded to Hersh's article, highlighting the concerns that emerged from Operation Popeye, stating that it 'stimulates further development of … environmental weapons', 'casts doubts on the peaceful role of … US scientists', and 'spreads distrust of the US'.[188] Bock's article also cements the connection between weather manipulation and nuclear weapons as both had the potential to cause extreme environmental and social damage. This implies that the public, like the Government, were viewing cloud-seeding as a variation of nuclear weapons, instead of as a domestic tool.[189] Like many historians of this period, public attitudes towards the wider Cold War were shifting. Public sentiment towards the Soviet Union was thawing, with a public favourability rating of 40% recorded in 1972 – 39% higher than in 1953.[190] Détente and the thawing of Cold War tensions were popular amongst the public: they were ready for a peaceful world. This, therefore, signals why public sentiment towards weather modification changed when its hostile uses were exposed. Previous weather modification projects had been discussed in relation to their benefits: relieving water shortages, preventing hurricanes, etc. Yet in Vietnam, it was used to essentially ruin the landscape, impacting civilians and military alike and potentially causing epidemics and famines.[191] Whilst rain may not cause as much direct damage as a bomb, its effects can still be disastrous, particularly in a war-torn country where the environment and infrastructure are already significantly damaged.[192] The Government may have perceived rain to be less harmful but the public did not. Geophysical warfare was not a popular concept in the age of anti-war and pro-environment protests.

Beyond cloud-seeding, Hersh revealed a distinct attitude difference between much of the public and the Government: the public was keen to move away from developing new weapons whereas the Government were less so. Despite engaging in Détente and signing treaties to limit nuclear weapons, the use of cloud-seeding in Vietnam indicated that the Government and military were willing to use alternatives, such as the weather, as weapons, something that the public and many

[188] P. Bock, 'Outlaw the Martial Rainmakers', *New York Times*, 18 July 1972, p. 32.
[189] Ibid, p. 32.
[190] M. Nincic, 'The American Public and the Soviet Union: The Domestic Context of Discontent', *Journal of Peace Research*, 22.4: (1985) 345-57 (p.348).
[191] Bock, 'Outlaw the Martial Rainmakers', p. 32.
[192] Ibid, p. 32.; Hersh, 'Rainmaking is Used as a Weapon by US', p. 1.

scientists rightly feared.[193] The tone of discussion surrounding Operation Popeye reveals this sentiment, with imagery of environmental destruction and human injustice appearing frequently.[194] For those who were concerned about justice – both human and environmental – this tore away any remnants of American exceptionalism and post-war euphoria, revising views of the Cold War to show that the US was not "saving the world from Communism": it was setting up a new system of weapons of mass destruction.[195] The media presentation of weather modification post-Operation Popeye starkly contrasts the futuristic, utopian view from the 1950s. Instead of colourful illustrations and films discussing its benefits, newspaper articles detailing the potential damage of this new category of weapon were written. This clearly depicts how previous post-war euphoria had come to an abrupt end, with a harsh realisation that the US was destroying the world alongside the USSR in their battle of ideologies.[196] Americans were not 'war-hating', as Thomas Bailey had claimed in 1950.[197] They were complicit in perpetuating the Cold War and damaging both human lives and the environment, something that was revealed to the public through journalism with many other injustices from the Vietnam War and wider US politics.[198] Weather modification became an unfavourable concept amongst the public due to revelations about its use in Vietnam and subsequent media coverage, as well as fears of geophysical warfare following a similar path to nuclear weapons.

However, public opinion cannot be discussed in blanket statements. Many of the articles discussed are from the *New York Times* or other left-leaning newspapers and thus do not represent all American citizens, particularly those in the "silent majority". Like the anti-war and environmental movements, it can be argued that these articles only represent the left-leaning American youth who vocalised their opposition, not the average American who supported Nixon and US involvement in Vietnam.[199] Therefore, it is difficult to determine an accurate depiction of public opinion towards weather modification in this period, but inferences can be made. There is little, if any, media support for weather modification in this period which is a direct contrast to the 1950s and 1960s. This still indicates that the majority of Americans' attitudes towards climate manipulation was impacted by military applications and media coverage of Operation Popeye which aligns with the overall effect of reports on the Vietnam War in the revisionist age.

---

[193] 'Geophysical Warfare', *New York Times*, 4 July 1972, p. 16.
[194] Ibid, p. 16.; Bock, 'Outlaw the Martial Rainmakers', p. 32.
[195] 'Geophysical Warfare', p. 16.
[196] Ibid, p. 16.; Bock, p. 32.; S.M. Hersh 'Weather as a Weapon', *New York Times*, 9 July 1972, p. 172.; L. Irwin, 'Operation Popeye: Using Weather to Kill People', *Los Angeles Free Press*, 7 July 1972, p. 10.; D. Ellsberg, L. Rottmann, and J. Barry, 'Defense Department Tampers with Nature', *The Pentagon Paper*, August 1972, p. 6.
[197] Bailey, *America Faces Russia,* p. 325.
[198] K.H. Jarausch, C.F. Ostermann, and A. Etges (eds.), *The Cold War: Historiography, Memory, Representation.* (Oldenberg: De Gruyter, 2017), pp. 4-9.; Hallin, 'The Uncensored War', pp. 51-57.
[199] D.L Cressman, 'The Great Silent Majority: Nixon's 1969 Speech on Vietnamization', *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 45.3: (2015) 619-20 (p. 620).

Press coverage of Operation Popeye indicates a mix of opinions amongst the government: some in support of weather modification, some against it (due to concerns over ethics and the environment), and others who opposed it on grounds of efficacy. However, there is evidence to suggest that even those who supported Operation Popeye understood that its ethical and environmental issues were controversial due to its nature as a classified operation. The Department of Defense denied its existence in Congressional hearings in 1971, and part of its exposure came from The Pentagon Papers.[200] Considering low levels of trust in the Government in the early 1970s – and other political circumstances such as the Watergate Scandal, Oil Crisis, and the Vietnam War – this era was full of secrecy, scandal, and doubt, which altered the view of the presidency.[201] It appears that the majority of support for Operation Popeye came from the RAND – Research and Development – Corporation and senior politicians, such as Henry Kissinger. The excess of power and lack of accountability which accompanied these positions can be seen to have driven this support and caused ethical and environmental issues to be overlooked.[202] Scientists and Congress were not in support of weather modification due to these concerns and, as their views were presented more publicly, it can be argued that there was a consensus on the unethical nature of weather modification amongst the government. Despite this, the project went ahead due to the support of senior politicians over its utility as an alternative, "natural" weapon and a way to show dominance over the Soviet Union in the age of nuclear treaties. As there are limited documents available, it is difficult to specify whether this is the exact reasoning behind the support for Popeye. However, given the context of the period, the vague statements given in congressional hearings in 1974 – and earlier promotion of environmental modification – it can be determined that the Cold War context played a key role in driving Government support for the hostile use of weather modification, particularly as nuclear weapons had been limited by legislation whereas geophysical warfare remained unregulated.[203]

These environmental and ethical concerns, however, were not ignored by all. Within the Senate, opposition was driven by Claiborne Pell who was known for his focus on ethics and justice for both humans and the environment.[204] Congressional records from 1972 show how Pell was calling for the regulation of, and a ban on hostile uses of, weather modification, alongside other Members of

---

[200] D. Shapley, 'Rainmaking: Rumored Use over Laos Alarms Arms Experts, Scientists', *Science*, 16 June 1972, p. 1216.

[201] D.B. Robertson, (ed.), *Loss of Confidence: Politics and Policy in the 1970s* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998) pp. 1-4.

[202] 'Rainmaking Is Used as a Weapon in SE Asia', *Daytona Beach Morning Journal*, 19 May 1974, p. 28.; R.R. Rapp, *Some Economic Aspects of Weather Modification* (Santa Monica, California: The RAND Corporation), April 1965, pp. 1-12.

[203] Harper, *Make It Rain*, pp. 225-29.

[204] Ibid, p. 225.; G.W. Miller, *An Uncommon Man* (UPNE, 2011), pp. 2-3.

Congress such as Frank Evans and Donald Fraser.[205] This clearly shows the congressional support for regulated, peaceful weather control but opposition to its military applications, indicating that ethical concerns drove these attitudes. Statements surrounding the 'unknown … environmental consequences', 'irreparable damage', and the potential for a 'new dimension in warfare' were common in these documents, indicating the prevalence of environmental concerns combined with fears of the development of geophysical warfare.[206] This – alongside the myriad of attempts within Congress to pass bills regulating peaceful uses, or banning hostile uses, of weather modification – demonstrates how attitudes within the lower levels of Government were driven by similar issues to the public: concerns over geophysical warfare following a similar path to nuclear weapons, and a growing consciousness of climate breakdown. However, it is likely that the political distrust of this period exacerbated these concerns, as Pell mentioned in 1974.[207] The classified nature of Popeye made it more controversial as it raised questions about what else could be hidden by the Government; fostering distrust that was intensified by the Watergate scandal. Thus, whilst ethical and environmental concerns contributed to the change in attitudes towards weather modification from lower levels of Government, the wider distrust in the Government elite and politicians intensified this.

Many scientists opposed weather modification, particularly its hostile uses, due to a combination of issues surrounding ethics and efficacy. Questions over the efficacy of cloud-seeding had been common since its discovery (as mentioned in chapter one), and this continued in the 1970s as there was still no definitive proof as to whether it could produce significant amounts of rain. Economic grounds for opposition amongst scientists and the military were common, as $3.6 million per year had been spent on Operation Popeye despite no definitive proof of its effectiveness.[208] The volume of these opinions amongst the scientific community surrounding the efficacy of cloud-seeding is notable as it signifies a move away from the 'science-and-technology-can-fix-anything approach'.[209] Weather modification was increasingly viewed as unethical or ineffective. The impact of post-war euphoria and American exceptionalism on attitudes towards human control of the weather amongst the public and the scientific community was declining.[210]

---

[205] United States Senate, *Congressional Record – Senate*, 20 July 1972 pp. 24671-76.; United States House of Representatives, 58252 *Weather Modification Regulation Act*, 93rd Congress, 20 March 1973.; United States House of Representatives, *Congressional Record – House of Representatives*, 28 March 1973, pp. 10062-63.

[206] United States Senate, *Congressional Record – Senate,* 11 July 1973, pp. 23303-5.; United States Senate, *Congressional Record – Senate,* 15 December 1971, p. 47065.; C. Russell, 'The Weather as a Secret Weapon from Vietnam to Geneva', *The Washington Star,* 23 August 1975, p. 1.

[207] United States Senate Subcommittee on Oceans and the International Environment on the Committee of Foreign Relations, *Weather Modification Briefing*, 20 March 1974, p. 111.

[208] Ibid, pp. 93-109.

[209] Fleming, *Fixing the Sky*, p. 3.

[210] E. Crawford, 'Accounting for the ENMOD Convention: Cold War Influences on the Origins and Development of the 1976 Convention on Environmental Modification Techniques', in *International Law and*

Calls for the regulation of environmental modification were particularly prominent across different sections of society, at both the national and global level.[211] As previously discussed, many MOCs attempted to pass bills regulating peaceful uses or banning hostile uses of weather modification, building on the work of Senator Anderson in the 1950s. Fears of climate modification taking a similar path to nuclear weapons fuelled these discussions, leading to a series of bilateral talks between the US and USSR.[212] These talks culminated in a Soviet proposal at the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, calling for a ban on the hostile use of weather control, as a consequence of Operation Popeye.[213] The Convention on Environmental Modification (ENMOD) was adopted by the UN in 1976 and ratified in 1977, banning 'military or any other hostile use of… [weather modification] …having widespread, long-lasting or severe effects as the means of destruction, damage or injury to any other State Party'.[214] This indicates that the UN's adoption of a critical attitude towards weather modification despite previous neutrality towards the topic, demonstrating how warfare is often the biggest catalyst for change, particularly on the international stage. This also fits with the comparison of climate manipulation to nuclear weapons, as international treaties paved towards nuclear disarmament and ENMOD effectively put a stop to all geophysical warfare, as well as slowing down peaceful uses.[215] Political and social contexts of the 1970s drove attitudes amongst international organisations, with détente, the environmental movement, and paranoia that geophysical warfare would take the same path as nuclear warfare, all contributing to ENMOD.[216]

From researching different societal groups and their changing attitudes towards weather modification in the 1970s, it is clear that attitudes were still driven by political contexts. However, unlike the post-war euphoria and American exceptionalism that previously drove attitudes, 1970s views were driven by distrust in the Government, protest, and paranoia. The context of the Watergate scandal, nuclear disarmament treaties, and the environmental movement led to questions about the

---

the Cold War, ed. by M. Craven, S. Pahuja, and G. Simpson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 93.

[211] Weiss, 'Weather Control: An Instrument for War?', pp. 9-12.

[212] B. Gwertzman, 'A US-Soviet Ban on Weather Use for War Is Near', *New York Times*, 24 June 1975, pp. 1-7.; J.D. Oldfield, and M. Poberezhskaya, 'Soviet and Russian Perspectives on Geoengineering and Climate Management', *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*, 14.4: (2023) 1-14 (p.7).

[213] Crawford, 'Accounting for the ENMOD Convention: Cold War Influences on the Origins and Development of the 1976 Convention on Environmental Modification Techniques', p. 94.

[214] United Nations, '*Convention on the Prohibition of Military or Any Other Hostile Use of Environmental Modification Technique'*, 1976.; P. Grose, 'U.N. Assembly's Achievement: A Quiet Session', *New York Times*, 24 December 1976, p. 6.

[215] L.S. Wittner, 'The Forgotten Years of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement, 1975-78', *Journal of Peace Research*, 40.4: (2003) 435-56 (pp. 435-36).

[216] K. Teltsch, 'U.N. Unit Votes to Ban Environmental Manipulation', *New York Times*, 4 December 1976, p. 11.; Crawford, 'Accounting for the ENMOD Convention: Cold War Influences on the Origins and Development of the 1976 Convention on Environmental Modification Techniques', pp. 86-88.

ethical impact of weather control, particularly in hostile situations, as well as more philosophical questions surrounding environmental stewardship. Despite politicians like Henry Kissinger still supporting weather modification, the majority of the public, Government, and international organisations no longer viewed the world through the euphoric post-war lens and did not blindly follow technology without considering the consequences. The development of technological awareness was driven by the fear of nuclear weapons and mutually assured destruction, and thus the paranoia that this path could be followed by geophysical warfare. Kennedy's speech to the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) in 1963 sums up the attitudes of the majority in the 1970s – a view that was cemented by ENMOD in 1976 – signalling an end to the weather control craze that began with Langmuir's experiments at General Electric in the 1940s.[217] Attitudes towards weather modification were still being driven by political contexts like in earlier decades, but the 1970s were a different time. As Pell stated, the secrecy surrounding Operation Popeye dug its own grave: if the Government were capable of using the weather as a weapon, how far would they go in the future? Therefore, it is clear that attitudes towards weather modification in the 1970s were driven by distrust in the Government, political paranoia, and the protest culture of the early 1970s which, like the techno-solutionist views of the 1950s, has driven the development of the climate control field in the twenty-first century. The research undertaken in this dissertation builds on that of historians such as Kristine Harper and J.R. Fleming, contextualising and informing current discussions of the relationship between humans and the climate and quelling the hysteria of conspiracy theories with factual accounts of what drove the 1970s' dismissal of environmental modification. At a time where AI and Silicon Valley are fuelling techno-solutionist ideals, a reminder of morality and the place of humans in the world is pertinent. The climate is not a resource for human exploitation and the scholarship of historians plays a vital role in fostering this environment.

[217] J.F. Kennedy, 'Address at Anniversary Convocation of National Academy of Sciences', 22 October 1963.

