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**The Princess and the Queer: A study of why Princess Diana was the hero of the gay community during the AIDS crisis and became an iconic figure for queer people.**

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# **The Princess and the Queer**

**A study of why Princess Diana was the hero of the gay community during the AIDS crisis and became an iconic figure for queer people.**



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**History: Politics, Culture and National Identities, 1789 to the Present**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis shows why the involvement of Princess Diana during the AIDS crisis was a step forward for the gay community. In the 1980s, the AIDS crisis wreaked havoc on the gay community in Britain. Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Party was in power during that decade and did very little to stop the homophobic British public from blaming the gay community for the AIDS crisis. However, there was a figure of importance who did care for homosexual AIDS patients. This was Princess Diana. Diana's visits to the AIDS wards from 1987 onwards transformed her in the eyes of the gay community from just another princess who was part of the establishment to a gay icon. This image evolved even further when it became public knowledge that Diana had suffered from neglect and was treated like an outcast by her husband and the royal family. Diana received massive support from the gay community because the problems she faced during her marriage were all too familiar to many queer people. Tragically, Diana died in a car crash on 31 August 1997. However, even decades after her death the gay community still sees Diana as relatable. This is because Diana's story is often portrayed in the media through a queer lens, which keeps her memory alive and seemingly makes her part of the gay community.

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## Introduction

Doctor Rob Miller worked in 1987 at the AIDS ward in the Middlesex Hospital which was filled with homosexual patients who were fighting for their lives. Miller noticed that many of his colleagues were secretive about their work to the outside world since discrimination against homosexuals was rampant. Miller thought this was because the Conservative Party under Margaret Thatcher had created a homophobic environment and therefore homosexuals received little sympathy from the British public.<sup>1</sup>

However, a significant event happened for homosexual AIDS patients that would change everything. On 9 April 1987, Princess Diana one of the most prominent and popular members of the British royal family visited the same AIDS ward where Miller worked.<sup>2</sup> Miller noted that even though Princess Diana was part of a conservative establishment, she did not seem to mind the sexual orientation of the AIDS patients. Moreover, Princess Diana refused to wear gloves or a mask, showing Britain and the world that there was no need for fear to engage in casual contact with AIDS patients. “On that day, she famously shook hands with AIDS patients and stated: ‘HIV does not make people dangerous to know. You can shake their hands and give them a hug. Heaven knows they need it.’”<sup>3</sup> This visit of Princess Diana to the AIDS ward would not be her last one. Even after Diana divorced her husband Prince Charles in 1996, she continued working for many AIDS charities until she died in a car crash on 31 August 1997.

The outpour of grief among the British public was immense. This sadness was felt particularly by the gay community. Even though it is more than 20 years after her death,

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<sup>1</sup> Rob Miller, ‘I met Princess Diana on one of her AIDS ward visits – she changed everything’ (31 August 2022) <https://metro.co.uk/2022/08/31/i-met-princess-diana-on-one-of-her-aids-ward-visits-2-17272748/> (accessed 10 November 2022).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Diana is still remembered fondly by the gay community. Chief Executive of the AIDS charity the Terrence Higgins Trust Ian Green remarked on the 60<sup>th</sup> birthday of the late Princess Diana on the contributions she made to support the gay community during the AIDS crisis. “To Princess Diana, I say: thank you for all you did and we will never forget you or what you did for all of us living with HIV.”<sup>4</sup> Looking at Green’s statement one would assume that Diana’s visits to the AIDS wards transformed her into an important figure in the eyes of the gay community.

I would want to know why the involvement of Princess Diana during the AIDS crisis was a step forward for the gay community in Britain. This thesis will look at what Diana had done to confront prejudice against homosexuals and how she helped to destigmatise AIDS. Moreover, it is notable that such a prominent member of the royal family wanted to help homosexual AIDS patients since they were treated throughout the 1980s as outcasts by a large number of people. I also would like to take a look at which other factors caused Diana to be important for the gay community during the AIDS crisis. What makes my research unique is that it will be written a few decades after the death of Diana. Therefore new perspectives will be integrated into this thesis. Also, it would be very interesting to see how Diana’s image has evolved among people who were not born during her time alive. Hence, media depictions of Diana will play a part in the research, which is not often seen in other studies.

The historical debates on what happened to Diana’s image after her death are the most relevant to this thesis. One can wonder if Diana’s visits to the AIDS wards were truly remarkable or did her tragic death transform simple charity events into something more in the eyes of the gay community. On the one hand, the interest in Diana can be seen as a form of sensationalism. The idea behind this is that the interest of the public in Diana got stirred up by the media coverage of her death. Consequently, when the media lost interest in Diana, the

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<sup>4</sup> Ian Green, ‘How Princess Diana challenged HIV stigma with every hug’ (30 June 2021) <https://www.tht.org.uk/news/how-princess-diana-challenged-hiv-stigma-every-hug> (accessed 9 January 2023).

public did as well. Political scientist Joke Hermes states that the public interest in Diana dwindled within a year after her death. For instance, not even 500 people showed up to Diana's one-year memorial service.<sup>5</sup> Art Professor Jill R. Chancey agrees with Hermes by saying that the anguish of the public for Diana was only so extreme because of the massive grief industry amplifying it to sell more merchandise.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, Diana's untimely death can be seen as a permanent transformation. Diana changed from a princess into a tragic heroic figure in the consciousness of the British people. According to Professor of American Studies Jane Caputi, Diana became almost a divine figure and many people started to "worship" her.<sup>7</sup> Historian Judith Dale states a similar argument and concluded that Princess Diana will always be adored by Western society because the kind of femininity that she embodied is highly valued.<sup>8</sup>

The primary sources that will be used to answer the research question consist of contemporary works and retrospective works. Great examples of the contemporary works that will be used are *The Wolfenden Report* by psychiatrist Karl Menninger published in 1963 and *Permissive Britain* by sociologist Christie Davies published in 1975. Those works show how people thought in their time about homosexuals and their place in society. Therefore those works lack a modern-day bias that could colour the writer's opinion about the treatment of homosexuals. Other contemporary primary sources that will be used are speeches from Margaret Thatcher and Princess Diana. Those sources make it clear what kind of messages Thatcher and Diana wanted to convey to the public. Moreover, photographs and newspaper articles published in the 1980s and 1990s from different news sources like *The Sunday*

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<sup>5</sup> Joke Hermes and Merel Noordhuizen, 'Diana. Death of a media-styled secular saint', *Emofoor*, Vol. 12, No. 2, Personality Cults (1999) 76-91, 76.

<sup>6</sup> Jill R. Chancey, 'The Fairytale Princess and the Photographer', *National Women's Studies Association Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 2, Woman Created, Woman Transfigured, Woman Consumed (Summer 1999) 163-175, 172.

<sup>7</sup> Jane Caputi, 'The Second Coming of Diana', *National Women's Studies Association Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 2, Woman Created, Woman Transfigured, Woman Consumed (Summer 1999) 103-123, 104.

<sup>8</sup> Judith Dale, 'Reading the Text', *National Women's Studies Association Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 2, Woman Created, Woman Transfigured, Woman Consumed (Summer 1999), 152-162, 153.



*People*, *Daily Mirror* and *The Times* will also be used. A great example would be the article of homosexual journalist Mark Simpson in *The Independent* about Diana and her place in the gay community. This piece is written just a few days after Diana's death.