Bibliography
Primary Sources

Government and United Nations Documents

'Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XXVIII, Laos - Office of the Historian'. 1967 <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v28/d274>

'Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume E–14, Part 2, Documents on Arms Control and Nonproliferation, 1973–1976 - Office of the Historian'. [n.d.] <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve14p2/d74>

'Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XVI, Soviet Union, August 1974–December 1976 - Office of the Historian'.1974 <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v16/d13>

United Nations, 'Convention on the Prohibition of Military or Any Other Hostile Use of Environmental Modification Technique' (1976)

United States House of Representatives, 58252, *Weather Modification Regulation Act*, 93rd Congress, 20 March 1973

United States House of Representatives, *Congressional Record – House of Representatives*, 28 March 1973, pp. 10062-63

United States Senate, *Congressional Record – Senate*, 20 July 1972, pp. 24671–76

United States Senate, *Congressional Record – Senate,* 11 July 1973, pp. 23303-5

United States Senate, *Congressional Record – Senate,* 15 December 1971, p. 47065

United States Senate Subcommittee on Oceans and the International Environment on the Committee of Foreign Relations, *Weather Modification Briefing*, 20 March 1974, p. 111

Newspapers and Online News Sources

Daytona Beach Morning Journal

The New York Times

The Pentagon Paper

The Washington Post

The Washington Star

St. Louis Post Dispatch

Official Reports and Publications

General Electric, *History of Project Cirrus* (New York, 1952)

Kennedy, John F., 'Address at Anniversary Convocation of National Academy of Sciences' (1963)

Rapp, R.R., *Some Economic Aspects of Weather Modification* (Santa Monica, California: The RAND Corporation, 1965), pp. 1–12

Secondary Sources

Articles

Aucoin, James L., 'The Re-Emergence of American Investigative Journalism 1960–1975', *Journalism History*, 21.1: (1995) pp. 3-15 <https://doi.org/10.1080/00947679.1995.12062403>

Brownlee, K. A., 'Statistical Evaluation of Cloud Seeding Operations', *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, 55.291: (1960) pp. 446-53 <https://doi.org/10.2307/2281907>

Cressman, D.L., 'The Great Silent Majority: Nixon's 1969 Speech on Vietnamization', *Presidential Studies Quarterly,* 45.3: (2015) pp. 619-20

Hallin, Daniel, 'The Uncensored War', *Peace Review*, 5.1: (1993) pp. 51-57 <https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659308425693>

Harper, Kristine C., 'Climate Control: United States Weather Modification in the Cold War and Beyond', *Endeavour*, 32.1: (2008) pp. 20-26 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.endeavour.2008.01.006>

Nincic, Miroslav, 'The American Public and the Soviet Union: The Domestic Context of Discontent', *Journal of Peace Research*, 22.4: (1985) pp. 345-57

Oldfield, Jonathan D, and Marianna Poberezhskaya, 'Soviet and Russian Perspectives on Geoengineering and Climate Management', *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*, 14.4 (Wiley-Blackwell, 2023) pp. 1-14 <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.829>

Pew Research Center, 'Trust in Government: 1958-2015', *Pew Research Center - U.S. Politics & Policy* (2015) <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2015/11/23/1-trust-in-government-1958-2015/>

Shapley, Deborah, 'Rainmaking: Rumored Use over Laos Alarms Arms Experts, Scientists', *Science*, (1972) pp. 1216-20

Wittner, Lawrence S., 'The Forgotten Years of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement, 1975-78', *Journal of Peace Research*, 40.4: (2003) pp. 435-56 <https://doi.org/10.1177/00223433030404005>

Books

Aucoin, James, *The Evolution of American Investigative Journalism* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007)

Bailey, Thomas A., *America Faces Russia.* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1950)

Crawford, Emily, 'Accounting for the ENMOD Convention: Cold War Influences on the Origins and Development of the 1976 Convention on Environmental Modification Techniques', in *International Law and the Cold War*, ed. by Matthew Craven, Sundhya Pahuja, and Gerry Simpson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 81-97

Fleming, James Rodger, *Fixing the Sky: The Checkered History of Weather and Climate Control* (Columbia University Press, 2010)

Harper, Kristine C., *Make It Rain State Control of the Atmosphere in Twentieth-Century America* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2017)

Harper, Kristine C., and Ronald E. Doel, ‘Environmental Diplomacy in the Cold War: Weather Control, the United States, and India, 1966-1967’, in *Environmental Histories of the Cold War*, ed. by John R. McNeill and Corina R. Unger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 115–37

Hoskins, Andrew, *Televising War: From Vietnam to Iraq* (London: Continuum, 2004)

Jarausch, Konrad H, Christian F. Ostermann, and Andreas Etges (eds.), *The Cold War: Historiography, Memory, Representation.* (Oldenberg: De Gruyter, 2017)

Miller, G.W., *An Uncommon Man* (UPNE, 2011)

Robertson, David Brian (ed.), *Loss of Confidence: Politics and Policy in the 1970s* (University Park, PA.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998)

Did *The Thick Of It* encourage a cynical public attitude towards British politics?

Ewan Lewis

Abstract: *The Thick of It (TTOI) was a television comedy series and a work of political satire broadcast from 2005-2012. The series satirised its contemporary politics by creating a fundamentally cynical depiction of British politics where government ministers are primarily at the mercy of unelected officials within their own party who are shown to be the real authority in government. British trust in politics has never been high and political cynicism has continued to climb. In 2023 the Office for National Statistics found that only 27% of the public had high trust in the UK government with only 12% having high trust for political parties.*[218] *This makes it an important time to examine Britain's contemporary history of political cynicism, with this essay placing a focus on British political fiction on television, specifically TTOI, exploring how the cynical depiction of fictional British politics offered by TTOI interacts with cynicism towards the actual political process. This essay finds that whilst TTOI intended to foster a constructive discussion of the flaws in the British political system it ultimately only ever offered the audience the opportunity to laugh at a deeply cynical world with no viable way out. Forcing the audience to fall back upon their pre-established cynicism for British politics.*

The Thick Of It (TTOI) was a television comedy series which ran from 2005-2012, first broadcast on BBC4. The series was created by Armando Iannucci and was a work of political satire, taking aim at the real contemporary British politics of New Labour, specifically the backstage machinations of the political system. The series focused on the workings of the fictional Department of Social Affairs (DoSA), renamed the Department of Social Affairs and Citizenship (DoSAC) after a cabinet reshuffle at the end of the second episode of the second series.[219] The characters at the core of the department are the government minister for Social Affairs, Hugh Abbott, played by Chris Langham and his special advisers (SPADs), senior adviser Glen Cullen played by James Smith and junior adviser Ollie Reader played by Chris Addison, as well as senior civil servant Terri Coverley played by Joanna Scanlan. Rebcca Front joined the cast at the start of the 3rd series in 2009, playing Nicola Murray, the new minister at DoSAC, after Langham had left the series. The political party in government and all parties remain nameless throughout the series. These characters are portrayed to be at the mercy of Malcolm Tucker; the Prime Minister's aggressive, foul-mouthed 'enforcer' and chief spin doctor, portrayed by Peter Capaldi, who is the primary authority in government and therefore British politics.

[218] 'Trust in government, UK: 2023', *Office for National Statistics (ONS)*, 1 March 2024
[219] 'Series 2: Episode 2', *The Thick Of It*, BBC4, 10:30pm 27 October 2005

TTOI portrays politics as an inherently cynical practice, in which the political actors are portrayed as incompetent, unprofessional or cynically manipulative. This, however, does not necessarily mean that it encourages cynicism towards politics. To explore this dynamic, this essay will examine the specific ways in which politics is presented in *TTOI*. The visual style of *TTOI*, with its staccato editing pattern, frequent camera cuts and handheld, shaky cameras are part of a broader stylistic shift in British comedy. However, it takes on an extra function in *TTOI*, becoming central in building the fictional political world in which the series is set. The craft at times can feel sloppy, poorly put together and unprofessional, outside shots sometimes feature lens flare and the camera often fails to keep up with the person speaking in a scene. This imbues the idea in the audience that what we are watching lacks professionalism, the sloppiness of the craft reflects the sloppiness of the politics being practiced.

Furthermore, the frequent camera cuts in every scene, combined with the shaky camera movements creates a sense of disorientation, bordering on chaos. This portrays the running of government as a constant state of disorder with endless crises to deal with. In the opening scene of the third series, when Tucker frantically scrambles to find a minister for DoSAC amidst a cabinet reshuffle, there are 20 cuts in the first minute.[220] The disorientating pace of the series increases the more frenzied the events unfolding become. Given the scandals and sleaze which had come to mire the premierships of John Major and Tony Blair, a sense of near chaos is exactly what the audience had come to expect from the government, highlighting how the series enunciated existing public perceptions on politics.[221]

Whilst creating a sense of disorder, the frequent camera cuts also inject the series with a frenetic energy. The series moves at a breathless, pulsating pace, often cutting away from a scene mid-conversation, it rarely slows down and almost never stops moving. The opening titles contribute to this. Appearing as a plain black screen with the series title capitalised in white, it flashes up for a few brief seconds after the opening scene of every episode.

[220] 'Series 3: Episode 1', *The Thick Of It*, BBC2 10:10pm 24 October 2009
[221] Andy Hughes, *History of Political Scandals: Sex, Sleaze and Spin*, (Pen & Sword Books Ltd, 2014), pp.35-54



The Thick Of It, Episode 1, Series 1, 05:37

Importantly, there is no music, instead the dialogue from the previous scene continues, overlapping with the opening title. The world of *TTOI* therefore never stops and the audience is never pulled away from the fictional environment, there is no time to take a breath or relax. In a time when 24 hour rolling news had come to replace print media, the choice to move the series at such a pace is deliberate.[222] It gives the impression that the disarray seen on screen is never ending. The political operators of the series are embroiled in constant crisis management, chasing a news cycle which never stops. A bleak political landscape is created as a consequence of the series' visual style, one which is uncomfortable and disorientating and does not reward those who are unable to align with the perverted logic of the series.[223] This instils the idea that politics is not a pleasant environment and is not an environment in which decency, sense or dignity can prevail. Therefore, whilst framing politics as disordered and unprofessional, it also paints a cynical picture of the world we are seeing.

The visual style also interacts with the audience and their relationship to the space. Whilst bearing stylistic similarities to the 'mockumentary' format, *TTOI* is not a mockumentary, the characters are not aware that they are being filmed and the 'camera' is not actually present in the fictional space. Furthermore, several scenes are filmed from behind half open doors, through glass walls or zooming in on hushed conversations from a distance away.

[222] James Walters, *The Thick of It* (London: Palgrave, 2016) p.16
[223] Ibid, pp. 38-40



The Thick Of It, Episode 1, Series 1, 06:00



The Thick Of It, Episode 3, Series 1, 07:02

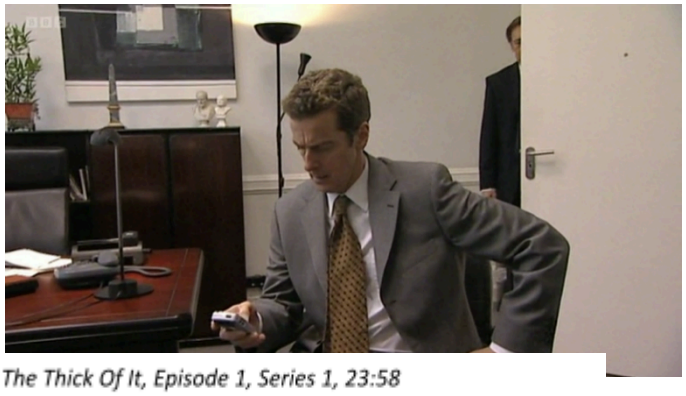
When combined with the general sense of disorientation the series creates, this gives the audience the feeling that we are not meant to be privy to these conversations; the audience feels as if it is somewhere that it shouldn't be, watching something that the characters on screen don't want us to see. By creating this feeling amongst the audience, it enforces the idea that there is a lack of transparency in the political environment of *TTOI*, that politicians are trying to hide something from us as the audience. Once again this creates the sense that the environment which we are in is a cynical one, lacking the morality and transparency desired from the political process.

Whilst the visual style frames the political world of *TTOI* as cynical, the content of the series fully enforces this idea. Primarily, this cynicism is communicated through the hierarchy of power existing within politics, which has the elected minister firmly at the bottom, with next to no power, stripped of gravitas, distinction and dignity relying almost entirely on their SPADs for policymaking, handling the press and the general running of DoSAC.[224] At the top of this hierarchy sits the Prime Ministers personal 'enforcers' or spin doctors, the role filled by Tucker for the majority of the series. This hierarchy establishes the elected official, as the one with the least power, whilst unelected

[224] Ibid, p. 30

officials, whose primary concern is their own political position followed by their party's success, as those really in control of government.

Near the end of the pilot episode, as a day of policy U-turns in DoSA causes a looming media storm, Hugh asks Tucker for help in containing the potential crisis.[225] This short scene very succinctly displays the hierarchy at play within government. Hugh never fully enters the room, hiding the majority of his body behind the door, looking down as he meekly asks Tucker for help, who sits with his back to Hugh. By the time Tucker has turned to face Hugh he has already left the room, fearing the wrath of the spin doctor.[226]





The Thick Of It, Episode 1, Series 1, 23:58

In this moment Hugh resembles a helpless child, asking their parent for help. A grown man striking such an image of infantile helplessness borders on pathetic, as the minister is stripped of any authority in the situation and he must turn to the real authority in Tucker, before running away to avoid facing the full consequences of his inability to successful do his job.

An earlier sequence in the pilot similarly communicates the perverted dynamics of politics in *TTOI*. Whilst the DoSA team are on their way to a policy launch, they receive a phone call from Tucker to tell them the anti-benefit fraud scheme they were planning to launch has not been approved by the Prime Minister and therefore cannot be announced. This leaves Hugh, Glen and Ollie scrambling in the back of the car to come up with a new policy to announce. Hugh sits sandwiched between his advisers, he is literally and figuratively in a tight spot, also sitting at a slightly lower height than both Glen and Ollie, who do the majority of the policy brainstorming;, they are the ones who really are in control of the departments policy. [227] In this scene Hugh's dignity and authority is eviscerated by the camera and just one phone call from Tucker has left him haplessly relying on his advisers to save him from embarrassment at a policy launch with no policy.

---

[225] 'Series 1: Episode 1', *The Thick Of It*, BBC4, 10:30pm 19 May 2005
[226] Ibid
[227] Ibid



The Thick Of It, Episode 1, Series 1, 17:48

The sequence also sees the advisers throw bizarre policy ideas back and forth at one another, this communicates to the audience that government policy lacks real substance, it can be created on a whim in the back of a car. The content of the policy is not relevant, it is more about how it can be presented or spun to the media to make it sound appealing. In fact, Hughs main contribution to this sequence is shaving his stubble whilst his advisers struggle to produce a viable policy, this reinforces the idea that politics is about appearance, not substance;, Hugh wants to appear collected and well-put together to the media, despite the disordered environment within which he actually exists.



The Thick Of It, Episode 1, Series 1, 15:49

This in turn introduces another element to the power hierarchy in *TTOI*: the media. Whilst journalists do appear sporadically, they are not at the front and centre of the series. Despite this, the presence of the press is felt in almost every episode. The apparatus formed through the relationship between Tucker and the press is where the true power lies in the series. The primary concern of the political parties is not policymaking or effective governing but managing the media. This dynamic, sees both the media and spin doctors exercising a toxic control over the other. The opening scene of the pilot sees Hugh's predecessor at DoSA sacked because of press pressure, yet the episode ends with

Tucker bullying a journalist into dropping a negative story about DoSA by threatening her career via his contacts with the newspaper editors.[228] Power in government lies within a toxically interdependent relationship between unelected officials and an unaccountable media, a fundamentally cynical depiction of politics.

Moreover, Nicola Murray's first introduction to Tucker in the opening episode of the third series sees him launch the following tirade at her:

'Bin it, people don't like their politicians to be comfortable, they don't like you having expenses, they don't like you being paid, they'd rather you lived in a fucking cave'[229]

'Bin it' is a reference to Murray's chair, which Tucker deems too comfortable for a politician. This appears as an utterly trivial issue, the dialogue satirises politicians for focusing on the wrong things, such as how a chair, which the public would never see, would be perceived by the public. The focus of government is not on actual governing but manufacturing a positive public image. In the same dialogue Tucker also states how people 'don't like you having expenses'. The episode containing this dialogue was broadcast on 24 October 2009, just 6 months after *The Daily Telegraph* had broken the news of the UK parliamentary expenses scandal.[230] When, in the midst of a financial crisis, it was revealed MPs had been misusing expenses they had claimed, much to the ire of the general public. The inclusion of this line is a deliberate reference to the scandal, which would resonate with the same public who had been appalled by the scandal mere months earlier. This reinforces *TTOI* as a cynical portrayal of politics as whilst it creates its own cynical political environment, it also parallels the actual contemporary politics which the audience held a cynical view of.

It is clear to see therefore, why *TTOI* could encourage cynicism amongst the British public given it deliberately portrays politics as inherently cynical thus entrenching the public's pre-existing cynical opinion of politicians and the political process. Peter Mandelson even admitted within Blair's governments 'there was great emphasis on managing the media at the expense of managing policy.'[231] This gives authenticity to how *TTOI* depicted the political culture under New Labour, further emphasising how the cynical world depicted resonated with audiences.

In 2008, Labour MP and Secretary of State for Local Communities, Hazel Blears suggested that Britain needed its own version of *The West Wing* to combat a culture of 'anti-politics' amongst the British public, which she partly attributed to the negative portrayal of politics on British television,

---

[228] Ibid
[229] 'Series 3: Episode 1', *The Thick Of It*, 2009, 08:03
[230] Emily Maitlis, 'MPs' expenses: The scandal that changed Britain' *BBC News*, 25 March 2019 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-47669589 (accessed 24 April 2024)
[231] Andrew Rawnsley, *The End of the Party: The Rise and Fall of New Labour*, (London: Penguin, 2010, p. 9

listing *TTOI* as a contributor to the problem.[232] Given that viewers of *The West Wing* were found to have a more sympathetic view of Presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton after watching a season of the show, it is obvious why a government minister may want a similar show broadcast to the British electorate.[233] However, Blears' assertion that fictional portrayals of politics can influence public opinion evidently had some veracity.

However, Iannucci has stated he intended to channel his anger towards politics into something constructive when writing *TTOI,* encouraging cynicism was never the intention.[234] When writing the series, it was the ministers who were intended to be the most human characters for the audience to sympathise with, as they entered politics with a desire and ambition to change things for the better but the energy and commitment is sapped from them by the pressure of unelected enforcers, SPADs, the media and the electorate.[235] Upon meeting Hugh at the beginning of the first series he is already deep into his political career, from the very onset he complains of being tired, telling Glen how the only time he gets for himself is when he occasionally gets to 'take a dump'.[236] We never therefore get to see Hugh with the ambition Iannucci believed he entered politics with. However, Nicola Murray's introduction at the start of the third series, when she is plucked from political obscurity and into DoSAC, offers a clear vision of how the political culture in *TTOI* grinds the life out of otherwise ambitions and human ministers. Nicola enters the department with a desire to focus on 'social mobility'. However, within one conversation, Glen and Ollie inform her this won't be possible because the department has no money. By the end of this discussion, mere minutes after her introduction, she concludes that 'basically [she] is going to be a woman with a computer and some pens' with no 'real power'.[237] The draining of her ambition occurs visually as well, when we first see Nicola, she is wearing a bright floral dress, appearing with a nervous smile on her face.[238] By the end of the next episode, after just one week as minister, the camera shows Nicola through the open door of her office, slumped in her chair, dressed in black and grey, with a glum expression across her face, the nervous energy she entered the department with just one episode ago has been completely drained from her.[239]

---

[232] Matthew Bailey, 'The Uses and Abuses of British Political Fiction or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Malcolm Tucker', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 64(2) (2010) 281-295
[233] R. Lance Holbert, and others, 'The West Wing as Endorsement of the U.S. Presidency: Expanding the Bounds of Priming in Political Communication', *Journal of Communication*, 53(3) (2003) 427-443
[234] 'Armando Iannucci, Rebecca Front, Joanna Scanlan, Ian Martin, Simon Blackwell | The Thick Of It ten years on', *The RTS Podcast*, 22 December 2022
[235] Ibid
[236] 'Series 1: Episode 2', *The Thick Of It*, BBC4, 10:30pm 26 May 2005, 00:40
[237] 'Series 3: Episode 1', *The Thick Of It*, 2009, 04:50
[238] Ibid, 02:24
[239] 'Series 3: Episode 2', *The Thick Of It*, BBC2, 10:10pm 31 October 2009, 28:07



The Thick Of It, Episode 1, Series 3, 02:30



The Thick Of It, Episode 2, Series 3, 28:07

How rapidly Nicola has the energy sapped from her, efficiently communicates the ruthlessness of the political culture in *TTOI*. No genuine commitment to bringing positive change stays alive for very long. Iannucci efficiently communicates his point here that the ministers are fundamentally the most human people in politics and it is the pressures placed upon ministers which grinds the life from politics.[240] In engendering sympathy for politicians Iannucci wants to allow for a more critical look at the culture around them. However, despite the ministers being the most human characters, trapped in a world they cannot control, at no point are they presented as the solution towards a better politics.

Whilst certainly being human, the ministers throughout the series are also consistently incompetent and out of their depth. Ben Swain, a junior minister, who appears sporadically across the series, is not only hopelessly inept but obnoxiously arrogant. Whilst Nicola does often stand up to Tucker, she is also easily drawn in by his manipulations. Furthermore, the last episode of the second series is the only time Hugh displays any sense of moral direction or conviction, opposing the closure of Special Educational Needs schools despite it being government policy, which DoSAC is in charge

[240] *The RTS Podcast*, 2022

of implementing. However, by the end of the episode, Hugh abandons his convictions and toes the party line. Even going so far as to fabricate a story about his friend and senior adviser, Glen's, disabled son in order to convince a select committee of his position.[241] Thus, ministers are not complete victims of the cynical world in *TTOI* and play their part in enabling such a system. Whilst a sympathetic depiction of government ministers is offered in *TTOI*, the ministers by no means offer an avenue through which better politics can be achieved.

Furthermore, whilst the series began as a satire on Blair's government, it does not confine itself to a critique of one party. The final series takes aim at the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition and the namelessness of the parties throughout the series allows *TTOI* to avoid a one-dimensional critique of a specific government.[242] Whilst the style of 'spin' the series derides was certainly a product of New Labour, it became a political culture which all parties bought into, making every party a victim of *TTOI*'s satirical lens. In the first special broadcast in 2007, a major plot point is Tucker trying to leak policies to the opposition to delay the Prime Minister's resignation.[243] This carries the implication that there is little ideological difference between the political parties in the series, as any policy can be passed off as either of theirs. Thus, a different political party in power also does not arise as a method through which the cynical culture in *TTOI* can be dismantled.

What is left is ultimately a cynical world, which grinds the life out of any meaningful ambition, in which political parties offer an illusion of choice to the electorate whilst they behave almost indistinguishable from one another. No avenue to better politics is meaningfully explored in *TTOI.* Ruben Quintero highlights how 'the satirist is not obligated to solve what is perceived as a problem or replace what is satirically disassembled or unmasked with a solution'. [244] Therefore, Iannucci is not obliged to offer a pathway to a better practice of politics in the series. However, he himself stated it was his desire to be constructive, an aim in which he ultimately fails in delivering. Despite positioning them as the most human characters, Iannucci ultimately invites us to laugh at politicians whilst they have the life ground out of them, whilst he fails to present them as characters fit for power in the first place. Thus, any effort at fostering constructive dialogue on dismantling a cynical practice of politics is absent from the series. *TTOI* is never brave enough to offer any essence of redeemability in its world, instead only inviting us to observe the eccentricities of a cynical political world with no way out.[245] Consequently encouraging further cynicism towards actual politics amongst the audience.

---

[241] 'Series 2: Episode 3', *The Thick Of It*, BBC4, 10:30pm 3 November 2005
[242] Walters, p.20
[243] Special: The Rise of the Nutters', *The Thick Of It*, BBC4, 10:30pm 2 January 2007
[244] Ruben Quintero, 'Introduction: Understanding Satire', in *A Companion to Satire*, ed. by Ruben Quintero (Blackwell Publishing: 2007) pp. 1-11 (p. 3)
[245] Stephen Fielding, *A State of Play: British Politics on Screen, Stage and Page, from Anthony Trollope to The Thick of It* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2014)

Bibliography

Primary Sources

'Armando Iannuci, Rebecca Front, Joanna Scanlan, Ian Martin, Simon Blackwell | The Thick Of It ten years on', *The RTS Podcast*, 22 December 2022

BBC Written Archives Centre T62/323/1

Curtice, Sir John, and others, 'British Social Attitudes 30: How and why Britian's attitudes and values are changing', *National Centre for Social Research*, 10 September 2013

Davies, Caroline 'Cynicism 'can damage democracy's health'', The Guardian, 14 September 2008, https://www.theguardian.com/education/2008/sep/14/research.humanbehaviour, (accessed 18 April 2024)

Dowell, Ben, 'The Thick of It to switch to BBC2 – with Rebecca Front on board', *The Guardian*, 27 April 2009, https://www.theguardian.com/media/2009/apr/27/thick-of-it-rebecca-front, (accessed 18 April 2024)

Maitlis, Emily, 'MPs' expenses: The scandal that changed Britain' *BBC News*, 25 March 2019 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-47669589 (accessed 24 April 2024)

'Malcolm Tucker's election briefing' , *The Guardian*, 2010 https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/series/malcolm-tuckers-election-briefing (accessed 24 April 2024)

McBride, Damian, Power Trip: A Decade of Policy Plots and Spin (London: Biteback Publishing, 2013)

The Thick Of It, BBC2/BBC4, (BBC, 2005-2012)

'The Thick Of It: BBC FOUR's award-winning comedy coming to BBC TWO in January 2006', *BBC Press Office*, 8 December 2012, https://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2005/12_december/08/thick.shtml (Accessed 19 March 2024)

'Trust in government, UK: 2023', *Office for National Statistics (ONS)*, 1 March 2024

'What's Trust Got To Do With It? Public Trust in and Expectations of Politicians and Parliament', *Hansard Society*, 5 May 2010

Secondary Sources

Articles

Bailey, Matthew, 'The Uses and Abuses of British Political Fiction or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Malcolm Tucker', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 64(2) (2010) 281-295

Basu, Laura, 'British Satire in The Thick of It' *The International Journal of Media and Culture* 12(2) (2014) 89-103

Brassett, James & Sutton, Alex, 'British satire, everyday politics: Chris Morris, Armando Iannucci and Charlie Brooker,' *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations,* 19(2) (2017) 245-262

Fielding, Steven 'New Labour, 'Sleaze' and Television Drama', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations,* 16(2) (2014) 326-348

Holbert, R. Lance, and others, 'The West Wing as Endorsement of the U.S. Presidency: Expanding the Bounds of Priming in Political Communication', *Journal of Communication*, 53(3) (2003) 427-443

Holbert, R. Lance, and others, 'The West Wing and Depictions of the American Presidency: Expanding the Domains of Framing in Political Communication', *Communication Quarterly*, 53(4) (2005) 502-522

McNair, Brian 'PR Must Die: spin, anti-spin and political public relations in the UK, 1997-2004', *Journalism Studies*, 5(3) (2004) 325-338

Books

Capella, Joseph N. & Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Kathleen Hall, *Spiral of Cynicism: The Press an The Public Good* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997)

Fielding, Stephen, *A State of Play: British Politics on Screen, Stage and Page, from Anthony Trollope to The Thick of It* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2014)

Hughes, Andy K., *History of Political Scandals: Sex, Sleaze and Spin*, (Pen & Sword Books Ltd, 2014)

Rawnsley, Andrew, *The End of the Party: The Rise and Fall of New Labour*, (London: Penguin, 2010)

Quintero, Ruben (ed.), A Companion to Satire, (Blackwell Publishing: 2007)
Walters, James, *The Thick of It* (London: BFI, 2016)

A Spoonful of Sugar: Exploring the Duality of Comfort and Challenge in *Call the Midwife*

Megan Jenkins Davies

Abstract: *In a review of Call the Midwife (CM), Mary McNamara, an LA Times television critic, invoked the famous Mary Poppins phrase 'a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down' to describe the show's messaging.*[246] *CM is surrounded by a binary and perpetuating discussion about whether the history presented in the show is comforting or challenging. This essay is premised on the duality acknowledged by McNamara's compromise which offers an effective metaphor for the complex interplay of challenge and comfort within CM and thus provides an interesting lens to engage in a discussion about the presentation of Cockney class and language within the show. Whilst CM challenges traditional narratives by amplifying the working-class experience, it also serves to 'other' the Cockney people by doing so through the lens of middle-class observers. This essay contributes to the growing body of work that utilises the period drama as a source for historical inquiry thus challenging the often-rigid boundaries that exist within the field which have traditionally led to unconventional mediums, such as the period drama, being rejected.*

Cockney class and language

This chapter considers the presentation of class and language in *CM.* The show is set in the East-End, specifically Poplar, which is the 'heart' of Cockney London.[247] The show challenges traditional historical narratives through its portrayal of the working class and conditions of poverty. It does this, however, through the lens of middle-class observers which engrains separation between the classes and serves to 'other' the Cockney people. This chapter will first tackle how *CM* presents Cockneys and assess whether this challenges or conforms to common media tropes. It will then explore the conditions of squalor that defined the East-End merely fifty years ago and note connections made in the show between these and rising poverty in modern Britain. Finally, it will assess accusations that *CM* presents a 'rose-tinted vision'[248] of life in the East-End. I conclude that *CM* utilises the comfort of nostalgia to cushion more challenging messages about class inequality.

Class and language are distinct phenomena, and it is important not to follow the common trope of associating strong accents or dialects with the working class. However, native Cockneys

[246] Mary McNamara, 'Review: BBC's 'Call the Midwife' is sweet, stirring medicine', LA Times, 28 Sep 2012 < https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/tv/la-xpm-2012-sep-28-la-et-st-bbc-call-the-midwife-review-20120929-story.html > [Accessed 10 Apr 2024].
[247] Robert Barltrop, and Jim Wolveridge, *The Muvver Tongue*, (New York: The Journey Man Press, 1980), p.2.
[248] Herman.

Robert Barltrop and Jim Wolveridge, argue that 'the vehicle of Cockney culture is everyday speech.'[249] This close tie makes it essential that they are tackled together. The Cockney has experienced attacks from both sides. There not only exists 'academic hostility'[250] which dismisses the dialect as lazy and primitive English, but also popular media unfriendliness which has created a caricature of Cockneys as vulgar and ignorant. Misrepresentation often comes from an inability to understand something you are not a part of. I have attempted to assess the presentation of the Cockney culture and dialect in the show objectively. However, I acknowledge the limitations of writing about a culture I do not belong to. The show is a sincere attempt to accurately portray the class and language of the Cockney people, although its short fallings are important to address.

A longstanding myth defines a Cockney as being born within the sound of Bow Bells.[251] Fundamentally, however, it means the working-class of the East-End who have been traditionally defined by their collective experience of poverty. In this world, humour was created out of necessity. Cockneys' reputation for 'lav' humour arose from families routinely sharing one outside toilet with little privacy.[252] The close living circumstances bred a strong sense of community and cultural pride. A significant proportion of both the production team and actors on *CM* have familial connections to the East-End. Costume designer Amy Roberts evidenced particular affection for her upbringing through creating the nurses uniforms claret and blue, a tribute to West-Ham.[253] This evidences that even today the Cockney 'feels an affinity with his kind.'[254] This affiliation, grown from circumstance, makes Cockneys traditionally uneasy of outsiders. This tension is evident in the dialect: the rhyming Cockney slang is rumoured to have been originally developed 'to outwit authority and nosy parkers.'[255] Speaking the dialect serves as a distinguisher and this is evidenced in season 1 of *CM* where a patient, Miss Jenkins, is resisting routine health checks until Sister Evangelina, a native East-Ender, breaks the tension by farting in front of her.[256] She follows this up with 'where're you be, let your wind go free' and Miss Jenkins responds 'church or chapel, let it rattle.' This oddly sweet moment shows the women bond through dialect enabling Sister Evangelina to gain her patients trust. Barltrop and Wolveridge criticise the media for creating fake Cockney rhymes for entertainment. This couplet featured in *CM* is a true piece of rhyming slang, evidencing the show's commitment to historical consistency.[257]

---

[249] Barltrop and Wolveridge, p.2.
[250] Barltrop and Wolveridge, p.5.
[251] Barltrop and Wolveridge, p.2.
[252] Barltrop and Wolveridge, p.39.
[253] Stephen McGann, Call the Midwife – A Labour of Love: Celebrating ten years of life, love and laughter, (London; Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2021), p.128.
[254] Barltrop and Wolveridge, p.2.
[255] Jennifer Worth, *Call The Midwife: A True Story of the East End in the 1950s*, paperback edn (London: Phoenix, 2012), p.331.
[256] Season 1: Christmas Special 2020, *Call the Midwife*, BBC One, 25 December 2012, 8pm, 27:30-29:05.
[257] Barltrop and Wolveridge, p.42.

Webb identifies that no one outside of the East-End would have been able to make 'head nor tail' of 1960s Cockney dialect.[258] As the show is attempting to reach a mass audience in the C21st, its portrayal of the Cockney dialect is sparse which also avoids the risk of parody for the purpose of providing 'chic entertainment.'[259] Worth attempted to write the original text in the vernacular, for example, 'let's ave yer coat and yer 'at.'[260] Barltrop and Wolveridge are critical of attempts to represent Cockney speech in writing, stating 'in most cases it is done carelessly, without due observation, in the frame of mind that correctness does not matter.'[261] Worth's interpretation avoids this as she demonstrates an appreciation for the complexities of the language through an appendix 'on the difficulties on conveying the dialect in written work.'[262] The most famous attempt to depict dialect in written form is Irvine Welsh's 1993 *Trainspotting.* Both the narration and speech in the majority of the novel is written in a colloquial form of Welsh's native Scots.[263] Both Worth and Welsh's text are indicative of a growing awareness in popular culture of the importance of correctly conveying dialects. Misrepresentation of the Cockney dialect through 'an outpouring of Cockney gangster films aimed at the 18-25 laddish audience' has resulted in incorrect assumptions and stereotypes of Cockneys.[264] Guy Ritchie's *Snatch* (2000) is the epitome of this trope. The main antagonist, Brick Top, is a Cockney gangster with a bad temper and is renowned for vulgar phrases such as 'you bet your bollocks to a barn dance you're not backing out.'[265] As we enter the 2020s, a backlash against cultural appropriations is growing within popular culture. This is evidenced in the recent scandal surrounding *Bob Marley: One Love* (2024).[266] There was extensive debate about whether the role of Bob Marley should have gone to a Jamaican actor rather than Kingsley Ben-Adir, a British actor, so that the dialect, Patois, could be more accurately depicted. Patois has commonly been appropriated on-screen resulting in Jamaicans made to be 'the butt of the joke.'[267] This echoes the Cockney caricature created by the media, also often the target of mockery. Public controversy and interest in the portrayal of culture is indicative of a growing demand for correct representation.

The Cockney community revolved around the East-London docklands and traditionally 'the poorest of the poor have tended to live around the docks.'[268] Many families relied upon the income of

---

[258] Webb, p.184.
[259] Barltrop and Wolveridge, p.3.
[260] Worth, p. 10.
[261] Barltrop and Wolveridge, p.99.
[262] Worth, p. 320.
[263] Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting,* (London: Secker & Warburg,1993).
[264] Robert Cross, 'From In Which We Serve to Last Orders: the Cinematic Representation of the Cockney', *Doshisha Studies in Language and Culture,* 5:4 (2003), 517-537 (p.531.).
[265] *Snatch*, dir. by Guy Ritche (Columbia Pictures, 2000).
[266] *Bob Marley: One Love*, dir. by Reinaldo Marcus Green (Paramount, 2024)
[267] Sariah Lake, 'One Love: The Bob Marley Movie' Review, Controversy, & Discussion', *Rebel Essex,* 19 March 2024 < https://www.rebelessex.com/2024/03/one-love-the-bob-marley-movie-review-controversy-discussion/> [Accessed: 20 March 2024].
[268] Worth, p.324.

dockers which was unsteady and low-paid. As a result, overcrowding and squalid conditions were rife. Webb recollects visiting a family members house in the 1960s, 'the smell and the filth in that one cramped and cold room, where two adults and five children spent almost their entire lives, was truly indescribable.'[269] To ensure authenticity in its depictions, *CM* draws influence from documentary photographers such as Shirley Baker whose work turning prosaic scenes from Mancunian slums into 'quietly romantic images,' is particularly evident in *CM* which routinely romanticises the lives of the working-class.[270] Images in *CM's* early title sequence are particularly reminiscent of Baker's pictures of children playing in the street.[271] Thomas also identified drawing influence from the work of Nick Hedges, another photographer, who ran a series of images in the 1960s in collaboration with the homeless charity Shelter entitled *Slum Housing and Poverty.*[272] *Figure 1,* taken by Hedges in Birmingham, directly inspired the scene in *CM* depicted in *Figure 2.*[273] Drawing upon documentary photographers demonstrates a sincere attempt of the show to authentically depict slum conditions.



Figure 1: photograph taken by Nick Hedges in a Kitchen of a Birmingham slum property 1971.[274]

[269] Webb, p.14.
[270] The Guardian, 'Laughter in the slums: the best work of street photographer Shirley Baker – in pictures', *The Guardian*, 8 October 2014 < https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/gallery/2014/oct/08/laughter-in-the-slums-the-best-work-of-street-photographer-shirley-baker-in-pictures > [Accessed 20 March 2024]
[271] Season 1: episode 1, *Call the Midwife,* BBC One, 15 Jan 2012, 8pm, 00:00-00:28.
[272] Nick Hedges, 'Slum Housing And Poverty', *Nick Hedges Photography* <http://www.nickhedgesphotography.co.uk/photo-gallery/slum-housing-and-poverty > [Accessed 20 March 2024].
[273] Thomas, Heidi, 'Heidi Thomas: Researching Call the Midwife', *National Archives,* 18 May 2016 < https://media.nationalarchives.gov.uk/index.php/heidi-thomas-researching-call-midwife/ > [Accessed 20 March 2024]
[274] Hedges.



Figure 2: scene from *CM* season 5, episode 8 where Sister Evangelina is collecting water for a patient.[275]

In the most recent season, *CM* uses the poor living conditions at the time to make a social commentary about present rising inequality in Britain. A struggling single mother is depicted painting over thick black mould while her two young children sleep in the room.[276] The viewer hears one child cough which ominously foreshadows a later admission to hospital due to respiratory issues. This storyline echoes current concerns about mould in modern day Britain where a cost-of-living crisis is forcing families into absolute poverty. It is estimated that the NHS spends £1.4bn on treating illnesses associated with living in cold or damp housing.[277] Poverty is not restricted within the past and *CM* forces its viewership to confront the squalid conditions many people in Britain continue to live in today.

The protagonists of *CM* are predominantly middle-class nurses and therefore, poverty is viewed through the lens of an outsider which replicates the perspective of the audience. This serves to alienate the Cockney as it reinforces class distinction. *CM* was undoubtedly influenced by the resounding success of ITV's period drama *Downton Abbey* (2010).[278] *Downton Abbey* is set within a stately home and follows both the lives of the aristocratic family and their servants. This also provides an insight into society's poorest whilst simultaneously maintaining class separation. Louise FitzGerald finds that the feminist potential of *CM* is limited due to the fact that 'working class women are

[275] Season 5: episode 8, *Call the Midwife,* BBC One, 6 March 2017, 8pm, 19.10.
[276] Season 13: episode 2, *Call the Midwife*, BBC One, 14 January 2024, 8pm, 20:45-21:15.
[277] James Gregory, and Tim Todd, 'Black mould: How dangerous is it in the home and how can it be treated?', *BBC News,* 12 March 2024 < https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-63642856> [Accessed 20 March 2024].
[278] *Downton Abbey,* ITV, 2010-2015.

'othered', and their stories are secondary to the women of Nonnatus House.[279] I will pick up FitzGerald's discussion on *CM's* feminist potential in chapter 2; however, the secondary treatment she identifies aligns the show with traditional historical narratives about the working-class. This concept is embodied by the quintessential cycling scene of the midwives which depicts the women as literally elevated from working-class society. Class distinction was emphasised from the very first scene of *CM* which depicts Jenny, a newcomer to Poplar, walking through the loud, busy and dirty East-End.[280] Jenny is dressed primly wearing a bright red lipstick which starkly contrasts the brown and greys that dominate the scene. Extradiegetic sound perpetuates the sense of unease with an anxious beat. Men appear threatening, leering and wolf-whistling at the outsider. She walks past two women fighting and calling each other names such as, 'whore' 'tart' and 'wicked bitch.' The use of 'tart' is inconsistent as it was used by Cockneys to refer to a young girl not as an insult.[281] Whilst this could be considered nit-picking, it contributes to the vulgar media perception of Cockneys. Barltrop and Wolveridge identified that obscenities are often put 'in the mouths of 'lower-class' characters by writers who have no feeling of its weight.'[282] Whilst 'tart' is not an obscenity, *CM* is televised at 8pm, pre-watershed, which restricted stronger language. The scene depicts naive Jenny entering a dangerous world entirely 'othering' the working class. However, this perception of danger is quickly dispelled, and *CM* depicts collaboration and friendship between the classes. For example, the usual friendship of Chummy, a very posh nurse, and Jack, a local boy. In episode 2, Jack teaches Chummy how to ride a bike and she buys him one in return, the episode ends with the almost comical image of the pair cycling around Poplar together. Even the name 'Chummy' plays into the juxtaposition as 'chum' in Cockney is used to identify an 'alien presence.'[283] Jack's thick Cockney accent also contrasts Chummy's received pronunciation which Cockneys traditionally dislike as it 'smacks of being the enemy's language.'[284] This scene is symbolic of Chummy being welcomed into Poplar through gaining the trust and respect of the community. It is perhaps an overly idyllic vision of the collaboration between classes.

CM is routinely accused of presenting an idealistic, even sanitised, version of history. Herman argues that 'the daily grind of life without running water, central heating and washing machines that looms large in Worth's memoirs gives way to dewy-eyed romance.'[285] Whilst this unfairly dismisses the extensive scenes displaying the harsh conditions of poverty, it's accusation that the show sanitises elements of the book has traction. To attract a broad audience the show must adhere to modern expectations which inevitably results in aspects of the book being altered. Herman identifies that the

[279] Louise FitzGerald, 'Taking a Pregnant Pause', in Upstairs and Downstairs: British Costume Drama Television from The Forstyte Saga to Downton Abbey, ed. by James Leggott and Julie Anne Taddeo, pp. 249- 261 (p.258).
[280] Season 1: episode 1, *Call the Midwife,* BBC One, 15 January 2012, 8pm, 00.29-3.18.
[281] Barltrop and Wolveridge, p.82.
[282] Barltrop and Wolveridge, p.15.
[283] Barltrop and Wolveridge, p.41.
[284] Barltrop and Wolveridge, p.51.
[285] Herman.

golliwogs knitted by Sister Monica-Joan are notably absent from the show.[286] The nurses do discuss the dolls; however, they are never actually visible.[287] To an extent, this is an attempt to avoid alienating a modern audience who would be overtly aware of the racist connotations of the dolls. However, displaying golliwogs on pre-watershed television would be inappropriate and therefore, this decision also arises from necessity. However, *CM* does force its audience to confront racism in East-End society through other narratives which refutes the perception that the show is only 'cosy nostalgia.'[288] For example, season 12 depicts the fallout from Enoch Powell's infamous 1968 'Rivers of Blood' speech.[289] *Figure 3* shows the demonstration depicted in the episode and *Figure 4* is a photograph from the actual march that took place on 22 April 1968. The images are almost identical illustrating historical consistency. Men in white coats, meat packers from Smithfield market, are shown marching alongside men in blue coats, dockers from London docklands, holding placards that read 'we back Enoch.' These attitudes illustrate the dangerous consequences of politicians scapegoating immigrants in times of economic hardship. The episode was televised in 2023 and echoes the rising racial tensions in modern Britain. Cockneys have a reputation as being unreceptive to immigrants. Barltrop, Wolveridge and Webb, all Cockneys, staunchly defend that unease of foreigners did not come from racism but general unease towards outsiders.[290] This is perhaps indicative of an inability to remain objective when writing about a culture you are a part of.

[286] Herman.
[287] Season 1: episode 6, *Call the Midwife,* BBC One, 19 February 2012, 8pm, 28:07.
[288] Herman.
[289] Season 12: episode 1, *Call the Midwife,* BBC One, 1 January 2023, 8pm, 41.05:42:05.
[290] Barltrop and Wolveridge, p. 53; Webb, p. 146.



Figure 3: scene from *CM* season 12, episode 1 showing a march in support of Powell.[291]



Figure 4: a photograph of the march that took place 22 April 1968 in support of Powell.[292]

[291] Season 12: episode 1, *Call the Midwife,* BBC One, 1 January 2023, 8pm, 41.17.
[292] Tengely-Evans, Tomas, 'Battle on the docks—when workers marched for Enoch Powell', *Socialist Worker*, 19 April 2018 < https://socialistworker.co.uk/features/battle-on-the-docks-when-workers-marched-for-enoch-powell/ > [Accessed 20 March 2024]

The 1960s are surrounded by a 'peculiar kind of nostalgia' which is utilised by *CM* to engage audiences.[293] Painstaking attention to detail, maintaining the authenticity of everything down to the tea-sets and backing music, provides escapism for the audience.[294] Depicting an era on-screen that exists within living memory carries many challenges as the East-End that viewers remember is not always consistent with the one that existed. The show has to maintain a balance between indulging the 'enormously powerful mythic narrative' that surrounded the 1960s and revealing the complex reality that Webb identifies in his 'warts and all' reflection of his childhood in this period.[295] Ed Cummings argues that as the show has progressed it has indulged nostalgia more and 'has become an institution.[296] Cummings is a regular writer for *The Telegraph* and his socially conservative political stance is evident in his assessment that the show is, 'woolly 21st-century liberal values projected into the past.'[297] Period dramas by premise inflict a modern outlook onto history or they would fail to engage an audience, making his argument redundant. This change could also be indicative of the rising living standards and improvement to medical care that occurred in the 1960s, providing less avenues for drama. According to Web, 'the 1960s changed everything; the old society had somehow crumbled away.'[298]

To conclude, the conflict of comfort and challenge is evident in *CM's* depiction of the Cockney people. By premise, its focus on working-class perspectives and its dedication to evidencing the realities of absolute poverty in 1950s and 1960s London challenges traditional historical narrative which overlooks these experiences. However, by doing so through the lens of middle-class observers it has the effect of 'othering' the Cockney for the purpose of entertainment and indulging a gritty insight for its predominantly middle-class viewership. Despite this, *CM* avoids falling into common media tropes, such as in *Snatch*, and demonstrates a sincere attempt to accurately portray the Cockney people without mockery. Certain elements of the culture, including the dialect, are minimised by necessity as the purpose of the show is to appeal to a mass audience on primetime television. Due to the growing awareness of the impact of television on public perceptions of history there is an increased demand in the popular media for more accurate representations of culture that avoid perpetuating offensive or inaccurate stereotypes.

---

[293] Webb, p.7.
[294] Thomas, Heidi, 'Heidi Thomas: Researching Call the Midwife', *National Archives,* 18 May 2016 < https://media.nationalarchives.gov.uk/index.php/heidi-thomas-researching-call-midwife/ > [Accessed 20 March 2024].
[295] Webb, p.167; Webb p.8.
[296] Cummings.
[297] Ibid.
[298] Webb, p.165.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Bob Marley: One Love, dir. by Reinaldo Marcus Green (Paramount, 2024)

Bridgerton, Netflix, 2020-present

Call the Midwife, BBC One, 2012-present

Downton Abbey, ITV, 2010-2015

Green Street, dir. by Lexi Alexander (Universal Pictures, 2005)

Hedges, Nick, 'Slum Housing And Poverty', *Nick Hedges Photography* <http://www.nickhedgesphotography.co.uk/photo-gallery/slum-housing-and-poverty > [Accessed 20 March 2024]

Olympics, 'The Complete London 2012 Opening Ceremony | London 2012 Olympic Games', *YouTube,* 27 Jul 2012 < https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4As0e4de-rI> [Accessed 10 Apr 2024]

Peaky Blinders, BBC Two (series 1–4) BBC One (series 5–6), 2013-2022

Sillitoe, Alan, *The loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner,* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007)

Snatch, dir. by Guy Ritche (Columbia Pictures, 2000)

Tales from Call the Midwife, BBC Rewind <https://canvas-story.bbcrewind.co.uk/talesfromcallthemidwife/> [Accessed 11 Apr 2024]

The Guardian, 'Laughter in the slums: the best work of street photographer Shirley Baker – in pictures', *The Guardian,* 8 October 2014 < https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/gallery/2014/oct/08/laughter-in-the-slums-the-best-work-of-street-photographer-shirley-baker-in-pictures > [Accessed 20 March 2024]

Thomas, Heidi, 'Heidi Thomas: Researching Call the Midwife', *National Archives,* 18 May 2016 < https://media.nationalarchives.gov.uk/index.php/heidi-thomas-researching-call-midwife/ > [Accessed 20 March 2024]

Welsh, Irvine, *Trainspotting,* (London: Secker & Warburg,1993)

WomensAid, 'He's Coming Home', *YouTube*, 24 Nov 2022 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8BTCSYFmXvU> [Accessed 10 Apr 2024]

Worth, Jennifer, *Call The Midwife: A True Story of the East End in the 1950s,* paperback edn (London: Phoenix, 2012)

Reviews

Burns, Amy, 'Call the Midwife, TV review: A sickly sweet alternative universe full of sunshine and lollipops', *Independent,* 17 January 2016 <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/reviews/call-the-midwife-tv-review-a-sickly-sweet-alternative-universe-full-of-sunshine-and-lollipops-a6818046.html > [Accessed 10 Apr 2024]

Cox, Laura, 'Viewers' anger at 'graphic' Call the Midwife scene that showed a backstreet abortion before the watershed', *The Daily Mail,* 19 Feb 2013

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2280850/Call-Midwife-Viewers-anger-graphic-scene-backstreet-abortion.html > [Accessed 11 Apr 2024]

Craig, David, 'Call the Midwife wins over 7 million in consolidated New Year ratings', *Radio Times,* 9 Jan 2024 < https://www.radiotimes.com/tv/drama/call-the-midwife-new-year-ratings-newsupdate/ > [Accessed 10 Apr 2024]

Cummings, Ed, 'Call the Midwife, series 12 episode 1, review: a TV institution with fortuitous timing', *The Telegraph,* 1 January 2023 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/tv/2023/01/01/call-midwife-series-12-episode-1-review-tv-institution-fortuitous/ > [Accessed 20 March 2024]

Gilbert, Gerard, 'Don't call Call the Midwife cosy - it's the most subversive drama on TV', *The Telegraph,* 13 March 2017 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/tv/2017/03/13/dont-call-call-midwife-cosy-subversive-drama-tv/> [Accessed 20 March 2024]

Herman, David, 'Horlicks for Chummy: Britain's romance with cosy TV nostalgia', New Stateman, 27 February 2013 <https://www.newstatesman.com/long-reads/2013/02/horlicks-chummy-britain%E2%80%99s-romance-cosy-tv-nostalgia> [Accessed 20 March 2024]

Holpuch, Amanda, 'PBS seeks Downton-esque Brit hit with Call the Midwife and Mr Selfridge', *The Guardian,* 29 March 2013 <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2013/mar/29/pbs-downton-abbey-call-midwife-selfridge > [Accessed 10 Apr 2024]

Kenway, Emily, 'Call the Midwife: Another Kind of Nostalgia', *The F-Word,* 22 June 2012 <https://thefword.org.uk/2012/06/call_the_midwif/> [Accessed 11 Apr 2024]

Lake, Sariah, 'One Love: The Bob Marley Movie' Review, Controversy, & Discussion', *Rebel Essex,* 19 March 2024 <https://www.rebelessex.com/2024/03/one-love-the-bob-marley-movie-review-controversy-discussion/ > [Accessed: 20 March 2024]

Lawson, Mark, 'Second to nun: why Call the Midwife's medical miracles are a joke', *The Guardian,* 27 May 2021 <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2021/may/27/why-call-the-midwife-medical-miracles-are-a-joke > [Accessed 20 March 2024]

McNamara, Mary, 'Review: BBC's 'Call the Midwife' is sweet, stirring medicine', *LA Times,* 28 Sep 2012 <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/tv/la-xpm-2012-sep-28-la-et-st-bbc-call-the-midwife-review-20120929-story.html > [Accessed 10 Apr 2024]

Moran, Caitlin, 'Caitlin Moran on TV: Call the Radical Feminist', *The Times,* 26 Jan 2013 < https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/caitlin-moran-on-tv-call-the-radical-feminist-f765chg72wq> [Accessed 11 Apr 2014]

Plunkett, John, 'Call the Midwife draws its biggest audience', *The Guardian,* 21 January 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2013/jan/21/call-the-midwife-tv-ratings#:~:text=Midwife%20was%20up%20on%20its,8%20million%20viewers%20(27.6%25)> [Accessed 10 Apr 2024]

Rose, Steve, ''Why is Bridgerton's race twisting acceptable?' The real problem with the show's Black fantasy', *The Guardian,* 12 June 2013 <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2023/jun/12/bridgerton-queen-charlotte-race-black-fantasies-king-george > [Accessed 11 Apr 2024]

Swain, Marianka, ‘To say Call the Midwife isn’t ‘woke’ enough for the Baftas is plain wrong’, *The Telegraph,* 13 April 2021 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/tv/0/say-call-midwife-isnt-woke-enough-baftas-plain-wrong/ > [Accessed 11 Apr 2024]

Wollaston, Sam, ‘TV Review: Call the Midwife’, *The Guardian,* 20 Jan 2013 <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2013/jan/20/call-the-midwife-painfully-slow-delivery > [accessed 10 Apr 2024]

Secondary Sources

Barltrop, Robert, and Wolveridge, Jim, *The Muvver Tongue,* (New York: The Journey Man Press, 1980)

Bivins, Roberta, ‘The Windrush Generation and the NHS: By the Numbers’, *People’s History of the NHS,* 3 June 2019 <https://peopleshistorynhs.org/the-windrush-generation-and-the-nhs-by-the-numbers/#:~:text=Their%20numbers%20climbed%20steadily%20%E2%80%93%20by,of%20those%20from%20the%20Caribbean > [Accessed 11 Apr 2024]

Brooke, Stephen, ‘Gender and Working Class Identity in Britain during the 1950s’, *Journal of Social History,* 34:4 (2001), 773-795

Coates, Terri, ‘Impressions of the midwife in literature’, Midwives Journal, (1998), 21-22

Cook, Hera, ‘The English Sexual Revolution: Technology and Social Change’, *History Workshop Journal,* 59 (2005), 109-128

Cross, Robert, ‘From In Which We Serve to Last Orders: the Cinematic Representation of the Cockney’, *Doshisha Studies in Language and Culture*, 5:4 (2003), 517-537

Dow, Bonnie J, *Prime-Time Feminism: Television, Media Culture, and the Women’s movement since 1970,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996)

FitzGerald, Louise, ‘Taking a Pregnant Pause’, in *Upstairs and Downstairs: British Costume Drama Television from The Forstyte Saga to Downton Abbey,* ed. by James Leggott and Julie Anne Taddeo, pp. 249- 261

Gregory, James and Todd, Tim, ‘Black mould: How dangerous is it in the home and how can it be treated?’, *BBC News,* 12 March 2024 < https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-63642856> [Accessed 20 March 2024]

Harris, Trevor, and Castro Monia O’Brien, *Preserving the Sixties : Britain and the 'Decade of Protest',* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014)

Hughes, Sarah, ‘Interview, From Call the Midwife to Little Women: meet the queen of the festive TV schedules’, *The Observer,* 24 Dec 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2017/dec/24/queen-of-festive-tv-heidi-thomas-little-women-call-the-midwife > [Accessed 11 Apr 2024]

King, Laura, *Fatherhood and Masculinity in Britain, 1914-1960,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015)

Leggott, James, and Taddeo, Julie Anne, ‘Introduction’, in *Upstairs and Downstairs: British Costume Drama Television from the Foresyte Saga to Downton Abbey,* ed. by James Leggott and Julie Anne Taddeo. (London: Rowan & Littlefield, 2015), pp. xv- xxx

McGann, Stephen, *Call the Midwife – A Labour of Love: Celebrating ten years of life, love and laughter,* (London; Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2021)

Mills, Helena, 'Using the personal to critique the popular: women's memories of 1960s youth', *Contemporary British History,* 30: 4 (2016), 463-483

National Army Museum, 'What was National Service?', *National Army Museum* < https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/what-was-national-service > [Accessed 10 Apr 2024]

O'Conner, John E, *Image as Artifact: The Historical Analysis of Film and Television*, (Malabar: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Co., Inc, 1990)

Park, Eva, 'Jennifer Worth obituary: Nurse and author of an acclaimed memoir of 1950s East-End Life', *The Guardian,* 6 Jul 2011 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/jul/06/jennifer-worth-obituary> [Accessed 10 Apr 2014]

Rosenstone, Robert, *History on Film/Film on History (History: Concepts, Theories and Practice),* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2012)

Royal Historical Society, 'Raising the Roof: A History of Nursing Activism', *Royal Historical Society* < https://royalhistsoc.org/calendar/raising-the-roof-a-history-of-nursing-activism/ > [Accessed 11 Apr 2024]

Segal, Lynne, *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men,* 3rd revised edn (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007)

Smith, Glenn, Bartlett, Annie and King, Michael, 'Treatments of homosexuality in Britain since the 1950s—an oral history: the experience of patients', *British Medical Journal,* (2004), 1-3

Stedman-Jones, Gareth, 'The Cockney and the nation 1780-1988', in *Metropolis: London histories and representations since 1800*, ed. by David Feltman and Gareth Stedman Jones (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 1989), pp. 272-316

Taddeo, Julie Anne, 'Introduction: Doing History in the Age of Downton Abbey', *Journal of British Cinema and Television,* 16:1 (2019), 1-8

Tengely-Evans, Tomas, 'Battle on the docks—when workers marched for Enoch Powell', *Socialist Worker,* 19 April 2018 <https://socialistworker.co.uk/features/battle-on-the-docks-when-workers-marched-for-enoch-powell/ > [Accessed 20 March 2024]

Wagner, Erica, 'Celebrating 10 Years of Call the Midwife', *Royal Television Society,* 14 April 2021 <https://rts.org.uk/video/celebrating-10-years-call-midwife > [Accessed 20 March 2024]

Webb, Simon, *A 1960s East-End Childhood,* (Gloucestershire; The History Press, 2012)

"Anyone can cook *aloo gobi*, but who can bend a ball like Beckham?" An oral history project analysing the quality and value of representation in *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002) to the history of British Indians

Rhianna Saglani

Abstract: *This dissertation was an oral history study into British South Asian lives in the noughties and includes regular reference to interviews carried out throughout the research process. The dissertation was split into two parts, and the following chapter is taken from the second chapter of the first part, and uses oral history, historiography and wider historical discourse to make its points in evaluating Bend it like Beckham ("BILB"). The first chapter of part one took a detailed look into the lives of the young British Indians of the noughties to understand how their lives changed from previous generations. It set up the framework for the following chapter, which takes these experiences and contextualises them in the wider communities these young people lived in to understand why things were so different as generations went by, and therefore explain how important it is for young Indians to see their stories represented on screen to be able to feel a part of British society. It takes into account five factors of youth culture to best draw parallels between the film the oral history conducted, these being body image, the dating scene, education, queer narratives, and gossip culture.*

"You know how people talk": Community Reputation and Generational Battles[299]

The research for this dissertation was undertaken in part using oral history. The process was done to maximise the accuracy of the historiographical analysis, as using real-world examples, as opposed to theory and outdated oral history would not have lent itself well due to the retrospective nature of this study. A sample size of fifteen British Indians, who were born and brought up in the UK, and of adolescent age in the late 1990s/early 2000s was originally chosen, but narrowed down to 6 due to availability and willingness of participants. This was a disadvantageous aspect to the study as finding willing and eligible participants proved difficult. Despite this, having oral history that reflected backwards, rather than archival material that was of the time meant the bias of being present in situations leading to potential hyperbolic material was avoided. However, only having six participants proved more than sufficient in terms of the content derived from interviews, each between 40-60 minutes.

Image and the Body

[299] *Bend It like Beckham*, dir. by Gurinder Chadha (United Kingdom, 2002)

Throughout *BILB*, it is implied that an Indian woman's body is not for her use, nor her enjoyment, but the property and subject of the opinion of the rest of her community. Jess is constantly reminded from the beginning that she is bringing "shame on [her] family," by playing football.[300] Interviewee #4 speaks about the internalised shame felt when being made to wear certain clothes for school P.E. lessons, explaining that "it still gives me trauma because they did not have shorts underneath those skirts. It's disgusting."[301] She explains how her white British female friends were comfortable wearing these clothes, whereas her mindset was that these clothes were shameful. These ideas took away the bodily autonomy of young Indians and is a theme represented well in the film.

A moment in the film that depicts the impact this shame has on Jess in particular is when she sits on the sideline, anxious ahead of her first training session due to her new shorts. She explains to Joe that she feels uncomfortable showing a nasty childhood scar on her knee, explaining that it "looks awful."[302] Later, playing in the park with the boys, they also make fun of her scar. Her mother finds her playing in the park being lifted and carried in her football kit and exclaims, "*chi chi chi (yuck)*, he was touching you all over, putting his hands over your bare legs. You're not a young girl anymore… showing the world your scar."[303] This quote highlights the shame placed on both Jess' scar, the impact it has on her, and the notion of showing her bare body to men. Her mother implies that her body is something to be protected and hidden, not to be touched by others, especially men. This was echoed by Interviewee #3, who explained her own mother's protection of her body from "paedophilia", and how "girls from a young age are already sexualised".[304] Jess' actor, Parminder Nagra, came out after the film to explain that the scar was real, and "she was concerned about it hindering her chances of getting the lead part".[305] This emphasises that same shame in showing the injury for fear of it hindering her in her career. Director Chadha including the original story of the burn to embrace the scar demonstrates a progressive change in attitude towards these issues.

In a scene early in the film, Jess and Pinky come home to have themselves measured by a tailor for wedding outfits. The attitude to both girls' measurements highlights a fundamental difference in the way they both saw themselves. While measuring their bust, Pinky, on one hand

---

[300] ibid
[301] Figure 4
[302] *Bend It like Beckham*, dir. by Gurinder Chadha (United Kingdom, 2002)
[303] ibid
[304] Figure 3
[305] Condé Nast.'5 Surprising Things You Didn't Know about Cult Film "Bend It like Beckham"', *British Vogue,* 11 July 2020 <https://www.vogue.co.uk/arts-and-lifestyle/article/bend-it-like-beckham-facts>

wants her "*choli* more fitted," while Jess wants it to be looser.[306] Their mother responds differently to each of them, only explaining to Pinky she needs to be able to breathe, but says to Jess "dressed like a sack, who's going to notice you?"[307] While her intentions may have been to ensure Jess looked good at her sister's wedding, the line projects the same objectifying ideas around the body that much of fourth-wave feminist ideology was aiming to avoid. Interviewee #3 expands on her thoughts above and speaks about the way that conversation around breasts made her "feel awkward" when going through puberty; a feeling inflicted upon her due to the conversation around women's bodies. To her mum, Jess' hobby goes beyond kicking a football and foreshadows a future for her child that she does not want. She projects fears of another young girl in the community who did not follow the pathway expected of her and went "running off to become a model wearing short-short skirts." This fear returns directly to image and Jess' body, which puts so-called 'unconventional' careers that are into this fearsome, shameful category. Amrit Wilson explains that at a university Hindu party, a young girl was prohibited from wearing a dress due to it being "too revealing", but that Indian clothes, revealing in their own way, were allowed.[308] These ideas put forward a double standard of Western and Indian fashion, rooted in fear of assimilation that takes away individuality. It highlights the role of the film in representing these ideas, and the way attitudes changed in the new generation to fashion and the body as Jess becomes more comfortable in her body throughout the film.

Modern Dating Culture

"I don't understand that white woman … why was she talking about kissing?", exclaims an Indian *aunty*[309] after Jules' mum disrupts the wedding accusing Jess and Jules of a lesbian relationship.[310] This quote underpins the conservative attitude and ideas around the dating culture of the Indian community in the film. Throughout the film, there is a distinct lack of acknowledgement within the older generation of the way dating culture worked for the younger generation. This is likely due to the moulds of arranged and assisted marriage that was more common in the previous generations, and so for some, it is unfathomable that dating or sexual activity without a view for marriage is so common. A study undertaken by Dr Katherine Twamley highlighted that "young Gujaratis in London distanced themselves from any sense of 'arrangement' in their relationships", which highlights an active

[306] *Bend It like Beckham*, dir. by Gurinder Chadha (United Kingdom, 2002)
[307] ibid
[308] Amrit Wilson, *Dreams, Questions, Struggles* (Pluto Press, 2006) p. 62

[309] In this instance, the use of the word 'aunty' is cultural, to refer to elder women in society, notorious for their gossipy nature, rather than a direct familial relation.
[310] *Bend It like Beckham*, dir. by Gurinder Chadha (United Kingdom, 2002)

rejection of these traditional relationship structures.[311] While the Bhamra family are not Gujarati, it appears that the themes in the film corroborate with Dr Twamley's findings and emphasise the concern of the elders in these circumstances. Traditionally, elders would help younger generations find suitors, and the dating culture strikes further fear into the generation about the nature of the lives their children and grandchildren are living.

It is clear that dating culture is not something discussed in the Bhamra household, outside of the two sisters, so it is almost a shock when, while angry, their mother bursts out "don't think I didn't know that you were sneaking out with that good-for-nothing Teetu as well."[312] It is the only acknowledgement of the older generation's awareness of the secrecy around dating culture. Their mother is momentarily upset, and it is clear that the behaviour of her two children is concerning to her. This incident occurs directly after the wedding has been called off because Teet's parents have misunderstood Jess' aforementioned friendly cuddle with Jules. There is a lot of upset around this incident and, despite Jess trying her best to refute the allegations, she is made aware that she is the one disgracing them. When the subject of gossip and community opinion is spoken about in interviews, several interviewees explain that the presence of judgement like this was strong and, while incidents like this did not occur, the knowledge that they were being gossiped about, or being told by the elderly that they may be doing things unconventionally, they "[did] get affected", and "words can hit home and it can hurt".[313] The interviews highlight the way this gossip, and how the misinterpretations of other people's lives can affect people. While dramatized and exaggerated for effect well in the film, it does emphasise the hurtful nature of gossip around personal lives. 'Throughout the film, Jess is fearful of her community's judgement of her relationship with a white Irishman. Such judgement is drilled home most strongly by her sister but reinforced by Teet's parents' strong reaction to the idea she was kissing a white man. Jess asks Pinky if she thinks their "mum and dad would still speak to [her] if [she] brought home a *gora* [white man]?", to which Pinky's reply is to "make sure that doesn't happen."[314] It is apparent that Jess knows that she would not be in a favourable position with her family, and the wider community should she marry out of the diaspora, but Pinky's fear of gossip and stepping out of line is drilled strongly into Jess at this moment, to the point she insists to Joe that their relationship cannot go ahead. This idea seems absurd to both Joe and Jules, who question "whose life [she is] living" by abiding by the laws of her community.[315] Eventually, Jess comes around to the idea of living her life for herself and ends up in a relationship

[311] Katharine Twamley, *Love and Marriage amongst Gujarati Indians in the UK and India* (2013)

[312] *Bend It like Beckham*, dir. by Gurinder Chadha (United Kingdom, 2002)
[313] Figure 4
[314] *Bend It like Beckham*, dir. by Gurinder Chadha (United Kingdom, 2002)
[315] ibid

with Joe, when a scene of him playing cricket with her father and other family members closes out the film. This latter thought process around the freedom to end up with who you want, which are in line with Jess' instincts, are echoed in Interviewee #4's words, where she explains she doesn't "understand why it matters who someone dates!"[316] She explains that dating outside the community one belonged to was frowned upon, and that it should not have mattered who people ended up with. When analysed alongside my oral history interviews, it is evident that BILB provides an accurate representation of the fear of judgement and its role within the British Indian community good or bad.'

Education and Career Paths

As Jess battles with the wishes of her parents, she is sharply told by Joe that "if [she tries] and please them forever, [she'll] end up blaming them". [317] Joe's criticism here relates to several aspects of her life, but it emphasises Jess' outlook on her life. It highlights the dilemma Jess has between what she wants and her duty, a pressure Joe no longer feels, and therefore criticises Jess for feeding into her dilemma. The internal battle between cultural expectations and wishes is prevalent amongst the young British Indians studied in this project. Interviewee #5 speaks about the complete disillusionment he felt from his community as he started to pursue a career in construction and studied away from his family. He explained that living away from his community gave him the "freedom to live how [he] wanted to", and not living in a strict household like Jess, he was able to come to conclusions about who he was becoming, in contrast to any expectations that might have been placed on him if he had chosen to stay within his community.[318] The interviewee goes on to explain that despite not feeling a strong expectation from his parents or community, he recognised that the "responsibility" to settle and assimilate in this country "is just as high, if not higher than the generations before us".[319] Undoubtedly, pressure is placed on British Indians to live up to the education and career expectations of the previous generation, while also trying to carve out their own career paths, as discussed in Chapter One. We can see this pressure in Jess' life as she battles between staying in the country and becoming a lawyer to appease her parents or going to America to pursue her dreams.

A sociological study by Tahir Abbas explains this struggle of young South Asians in educational fear as they grapple with factors like religion and culture. The study highlighted that "Sikh mothers…impart values onto their daughters that encourage them to attain higher education and

[316] Figure 4
[317] *Bend It like Beckham*, dir. by Gurinder Chadha (United Kingdom, 2002)
[318] Figure 5
[319] ibid

subsequent professional employment."[320] These values are echoed in the film; despite some gender inequalities in the community, both Bhamra parents worked and encouraged their daughters to achieve their highest potential. By studying Indians as a group, Abbas explained that the social and economic mobility they adopted was greater, and this had a direct impact on the education afforded to their children. Greater social mobility allowed parents to enforce cultural practices to better assimilate their children into British culture. By giving their children the best educational opportunities, they would be able to thrive in the way white British people did, and therefore make a home for themselves in a new country. Abbas' research gives the film an extra layer of truth and allows more viewers to see themselves, and their migration struggles represented within it, no matter their age.

Gossip and the Generation Gap

Throughout *BILB,* Jess' mum is constantly concerned with what people will think of her and her choices, reiterating the idea of "you know how people talk" to her daughter, creating shame around her unconventional behaviour.[321] Gossip penetrates society throughout the film, and becomes the outline for many of the stresses the younger generation feels. It is clear that Pinky becomes gripped by the pressure of the elders around her as she treads carefully to ensure she is not put under the scrutiny of elders and warns Jess of the same. This is first evident when Pinky pulls Jess aside after realising that she has been lying about a job at HMV, and asks who she has been dating in secret, only for Jess to reveal she has been playing football. Pinky's simple reaction: "if you're going to go to all this bother lying, at least do it for something good. Don't you want a boyfriend like everyone else?"[322] The initial idea of lying emphasises the younger generation's need for secrecy about aspects of their life to avoid unnecessary opinions on their unconventional behaviour by becoming more like the white British people around them. Avoidance was often in an effort to attempt to stay within cultural norms in a country that is not built for a traditional Indian way of life. The sisters' exchange is shortly followed up by their mother interjecting by saying "Jassie's a good girl now" and lists all the ways she has been helpful to her mother in recent weeks.[323] Jess' double life becomes more common throughout the film as she behaves one way to appease her parents and bridge the generational gap, while still defying their wishes by playing football.

---

[320] Tahir Abbas, 'The Impact of Religio-Cultural Norms and Values on the Education of Young South Asian Women', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 24.4 (2003), pp 411-428 (p 415), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3593312>

[321] *Bend It like Beckham*, dir. by Gurinder Chadha (United Kingdom, 2002)

[322] Ibid.

[323] Ibid.

This gap is discussed by Interviewee #6, the first in his generation within his extended family to be born in this country. He explains that "if you don't conform to the model (as an) Indian person, then there's … just an element of judgement upon that."[324] He discusses how the ideals of the generation above him helped him to carve out his path; a happy medium between the parts of his culture he liked, while refuting the toxic and negative parts too – something we see Jess do. A sociological study by Parvez Wakil et al., researches these generational differences from a psychological perspective. While the study was undertaken in Canada, many of the same principles apply to Britain in its reference to a "host society… certainly marked with greater socioeconomic independence and individualism" in contrast to the characteristics of the countries that families came from which are "characterized by strong kinship ties, interdependence, and a great respect for age and authorities".[325] These 'kinship ties' encourage the opinions and often unwanted help of the community with the common idea that raising children 'takes a village.' These ideas begin to wane in the next generation, who value less the opinion of their elders, as they do not feel people who have no familial ties to them should be able to weigh in on their lives. Thus, the generational gap grows and explains much of Jess' frustration in *BILB*, and the fear Pinky feels, forcing her to hide parts of her life so it does not fall under the scrutiny of people whose opinions she does not value.

Perspectives on Queer Youth

Tony's biggest fear of accepting his sexuality is not his identity, but the knowledge he will be shunned entirely by his community. He is even hesitant to trust Jess with the knowledge, evidenced by his panicked reaction to her shock. Tony's queer plotline is not explored in depth, so it is difficult to make a judgement on the attitudes towards queer people solely based on this small scene between Tony and Jess. Referring to Dhaliwal's work, she states that "I was conditioned from childhood to get married to a "good man from India" and it was so deeply ingrained in me that I didn't realise I was also being conditioned to be straight."[326] The idea of heterosexuality as the cultural norm is emphasised by Tony who wants his coming out to be subtle; he never uses the word gay. Tony explains his preferences to Jess and hopes his sexuality is understood easily. Jess' shock recedes quickly, as she makes a joke about her parents thinking he is "mad" for her. This points to a generational difference in attitudes

[324] Figure 6.
[325] S. Parvez Wakil, C. M. Siddique, and F. A. Wakil. 'Between Two Cultures: A Study in Socialization of Children of Immigrants', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 43.4: (1981), pp 929-940 (p 929) https://doi.org/10.2307/351349

[326] Sharan Dhaliwal, *Burning My Roti: Breaking Barriers as a Queer Indian Woman* (Hardie Grant Publishing, 2022) p. 39.

towards queer people, as Jess can accept her friend's sexuality easily, while Tony still fears the opinions of others, so does not come out for the duration of the film.

While Tony's sexuality is not discussed, the negative perspectives on queer youth are highlighted in the elders' confusion at Jules' mum's allegations at Jess. A quote that has become one of the most famous in the film highlights this best, "Lesbian? Her birthday's in March. I thought she was a Pisces."[327] While funny to many viewers, this assumption would have been well-placed in 2002 due to the confusion between star signs and sexuality – the former is a concept familiar to Indians, but the latter is not. Such confusion epitomises the way queer culture was seen in the Indian community – something that does not even cross their mind. While Jules' mum lives in fear of her daughter being a lesbian, the Indian aunties have no concept of this idea whatsoever and appear confused. This theme around the lack of knowledge of the queer community is discussed in the interviews, too, with Interviewee #4 going as far as to say that within the community, "it wasn't a thing at that point".[328] The second generations' complete lack of knowledge of queer culture highlights why the film does not feel the need to discuss queer identities much further than Tony's coming out and the lesbian jokes at Jess' expense. An acquaintance of Chadha's claimed that she "chickened out" of making the Jess and Jules plotline, but had that happened, it is unlikely the film would have been received as well.[329] Within the context of 2002, it made sense to stray from that idea, in turn allowing the film to be as representative as possible of British Indian society at the time.

Conclusions on *Bend it Like Beckham*

It cannot be overstated that *BILB* has become a cultural phenomenon for the Indian diaspora in the UK. Interviewee #3 speaks about its representation of queer people, saying that "the way they dealt with that was… very good."[330] While this is only one example of its impact on young British people, the shared opinion highlights that in discussions about difficult topics, it was this film that allowed young Indians to broaden their horizons. It offered young people the opportunity to see different types of people who look like them and to feel represented by Jess or Pinky's struggles to straddle two cultures. The interviews give a deep insight into the accuracy of the representation of the films, and underlines that while it told one story, aspects of many young Indians' lives were told throughout. This study has filled a gap in the study of the settlement of migrants in the context of the

[327] *Bend It like Beckham*, dir. by Gurinder Chadha (United Kingdom, 2002)
[328] Figure 6
[329] Noor Norman,'The Queer Legacy of "Bend It like Beckham"', *The Juggernaut,* 12 April 2022 <https://www.thejuggernaut.com/bend-it-like-beckham-queer-lesbian-legacy>

[330] Figure 3

representation on screen. It allowed for the use of oral history, film study, and traditional historiographical analysis to highlight how important representation continues to be to recording the histories of migrants and underrepresented communities. Underlining the qualities and flaws of the film allowed for an accurate analysis of its impact, and the quality of the representation of British history it portrays, something that is seldom done in historical study. Naturally, many critics of the film arise, and its cliché and overly-dramatised nature presents some flaws to its accuracy. However, it is important to note that the role of media like this is to first and foremost entertain, not to provide an accurate picture of the lives of the communities it features. It is because of this entertainment factor that it is an even stronger piece of media in its ability to allow Indians to feel emotions at their own expense, instead of watching characters who neither look like them nor have lives similar to them. The value of representation in this film is therefore indubitable.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Bend It like Beckham. 2002. dir. by Gurinder Chadha (United Kingdom: Helkon SK)

Dhaliwal, Sharan. 2022. *Burning My Roti: Breaking Barriers as a Queer Indian Woman* (Hardie Grant Publishing)

Figures 1-6 – Oral History Interviews in Appendix A.

Secondary Sources

Abbas, Tahir. 2003. 'The Impact of Religio-Cultural Norms and Values on the Education of Young South Asian Women', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 24.4: 411–28 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3593312>

Bradbury, Alice. 2013. 'From Model Minorities to Disposable Models: The De-Legitimisation of Educational Success through Discourses of Authenticity', *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 34.4: 548–61 <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2013.822618>

Desai, Niranjan. 2012. 'Revisiting the 1972 Expulsion of Asians from Uganda', *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal*, 7.4: 446–58 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45341851>

Nast, Condé. 11 July 2020. '5 Surprising Things You Didn't Know about Cult Film "Bend It like Beckham"', *British Vogue*<https://www.vogue.co.uk/arts-and-lifestyle/article/bend-it-like-beckham-facts>

Norman, Noor. 12 April 2022. 'The Queer Legacy of "Bend It like Beckham"', *The Juggernaut* <https://www.thejuggernaut.com/bend-it-like-beckham-queer-lesbian-legacy>

officialosugma. 2024. 'Because She's Brown, She's Not Pretty?', *Www.reddit.com*<https://www.reddit.com/r/TwoXChromosomes/comments/1avm90v/because_shes_brown_shes_not_pretty/https://www.reddit.com/r/TwoXChromosomes/comments/1avm90v/because_shes_brown_shes_not_pretty/> [accessed 24 April 2024]

Pande, Raksha. 2021. 'Comment: Young British Indians Are Embracing Arranged Marriage', *Press Office*<https://www.ncl.ac.uk/press/articles/archive/2021/04/conversationarrangedmarriages/#:~:text=Young%20British%20Indians%20practising%20love> [accessed 24 April 2024]

Rajendran, Aneeta. 2012. 'Lesbians in the House: Female Queerness in Bend It like Beckham (Gurinder Chadha, 2002) and Chutney Popcorn (Nisha Ganatra, 1999)', *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film*, 10.2: 145–66 <https://doi.org/10.1386/ncin.10.2-3.145_1>

Roberts, Millie. 2022. 'Was Joe from "Bend It like Beckham" Actually Problematic the Whole Time?', *Junkee*<https://junkee.com/bend-it-like-beckham-joe-jess/326764>

Sawhney, Cary Rajinder. 2001. '"ANOTHER KIND of BRITISH" an Exploration of British Asian Films', *Cinéaste*, 26.4: 58–61 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41689402>

Twamley, Katharine . 2013. *Love and Marriage amongst Gujarati Indians in the UK and India*

Wakil, S. Parvez, C. M. Siddique, and F. A. Wakil. 1981. 'Between Two Cultures: A Study in Socialization of Children of Immigrants', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 43.4: 929 <https://doi.org/10.2307/351349>

Wilson, Amrit. 2006. *Dreams, Questions, Struggles* (Pluto Press (UK))

Wong, Billy. 2015. 'A Blessing with a Curse: Model Minority Ethnic Students and the Construction of Educational Success', *Oxford Review of Education*, 41.6: 730–46 <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2015.1117970>

The Composition of Atlantic Golden Age Pirate Communities as Escape Societies

Aaron King

Abstract: *My thesis explored how far pirate societies of the Golden Age could be described as 'Escape Societies', a term originated by James C. Scott in The Art of Not Being Governed (2009) and expounded upon by Joseph McKay in his article entitled "Pirate Nations: Maritime Pirates as Escape Societies in Late Imperial China" (2013). Within his article, escape societies were defined as "decentralised, horizontal social organizations" that "leverage their relative size, local knowledge of physical geography… and diffuse social configuration to escape the taxing, conscripting and labour-extracting powers of large coercive state and empire-building projects."*[331] *Scott defined these groups in terms of their presence within mainland Asia; McKay sought to expand the definition to groups of pirates in the South China Sea. I aimed to determine the helpfulness of the term as it relates to Euro-American Pirates across the late 16th Century to early 18th Century. This chapter considers the cultural considerations of how the members of an escape society are composed, taking a closer look at how the various identities of gender, race and sexuality contributed to the atmosphere and culture aboard ship and, further, created various escape societies.*

The Composition of Atlantic Golden Age Pirate Communities as Escape Societies

Charles Johnson records the efforts of a black sailor aboard Edward Teach's ship at the time of his struggle against Robert Maynard to obliterate the ship they were on and condemn the British soldiers to the same fate as him, saying '… Teach had little or no hopes of escaping, and therefore he had posted a resolute fellow, a Negroe, whom he had bred up, with a lighted match…'.[332] This member of Blackbeard's crew, a former African war chief known to many as Black Caesar, is said by legend to have maintained a position of significant threat in the Florida Keys before joining Teach's crew[333] and would go on to be acquitted of his crimes when he was later brought into custody after refusing to light the match and take everyone with him. When discussing who was allowed on board Teach's ship, his relationship with Black Caesar does not and cannot inform us of the wider relationship between piracy and diversity. Some of Blackbeard's most targeted bounties were slave ships, where

[331] Joseph MacKay, "Pirate Nations: Maritime Pirates as Escape Societies in Late Imperial China", *Social Science History*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (2013) 551-573

[332] Charles Johnson, *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the most notorious Pyrates* (London: Ch. Rivington, J. Lacy and J. Stone, 1724) p. 85

[333] Kevin M. McCarthy, *Twenty Florida Pirates* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2015) pp. 39-43 and Melissa Petruzzello, *Black Pirates and the Tale of Black Caesar* (2017) < https://www.britannica.com/story/black-pirates-and-the-tale-of-black-caesar> [accessed 16th April 2024]

he would not free those aboard but sell them to colonists in America to turn a profit. This measured toleration for diversity is at the heart of how minorities interacted with pirate crews and is what this chapter intends to address. The individual members of the communities that composed these crews are an important part of determining whether they can qualify as an escape society, considering that in both Scott's original vision and McKay's expansion of it they were primarily composed of minority groups that had great incentive to escape state control as a means of securing freedom to live in the way that they should want and be able to maintain or establish their own cultural practises. Much like pirate articles, the composition of crews can be questioned similarly. Many individual crews had a range of diverse backgrounds among them, but the motivations and reasons for their presence can differ widely. To determine the extent to which minority groups were included within pirate groups, this chapter will address homosexuality among pirates and the concept of matelot, ethnic diversity and the extent to which women found themselves on the ship.

This chapter intends to show that in the greater historiography surrounding piracy, the institutions that many Atlantic pirates created and adhered to are more than coincidence and less than a product of genuine intent. Much of the scholarly field is divided between portrayals of proto-revolutionary heroes or common thieves.[334] The disparate gap between these two positions is something that should be rectified, and viewing piratical groups under the model of an escape society is something that can help to do this. Being able to view the ship as a non-state space acknowledges the unique democratic and cultural practices that would not be seen for quite some time in state positions whilst also not devaluing the harm that these groups were often capable of. Whilst it is certainly true that pirates were, first and foremost, raiders who cared about improving their social mobility no matter the human cost, their acts and policies are consistent with that of other non-state groups who have been similarly described in both Scott and MacKay's work on the subject, in something that could possibly extend scholarly thought on the subject to describe the formation and maintenance of non-state spaces.

Matelotage was an agreement of union between two sailors that joins together their financial assets and property, in a similar manner to a domestic partnership. It is a wide point of contention, however, as to what this system meant for sailors. It could imply homosexual relationships as a standard, or act as a form of platonic companionship that guaranteed the money buccaneers and pirates earned could be taken back to their families in the event of death. B.R. Burg, a scholar at the centre of the debate surrounding pirates and sexuality, has suggested that a large portion of their population were homosexual. He claims that the majority who raided in West India outright rejected

[334] C.R. Pennell, "Who Needs Pirate Heroes?", *The Northern Mariner*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (1998) 61-79 & Laura Rosenthal, "Cultural Studies and Pirate Studies: Straight on 'til Morning", *The Eighteenth Century*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (2012) 381-390

heterosexuality, staying within their groups to be able to continue to engage in homosexual activity and stay within the culture they found themselves in. [335] On the opposite end of the spectrum, and in firm disagreement with Burg's overall thesis, Peter Leeson has suggested that matelots only exist due to financial incentives, and the ability it would give sailors to ensure their funds return to their families. [336]

Much of the existing historical record on this issue suggests that it was not the case that matelots exclusively focused on either of these aspects and were related to a mixture of these two principles. As one example of this, Alexandre Exquemilin was a prominent buccaneer of the 17th Century who was involved in much activity around the Spanish Main. He enlisted in Henry Morgan's crew and would later document his experiences in *The Buccaneers of America.* He wrote this about matelotage- "It is a general and solemn custom… to seek out for a comrade or a companion, whom we may call partner…"[337]. The use of this language implies that an emotional bond was an important part of the matelot agreement. The use of language like 'partner' or 'companion' implies a deeper relationship than would be present if matelotage acted as a strictly financial agreement. The legal aspect is also elaborated on somewhat but discussed to a far lesser extent than the emotional side of a matelot. "… this is also done by articles drawn and signed on both sides…'[338]. From Exquemilin's portrayal, the material aspect of the division of assets seems to take less priority than his description of the companionship, which would suggest that whether platonic or romantic, forming an emotional bond was the primary purpose of matelot and management of finance was secondary to it.

Rebecca Simon discusses matelot in *The Pirate's Code: Life and Laws Aboard Ship*, using the example of a relationship formed between two sailors during the period, John Swann and Robert Culliford. [339] Culliford was a crewmate of William Kidd's ship, a privateer turned pirate primarily known for his seizure of the Mughal vessel, the *Quedah Merchant*. Theophilus Turner, a pirate captain, offered a confession of piratical activities he had observed at sea after he had his ship captured in Virginia in 1699 so that he might've avoided execution. Making up a part of this confession, he describes various captains and crews that he saw docking in St. Marys, a small island off the coast of Madagascar, relating his account of Kidd's ship coming into port. This account takes a particular interest in Swann and Culliford, describing the former as being a "…great consort of

[335] B.R. Burg, *Sodomy and the Pirate Tradition: English Sea Rovers in the Seventeenth Century Caribbean, Second Edition* (New York: NYU Press, 1995) p. 108
[336] Peter Leeson, *The Invisible Hook: The Hidden Economics of Pirates* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009) p. 174
[337] Alexandre Exquemilin, *The Buccaneers of America* (Amsterdam: Jan ten Hoorn, 1678) p. 40
[338] Exquemilin (1678) p. 40
[339] Simon (2023) p. 105-106

Culliford's, who lives with him…". [340] Although rare, formalised and written agreements of matelot do persist, and many describe such an agreement as being engaged in consortship. A surviving example of such a document made between Francis Reed and John Beavis made in a similar time frame in 1699 reads as follows: "Be it knowen to all men by these preasants that Francis Reed and John Beavis are entread in Consortship together…".[341] Much of the language used in surviving descriptions and agreements would suggest that there is certainly a strong aspect of male companionship that cannot be explained purely through saying that matelot was only financial. Whether platonic, romantic, or sexual, these men certainly formed strong bonds with each other and these relationships would certainly not be encouraged by the state in the manner that they are described. Adversity to homosexual relationships was the stark reality of late 17th to early 18th century Europe and America, often punishable by death. As such, avoiding suspicion was important during this period and although gay culture existed during this period within Europe, it remained secretive in order to avoid punishment under the sodomy laws made prominent by English common law. As stated by Randolph Trumbach, "European society was unique in objecting to all forms of homosexual behaviour."[342] John Swann and Robert Culliford are a prominent example of such relationships being in the open, and perhaps provide the most solid foundation that such activity was commonplace. As set out, one of the aspects of an escape society is that minority groups would often seek them out so that they would be able to practise their own culture more freely. Matelotage was a prominent cultural practise among buccaneers that would be discouraged by the states they came from, and buccaneering communities would indisputably allow for this activity to occur. This allowed for cultural freedom that was not commonplace- although not for any enlightened notion of equal rights among sexual orientations.

The more universally accepted practise among buccaneering communities of matelot is contrasted with how piracy related to race, which was marked by a measured tolerance for diversity. This statement means that pirates cannot be described as the 'liberators' that they have been by figures such as Marcus Rediker and Rebecca Simon in relation to the Atlantic Slave Trade, implying that this diversity was the result of conscious political thought. The concept of diversity among piratical groups is a well-substantiated one, but to assert it has any intentionality is not found well in the historical record. Many pirates were just as likely to participate in the slave trade as to take people away from it. Edward Teach was a famous participator in the slave trade. After raiding the French slave ship known as *La Concorde*, of the 450 slaves on board, Teach decided to return the majority of

[340] *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 17, 1699* and *Addenda 1621-1698* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1908)
[341] Edward Theophilius Fox, *Pirates in Their Own Words* (Fox Historical, 2014) p. 74
[342] Randolph Trumbach, "London's Sodomites: Homosexual Behaviour and Western Culture in the 18th Century", *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (1977) 1-33

them to the ship's owner and keep the remaining 61 to sell at auction on the island of Martinique.[343] As argued by Arne Bialuschewski, pirates of the Atlantic Golden Age were not "multiracial pioneers" and had little thoughts of enlightenment in this area.[344] However, to only look at these events with no overall framework or reference leaves very little opportunity for a fruitful analysis. It has the effect of relegating these idiosyncratic events of both pirate involvement in the slave trade and black members of Atlantic crews as isolated incidents with no strong connection that offers very little explanation, seeming very much contradictory. Although this is a point of view expressed by Bialuschewski, it is also a marker of the general attitude of a section of scholars that address the social history of piracy.[345] This contradiction becomes especially important when considering individual events, such as rebellious slaves joining pirate crews voluntarily after escaping plantation life, as on the island of Antigua during unrest in 1716 as told by Hugh Rankin.[346] A space that needed the assistance of as many people as possible to accomplish feats that would likely result in death necessarily bred toleration, as the opportunity for new crew was something unlikely for captains to be able to refuse. The nature of a non-state space allowed for more exchange and expression of culture than would be common in similar state spaces. Essentially, whilst piracy was not and could never be desirable to those undergoing slavery, it acted as enough of a viable alternative for black sailors among these crews to be relatively common.

The commonality of radically democratic policies and multiethnic ships often led to pirates experiencing a disconnect from the nations of their origin, often choosing to identify as a pirate first. Many pirate captains allowed for a variety of backgrounds, a prominent example of this being Edward England's ship. John Bois, a carpenter on a raided ship, describes his encounter with the group as such: "The pirates had on board about 130 white men, and about 50 Spaniards, negroes and Indians, 26 guns and 4 guns, commanded by Edward England and an Irishman"[347]. Other pirate captains such as Sam Bellamy, Benjamin Evans and William Lewis all had crews with a multitude of backgrounds, emphasising piratical spaces as being multicultural and diverse, although it bears repeating that this was with no particular intent to be so. As Joseph MacKay discusses in his article surrounding escape societies and their relation to piracy in the South China Sea, pirates constituted groups that were, in most instances, in opposition to the concept of the state. [348] Groups like these would serve to

[343] Sarah Watkins-Kenney, "A Tale of One Ship with Two Names: Discovering the Many Hidden Histories of "La Concorde" and Queen Anne's Revenge", *The North Carolina Historical Review,* Vol. 95, No. 2 (2018) 186-220
[344] Arne Bialuschewski, "Black Sailors and Seafaring Slaves in the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1716-1726", *Journal of Caribbean History*, Vol. 45, Iss. 2 (2011) pp. 143-153
[345]David J Starkey, "Voluntaries and Sea Robbers: A Review of the Academic Literature on Privateering, Corsairing, Buccaneering and Piracy", *The Mariner's Mirror*, Vol. 97 (2013) 127-147
[346] Hugh Rankin, *The Golden Age of Piracy* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969) p. 82
[347] *CSP, Vol. 30, 1717-1718*, ed. by Cecil Headlam (1930) p. 411
[348] Joseph MacKay, "Pirate Nations: Maritime Pirates as Escape Societies in Late Imperial China", *Social Science History*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (2013) 551-573, p. 556

differentiate themselves from it, regardless of whether the intent was borne out of self-interest or not. They were often supported by radically democratic policies that were substantially different from what could be found in the contemporary West and these factors came together to create a barrier of social and political thought that split many pirate's identities. During the latter era of the Golden Age, some went so far as to reject the identity of their country and supplant it with that of their seafaring life. According to Marcus Rediker, Atlantic pirates proclaimed to come "from the seas" rather than their home country.[349] Their identities as pirates often came first, such as when pirate Thomas Morris came for execution and began "…crying up a Pyrate's life to be the only Life for a Man of any Spirit".[350] Pirate's multiethnic crews were often created out of self-interest, but this intent had no bearing on their ultimate consequence. They further created a barrier of thought and culture between pirates and the nations that they came from.

This barrier of thought would also come into play when discussing the topic of women aboard the ship. This was heavily discouraged and sometimes outright banned in most nautical circles. Many believed that women could only be the cause of dangerous situations, from shipwrecks to death. The articles aboard Bartholomew Roberts' ship as recorded by Charles Johnson contained one that specifically prevented women from being able to have access to it, reading as follows -

"VI. No Boy or Woman to be allow'd amongst them. If any Man were found seducing anny [*sic*] of the latter sex, and carried her to Sea, disguised, he was to suffer death."[351]

Approaches like these among some piratical groups show that, much like all other practices, attitudes towards women were very inconsistent. Whilst misogynistic attitudes were certainly prevalent and held strongly within some crews, others were far more lenient as to who was allowed on board. The strong attitude that an exceptionally large majority of sailors held was likely supported by centuries of nautical tales that supported a view encouraging the idea that women caused misfortune at sea, such as the tales of sirens that would lure men to their deaths or that their very presence would anger the gods at sea and bring unfavourable weather. These attitudes would very often carry over to cases of real-life violence. As John C. Appleby relates in his work '*Women and English Piracy'*, the voyage of Mary Lee exemplifies the perceived danger of women. [352] During a voyage travelling to Maryland, she

[349] Markus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra, Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (London: Verso, 2000) P. 167
[350] Markus Rediker, *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004) p. 13
[351] Johnson (1724), p. 180
[352] John C. Appleby, *Women and English Piracy, 1540-1720: Partners and Victims of Crime (*Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2013) p. 197

was accused of witchery and causing storms across their path, for which she was hanged on board and then thrown into the sea.

Notably, however, this attitude was not persistent among all piratical groups. Perhaps the most famous examples of female pirates in the Golden Age are Anne Bonny and Mary Read, members of Calico Jack's crew. The illustration of Bonny and Read later in the article is a colour representation of the image that was displayed within Charles Johnson's General History, displaying them in the most ferocious and masculine light possible by emphasising their capacity for violence through the use of their weaponry. [353] This image is compounded through descriptions that Johnson gives of them throughout his biographies, playing up the difference between her claims that she fell into piracy "…only under compulsion…" and the reality of her actions. When her ship and crew were under threat of capture, she was one of the few attempting to rouse them awake and into action. When they would not, she "… fired her arms down the hold amongst them, killing one and wounding others."[354]. Anne Bonny experiences much of the same treatment, being of a "…fierce and courageous temper…", one of few acting in defence of the ship at the time of their arrest alongside Read. When permitted to see Jack Rackham before his execution, some of her few words to him according to Johnson's account relayed that "… if he had fought like a man, he need not have died like a dog." [355]Contemporary thinking surrounding women's involvement in piracy indicates that it was necessary to view those who participated in it as different, almost as not being of sound mind or as not being rational actors. Women's political agency and its removal through a greater amount of political codification became a matter of concern over the eighteenth century. The idea that piracy could give women agency and a more active role contradicted the subservient and submissive ideal of women that was being codified at the time. Ingrid Tague relates that the "consumer revolution" of the eighteenth century would lead to many writers attempting to reestablish the importance of domestic life and "…restore traditional gender roles."[356] Although Johnson's description acts as an attempt to capitalise on a great interest in violence, it also acts as an attempt to codify domestic life.

Alongside an interrogation of their mental faculties, as Sally O'Driscoll's article indicates, writing surrounding the pair also fascinates due to its attempts to restrict their physicality through illustrations, particularly in the representation of the female body. The exposure of their breasts within various drawings is, at once, both an expression of their agency and a limiter that serves to guide the reader to the conclusion that, although pirates, they remain women and as such, have "… an

[353] Johnson (1724)
[354] Johnson (1724), p. 121
[355] Johnson (1724), p. 131
[356] Ingrid H. Tague, "Love, Honor and Obedience: Fashionable Women and the Discourse of Marriage in the Early Eighteenth Century", *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (2001) 76-106

essentially domestic nature."[357] Just as with an interrogation of their faculties, their bodies experienced the same treatment among those who authored on the subject. A clear barrier of political thought emerges when discussing female pirates; a subservient ideal that many would seek to protect in contrast with the striking idea of women being able to commit violence to the extent of Bonny and Read. It becomes clear through this case study that the communities they were involved in, as this does not apply broadly to all ships, viewed their involvement differently than would be encouraged by the state or those that would act on its behalf.



1- Colour Illustration of Anne Bonny and Mary Read

Aside from the most infamous examples of Bonny and Read, other women pirates from the Golden Age in the Atlantic remain notable, almost entirely from the later period. In terms of the former, Ingela Gathenhielm was a prominent privateer in Sweden across the course of the early 18th Century in companionship with her husband Lars Gathenhielm and for the latter, Mary Critchett acted in operation much later, as she raided a ship as a prisoner in 1729 and faced execution for it in the same year. The role of women in piracy across the course of the Golden Age is, in many ways, quite contradictory and much like the topic of diversity among pirate crews, fragmented. Attitudes varied widely, whether favourable or not, but the reaction of contemporaries historicizing the issue firmly

[357] Sally O'Driscoll, "The Pirate's Breasts: Criminal Women and the Meanings of the Body", *The Eighteenth Century*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (2012) 357-379 (p. 364). For more information on the way the pair are historicized within a General History, this article is of particular value - Rob Canfield, "Something's Mizzen: Anne Bonny, Mary Read, "Polly", and Female Counter-Roles on the Imperialist Stage", *South Atlantic Review*, Vol. 66, No. 2 (2001) 45-63

swung towards highlighting the contrast between what they considered to be the ‘proper’ role of women with the more violent and active role that female pirates took. This barrier of thought, this time more so coming from members of society towards what they saw at sea, is demonstrative of the barrier aspect of an escape society.

The terms set out by both Scott and McKay contain the provision that the people involved in escape societies were often socially disadvantaged and fled state control as a means to retain or create cultural practises that would be inaccessible through other means. Matelot acted as a cultural practise among buccaneers and pirates, especially during the early phase of the Golden Age. It was not common among any other contemporary group accessible to primarily European, working-class sailors and acted as a distinctive feature of buccaneer culture that emerged through a lack of state control. In terms of diversity among pirate crews, the idea that such practices would be inaccessible if not for escape societies becomes of the utmost importance. Piracy was never the ideal option, and the idea that many would choose to go into such a life with other paths available to them in the name of purposeful anti-state activity is fanciful at best. However, to deny that participation existed would be the very same, and this participation is something that could only be afforded by an escape society that had a significant barrier of political thought between their ideals and the ideals that the state espoused as a whole over the period. On the same topic, this barrier of thought also affected how women in piracy were perceived. In the case of Bonny and Read, much about their physical appearance and mental state was interrogated, most likely as a means of separating them from the ideal of a woman that was being established. Through these factors, much of the social interaction surrounding pirate crews matches what would be typically expected of an escape society.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 17, 1699 and *Addenda 1621-1698* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1908)

Exquemilin, Alexandre. 1678. *The Buccaneers of America* (Amsterdam: Jan ten Hoorn)

Fox ,Edward Theophilius. 2014. *Pirates in Their Own Words* (Fox Historical)

Johnson, Charles. 1724. *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the most notorious Pyrates* (London: Ch. Rivington, J. Lacy and J. Stone)

Secondary Sources

Books

Appleby, John C. 2013. *Women and English Piracy, 1540-1720: Partners and Victims of Crime (*Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer)

Burg, B.R. 1995. *Sodomy and the Pirate Tradition: English Sea Rovers in the Seventeenth Century Caribbean, Second Edition* (New York: NYU Press)

Leeson, T. Peter. 2009. *The Invisible Hook: The Hidden Economics of Pirates* (Princeton: Princeton University Press)

McCarthy, Kevin M. 2015. *Twenty Florida Pirates* (Rowman & Littlefield)

Rankin, Hugh. 1969, *The Golden Age of Piracy* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston)

Rediker, Markus. 2000. *The Many-Headed Hydra, Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (London: Verso)

Rediker, Markus. 2004. *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age* (Boston: Beacon Press)

Simon, Rebecca. 2023. *The Pirate's Code: Life and Laws aboard ship* (London: Reaktion Books, 2023)

Journal Articles

Bialuschewski, Arne. 2011. "Black Sailors and Seafaring Slaves in the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1716-1726", *Journal of Caribbean History*, Vol. 45, Iss. 2

Canfield, Rob. 2001. "Something's Mizzen: Anne Bonny, Mary Read, "Polly", and Female Counter-Roles on the Imperialist Stage", *South Atlantic Review*, Vol. 66, No. 2, 45-63

MacKay, Joseph. 2013. "Pirate Nations: Maritime Pirates as Escape Societies in Late Imperial China", *Social Science History*, Vol. 37, No. 4, 551-573

O'Driscoll, Sally. 2012. "The Pirate's Breasts: Criminal Women and the Meanings of the Body", *The Eighteenth Century*, Vol. 53, No. 3, 357-379

Pennell, C.R. 1998. "Who Needs Pirate Heroes?", *The Northern Mariner,* Vol. 8, No.2, 61-79

Rosenthal, Laura. (2012) "Cultural Studies and Pirate Studies: Straight on 'til Morning", *The Eighteenth Century*, Vol. 53, No. 3, 381-390

Starkey, David. 2013. “Voluntaries and Sea Robbers: A Review of the Academic Literature on Privateering, Corsairing, Buccaneering and Piracy”, *The Mariner’s Mirror*, Vol. 97, 127-147

Tague, Ingrid H. 2001. “Love, Honor and Obedience: Fashionable Women and the Discourse of Marriage in the Early Eighteenth Century”, *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 1, 76-106

Trumbach, Randolph. 1977. “London’s Sodomites: Homosexual Behaviour and Western Culture in the 18th Century”, *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 1-33

Watkins-Kenney, Sarah. 2018. “A Tale of One Ship with Two Names: Discovering the Many Hidden Histories of “La Concorde” and Queen Anne’s Revenge”, *The North Carolina Historical Review,* Vol. 95, No. 2

Website Articles

Simon, Rebecca. 2022. *Anne Bonney and Mary Read: the deadly female pirate duo* < https://www.historyextra.com/period/stuart/anne-bonny-mary-read-female-pirates-lives-crimes/> [accessed March 1st 2024]

How and why did children become involved as witnesses in English witchcraft cases, 1560 - 1680?

Emma Shapland

Abstract: *The involvement of children as witnesses in English witch trials is an aspect of early modern witchcraft which has been particularly neglected. This dissertation focuses on both sixteenth and seventeenth-century witchcraft cases where children were involved as witnesses in trials, and then the cases where children were witnesses after supposedly being possessed. This topic is particularly intriguing as, for a modern audience, children having such an influential role in court trials seems very peculiar. There is an extremely limited historiography surrounding children in witch trials, with the vast majority of historians dedicating a chapter at most to the topic. Ronald Seth's 1969 book Children Against Witches provides the most detailed examination of the role of children in witch trials. However, Seth has quite a cynical view of these children so this dissertation, by contrast, adopts a slightly more lenient perspective as many of the children were coerced into making witchcraft allegations, or pretended to be bewitched for attention without fully understanding the sinister consequences of their actions. The following discussion explores not only how children were involved in witch trials but also why they played such an important role in so many trials.*

Children as Witnesses in English Witch Trials, 1612 to 1634

The utilisation of children as witnesses in witch trials was maintained throughout the seventeenth century. There was not only a continuation of child witnesses but even an increase in recorded witch trials that relied upon children to provide evidence for a conviction. This chapter will explore the changing role of children as witnesses in these later witch trials, and how children were gaining more influence in the outcomes of trials. It will also aim to challenge pre-existing historiography, such as Ronald Seth's claims that all these children were innately evil beings who wanted those that they accused to be executed.

One of the most notorious witch trials was the 1612 Pendle Witch Trials. The accusations originated after Alison Device believed that she had bewitched a man and through her confession implicated most of her own family and their local rival family, the Chattoxes. The proceedings of the trial were recorded by Thomas Potts, a law clerk, who published his pamphlet *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster* in 1613.[358] As it was a Catholic hotspot in the midst

[358] Thomas Potts, *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster* (London: W. Stansby, 1613).

of a vastly Protestant kingdom, Lancashire was known for being particularly troublesome, making it especially susceptible to becoming the location for a major witch trial. Catholics were more likely to be accused of witchcraft along with any other perceived deviants who threatened the typical way of life. The case resulted in the execution of ten people on the charge of witchcraft, making Potts' pamphlet hugely valuable for its provision of great insight into the progression and conclusion of the trial. One of the main witnesses in the trial was Jennet Device, 'a yong Maide about the age of nine yeares' whose testimony enabled many of these convictions, including those of her mother, brother and sister. [359] Jennet's grandmother, Old Demdike, had also been convicted of witchcraft, but she died in prison before the trial had begun. The Device family were particularly vulnerable to being accused of witchcraft as they were a poor family with no adult male present. As men were seen as more able to resist the temptations of the Devil, all female households were seen as especially weak and, therefore, much more likely to contain a witch who had been lured by the Devil. The tragic consequence of Jennet's entire family being executed based on her testimony is one of the most harrowing aspects of any English witch trial. In the seventeenth century, 'fourteen, being the age of discretion, was the legal cutoff point at which children… were permitted to testify; but age was not an absolute disqualification'.[360] Evidently, it would have been viewed as inappropriate to use Jennet as a witness. However, local Justice of the Peace (JP) Roger Nowell was keen to obtain Jennet as a witness and did this by using James I's own book *Daemonologie* as justification. James had written that 'such witnesses [women, criminals and children] may be sufficient in matters of high treason against God'.[361] Consequently, Nowell used the monarch's own claim that children could be used as witnesses to provide validity to Jennet's testimony. Jennet was first used as a witness against her mother, Elizabeth Device. This testimony highlighted the greatest amount of distress from Jennet when providing evidence against her family. When Jennet was first brought in front of the court, she 'with weeping teares… cryed out unto my Lord the Judge, and told him, shee was not able to speake in the presence of her Mother'.[362] This potentially alluded to great guilt from Jennet and a clear reluctance to provide her testimony. Consequently, Jennet's reaction could suggest that, unlike some of the other child witnesses, she may have been acutely aware of the potential consequences of her evidence. It is also highly probable that Jennet was coerced, by those desperate to secure a conviction, into giving evidence against her family and that it was an incredibly upsetting ordeal for the young child. James I had once been terrified about the potential presence of witches, and so witchcraft convictions were seen as a way to gain favour with the monarch. Conversely, Jennet Device is one of the children that Ronald Seth is most scathing towards, describing the child as 'a precocious aplomb' without 'the

[359] Potts, p. 55.
[360] Gilbert Geis and Ivan Bunn, *A Trial of Witches: A Seventeenth-Century Witchcraft Prosecution* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 44.
[361] James I, *Daemonologie* (Edinburgh: Robert Walde, 1597), p. 79.
[362] Potts, p. 55-56.

unwitting innocence of childhood'.[363] These appear to be particularly unwarranted assaults on a child who lost her entire family as a result of a rampant witch hunt, in which she was perhaps manipulated into becoming a witness. The probable coercion by an adult could be linked to Jennet's status as an illegitimate child which may have been used to pressure Jennet into providing testimonies against her family.

After the initial distress shown by Jennet, her testimony becomes much more composed and provides many damning details against her mother and siblings. There is a recognisable description of familiars with Jennet claiming that her mother possessed a 'browne Dogge, which she called *Ball*' and that her brother James, who was only fourteen himself at the time of the trial, had a 'Blacke Dogge… called *Dandy*'.[364] However, when providing evidence against her mother Jennet deviated away from the more typical child witness statement, usually about familiars, by explaining how 'there was about twentie persons… at… Malking-Tower… all which persons… were witches'.[365] This was a new aspect of a testimony in which a child not only provided evidence against the specific person but also implicated a plethora of other potential witches. The Pendle trial most clearly demonstrates the dangers of child witnesses due to the accusation of more innocent people as Jennet's story developed. The accusation of a meeting of witches caused the case to develop beyond the two rival families to also incriminating other local families. Jennet then provides specific details against her brother and how he 'hath beene a Witch for the space of three yeares'.[366] As Jennet would have only been six at the time she claims to remember James becoming a witch, it alludes to another element of potential coercion from an adult as it seems dubious that Jennet would have been aware of such an event at only six years old. The testimony of Jennet had a particularly long-term impact, as she continued to be cited as an example as to why children should be used as witnesses. This was especially apparent in Michael Dalton's *The Country Justice*, published in 1746 as a guide for those learning law.[367] Dalton explained how he found 'in the said Book of the Discovery of Witches, that two children, the one about nine Years of Age, the other of fourteen, did upon their Oaths give Evidence against the Prisoners' and applied this to argue 'that [a] minor *under age* may be a Witness or [an] Accuser'.[368] This demonstrates how contemporaries were evaluating how reliable a testimony from a child could be and whether they should be trusted during trials. Evidently, Jennet's testimony continued to influence early modern courts for over a hundred years after the Pendle Witch Trial by being the proof contemporaries required to decide that children could be valuable witnesses.

---

[363] Ronald Seth, *Children Against Witches* (London: Robert Hale, 1969), p. 80.

[364] Potts, p. 57, 73.
[365] Potts, p. 61.
[366] Potts, p. 73.
[367] Michael Dalton, *The Country Justice* (London: H. Lintot, 1746), p. 378.
[368] Dalton, p. 378.

A trial occurring simultaneously alongside the Pendle Witch Trial was the Salmesbury witch trial, also in Lancaster. Potts devoted a small portion of his pamphlet to this case which involved fourteen-year-old Grace Sowerbutts accusing four people of witchcraft. Compared with previous statements provided by children, the evidence given by Grace was much longer and more detailed than what was usually provided. Grace claimed that four women, including her own grandmother Jennet Bierley, had been tormenting her for several years and causing her significant pain. There are numerous examples provided by Grace about how these women would transform into 'a black Dogge, with two legges' that 'persuaded this Examinate to drowne her selfe'.[369] This dramatic story would have been quite concerning for those listening to Grace about the attempts made on her life. As a result, those involved in the trial may have been even more determined to achieve a conviction to protect the young girl. There is also a contrast in which Grace does not just claim that she saw a familiar, but instead that the animal was actually the accused who had transformed into the black dog. This is another escalation compared to more traditional witchcraft claims by suggesting that the women were disguising themselves as animals to conduct their witchcraft, which probably created an even greater sense of fear amongst the local community that these women could have been hidden anywhere. The most serious allegation made by Grace was against Jennet and Ellen Bierley, her aunt, whom Grace claimed had murdered and then consumed the one-year-old child of a local man, Thomas Walshman. This abhorrent crime is a further example of the unusual evidence being provided by Grace and was later supported by Thomas Walshman himself.

However, while evidence such as this may have once made a conviction almost inevitable, JPs in the seventeenth century were beginning to exercise more caution before blindly accepting all claims of witchcraft. Instead, they began to question the story depicted by Grace and became sceptical of aspects of her unusual claims. Potts himself highlighted that 'there was not any one witnes able to charge them with one direct matter of Witchcraft; nor prove any thing for the murther of the childe'.[370] This was one of the first demonstrations of people at the trial assessing the validity of the evidence being provided and becoming suspicious when there were few other witnesses to corroborate a testimony provided by a child. Additionally, Potts wrote how he 'pray you observe these contrarieties, in order as they are placed, to accuse the Prisoners'.[371] Therefore, the evidence itself was also being cross-examined and any inconsistencies were being identified. It was then concluded that the testimony of Grace Sowerbutts was 'more proper for the Legend of Lyes, then the Evidence of a witnesse upon Oath', resulting in all the accused being found not guilty.[372] After the discovery that Grace had fabricated her testimony, it was found that she had been pressured by a Jesuit priest

[369] Potts, p. 94.
[370] Potts, p. 102.
[371] Potts, p. 104.
[372] Potts, p. 105.

Christopher Southworth, the uncle of Jane Southworth who was one of the women accused by Grace. Therefore, it can be presumed that the Catholic Christopher Southworth had been seeking revenge against his Protestant family and neighbours and saw the manipulation of a child, who are typically easier to coerce than adults, into making witchcraft accusations as the best way to achieve this. The testimony of Grace Sowerbutts is the first example in which it was admitted that an adult had coerced a child to give evidence. When Grace was bought back in front of the two JPs, she confessed that 'shee was sent [to Christopher Southworth] to learne her prayers, [and he] did perswade, counsell, and advise her, to deale as she formerly hath beene'.[373] Grace then concluded by admitting that 'shee never did know, or saw any Devils, nor any other Visions, as formerly by her hath beene alleaged and informed'.[374] Although, despite this confession, it is never explained how Southworth convinced Grace to not only falsely accuse her neighbours but also her grandmother and aunt. Evidently, those involved with the trial were less interested in the reasoning behind the allegation compared to their main discovery that the accusations were false. However, this level of scepticism towards the claims made by a child was not applied to the Pendle Witch Trial which was covered within the same pamphlet. Instead, while recording the discovery of Grace's dishonest allegations, Potts commented how 'the Witches of the Forrest of Pendle were never so cruell nor barbarous'.[375] This appears to imply that Potts, and likely the JPs as well, were more willing to accept the testimony of Jennet Device as it involved much less violent details about the supposed witches compared to that of Grace Sowerbutts. Therefore, the case of the Salmesbury Witches is hugely important in potentially revealing why testimonies from children were often accepted if they were taken to be more reasonable and plausible to the JPs.

A year later a pamphlet entitled *Witches Apprehended* was published and detailed the accusation made by Henry Sutton against his mother, Mary Sutton.[376] Mary Sutton would have been particularly vulnerable to witchcraft accusations as she 'was never married, yet she had three bastard(s) [sons]'.[377] This is one of the first details mentioned about Mary Sutton, suggesting how important the author felt this to be, probably as it would have made Mary an outsider from her local community. The case began in 1612 when Henry had reported to his mother that a local landowner, Master Enger, had beaten him. While there is no direct testimony within the pamphlet from Henry himself, the author then reported the boy's claim that 'though hee had received no hurt, [Mary] vowed to take revenge'.[378] While the author attributed this statement to Mary's 'venomous nature', it instead

[373] Potts, p. 109.
[374] Potts, p. 110.
[375] Potts, p. 105.
[376] Anon., *Witches Apprehended, Examined and Executed, for notable villanies by them committed both by land and water* (London: William Stansby, 1613).
[377] *Witches Apprehended,* p. 8.
[378] *Witches Apprehended*, p. 8.

appears to be much more just the words of a mother angered about the mistreatment of her son.[379] This highlights one of the main dangers of allowing children to be witnesses as what was most probably a flippant comment from Mary was instead taken by her son to be a certain sign that she was a witch. The case developed after an encounter in which Enger's seven-year-old son had thrown stones at Mother Sutton and called her a witch. It was then reported that the women had 'both resolved, and vowed revenge' upon the son, which eventually resulted in the death of the child.[380] Mary Sutton eventually confessed to being a witch after Enger had informed her that 'her owne sonne Henry had revealed all', further illustrating the impact a child could have upon the outcome of a witch trial.[381] This case is informative for not only again involving a child as a witness but also because it was one of the first recorded witch trials that used the water test to judge whether the accused was innocent or guilty. This was where a suspected witch would endure the torture of being tied up and was then put into water. If they drowned they were deemed to be innocent, and if they floated they were believed to have been a witch and were then executed. With both outcomes resulting in death for the suspected witch, the water test was an especially cruel way to decide the fate of these women. Enger inflicted this torture upon Mary several times and, as she floated every time, he concluded that she must have been a witch. This, therefore, portrays the lengths people were going to in order to corroborate stories conjured up by children which resulted in even more witchcraft executions.

The final example of a child being used as a witness was in 1634 and was the case of Edmund Robinson, which also took place in Pendle Forest. The case was mentioned by John Webster in his *Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft*, published in 1677 with the hopes of increasing scepticism towards witchcraft.[382] Edmund had accused at least seventeen neighbours of being involved in a meeting of witches, though they were all given a reprieve based on subsequent events. Webster had always been sceptical of the case but grew even more so when he was told that he could not speak to Edmund alone. During an interview with Edmund, Webster asked the boy many questions to interrogate his story and to discover whether or not he was lying. Webster commented how Edmund 'had been examined by two able Justices of the Peace, and they never did ask him such a question'.[383] This may explain why so many testimonies from children had been trusted as the JPs were more focused on getting a conviction than properly examining the witness. After subsequent examinations, Edmund 'confessed that he was taught and suborned to devise, and feign those things against him'.[384] Therefore, as with the case of the Salmesbury Witches, once a closer investigation was undertaken into the feasibility of the story presented by Edmund, it was easily discovered that the boy had

[379] *Witches Apprehended*, p. 8.
[380] *Witches Apprehended*, p. 17.
[381] *Witches Apprehended*, p. 20.
[382] John Webster, *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft* (London: J. M., 1677).
[383] Webster, p. 277.
[384] Webster, p. 277.

invented his accusations. As Edmund's father corroborated his story it is probable that he was also a part of the fabrication. This can easily be explained as after the allegations 'the boy, his Father and some others did make a practice… go[ing] from Church to Church [so] that the Boy might reveal and discover Witches' from which 'they got a good living'.[385] As the Robinsons were a poor family, the ability to make an income from Edmund discovering witches would have incentivised his father to comply with Edmund's story. However, it may also be that Edmund's father was the one who encouraged him to make his initial accusations with the original intent of Edmund gaining fame and credibility as a witchfinder in order to make a living.

The case of Edmund Robinson was even mentioned in the *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic* when both Edmund and his father were re-examined in July 1634.[386] These entries are intriguing because Edmund confessed that 'he had heard the neighbours talk of a witch feast that was kept at Mocking Tower in Pendle Forest… and thereupon he framed those tales concerning the persons aforesaid, because he heard the neighbours repute them for witches'.[387] Evidently, children did remember stories about witches that they heard while growing up as Edmund was aware of the intricacies of the Pendle Witch Trial that had occurred over twenty years earlier. This would explain why children became involved as witnesses in witch trials as they had been surrounded by tales of witchcraft from an early age, making them extremely wary of potential witches, thus making them more eager to discover any witches. Furthermore, Edmund also admitted that he had aimed his allegations at people who he had heard rumours about being witches. This shows that children were aware of local rumours and gossip that was spread by neighbours and so upon hearing the possibility of local witches may have been scared and chose to accuse them of witchcraft themselves. Edmund did then state that 'nobody was ever acquainted with any part of his fiction… nor did any body ever advise him'.[388] While, based on Edmund's confession, this could be true, he still may have said this in order to protect his father, who continued to deny involvement with the false allegations. This is especially so as this contradicted Edmund's original confession that he had been 'taught and suborned to devise'.[389] While the true influence of other people in the case of Edmund Robinson will never be known, it is still hugely valuable in demonstrating the influence neighbours and rumours could have upon children.

The role of children as witnesses in trials clearly developed over the seventeenth century, with people beginning to question the reliability of testimonies from children. While this helped save the

[385] Webster, p. 277.
[386] 'Charles I – Volume 271: July 1-16, 1634', in *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Charles I, 1634-5*, item 97 (London, 1864).
[387] 'Charles I – Volume 271: July 1-16, 1634', p. 152.
[388] 'Charles I – Volume 271: July 1-16, 1634', p. 153.
[389] Webster, p. 277.

lives of several innocent people who were the victims of allegations from children, there were still many others who were not so lucky. The revelations that these allegations were often the result of coercion or mere imagination also make these cases of later child witnesses particularly captivating. However, there is little evidence as to why children were utilised as witnesses and whether they were truly aware of the severe consequences of their testimonies. While there may be this lack of evidence about the intricacies of child involvement in witch trials, it can be clearly seen that many of these children did not necessarily make the allegations out of the 'sheer nastiness or pure devilment' which Seth had once accused them of.[390] Instead, many of these children were pressured by adults into making their testimonies, or they had just been desiring the attention that came with being involved in a witch trial. These cases may have caused Seth to find himself 'questioning the clear pure innocence of childhood', but it could also be perceived that these trials did actually prove the innocence of children.[391] Admittedly, not all the children were entirely innocent which can be seen by those who confessed to lying. However, as children were bought up being subservient to adults, children such as Jennet Device who had made accusations against their own families after adult pressure were just following what they had always been taught, which was conforming to the requests of adults. Many of these cases show how easy it was for children to be manipulated by adults and demonstrate the grave consequences of this.

[390] Seth, p. 22.
[391] Seth, p. 173.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Books

Dalton, Michael, *The Country Justice* (London: H. Lintot, 1746).

Gibson, Marion, *Early Modern Witches: Witchcraft Cases in Contemporary Writing* (London: Routledge, 2000).

James I, *Daemonologie* (Edinburgh: Robert Walde, 1597).

Government Records

'Charles I – Volume 271: July 1-16, 1634', in *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Charles I, 1634-5*, item 97 (London, 1864).

Pamphlets

Anon., *Witches Apprehended, Examined and Executed, for notable villanies by them committed both by land and water* (London: William Stansby, 1613).

Potts, Thomas, *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster* (London: W. Stansby, 1613).

Webster, John, *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft* (London: J. M., 1677).

Secondary Sources

Articles

Gaskill, Malcolm, 'Witchcraft and Evidence in Early Modern England', *Past & Present,* 198.1 (2008), 33-70.

Holmes, Clive, 'Women: Witnesses and Witches', *Past & Present*, 140.1 (1993), 45-78.

Micklewright, F. H. Amphlett, 'A Note on the Witch-Familiar in Seventeenth Century England', *Folklore*, 58.2 (1947), 285-287.

Poole, Robert, 'Polychronicon: Witchcraft History and Children: Interpreting England's Biggest Witch Trial, 1612', *Teaching History*, 147.1 (2012), 36-37.

Wilby, Emma, 'The Witch's Familiar and the Fairy in Early Modern England and Scotland', *Folklore,* 111.2 (2000), 283-305.

Books

Almond, Philip, *The Lancashire Witches: A Chronicle of Sorcery and Death on Pendle Hill* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017).

Borman, Tracy, *Witches: James I and the English Witch-Hunts* (London: Vintage, 2014).

Davies, R. Trevor, *Four Centuries of Witch Beliefs,* vol. 2 (Oxford: Routledge, 2011).

Douglas, Mary, *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations* (Oxford: Routledge, 2004).

Gaskill, Malcolm, *Witchfinders: A Seventeenth-Century English Tragedy* (London: John Murray, 2005).

Geis, Gilbert, and Ivan Bunn, *A Trial of Witches: A Seventeenth-Century Witchcraft Prosecution* (London: Routledge, 1997).

Gibson, Marion, *Early Modern Witches: Witchcraft Cases in Contemporary Writing* (London: Routledge, 2000).

MacFarlane, Alan, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, 2nd edn. (London: Routledge, 1999).

Poole, Robert, *The Lancashire Witches: Histories and Stories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

Rosen, Barbara, *Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991).

Seth, Ronald, *Children Against Witches* (London: Robert Hale, 1969).

Sharpe, James, *Witchcraft in Early Modern England*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Routledge, 2020).

Winsham, Willow, *Accused: British Witches Throughout History* (Yorkshire: Pen & Sword History, 2016).

Online Articles

Gowing, Laura, 'Pendle Witches Lancashire Witches', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004), <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-67763#odnb-9780198614128-e-67763-headword-11> [accessed 1 April 2024].

University of Southampton

SJUH Southampton Journal of Undergraduate History

All content is © the authors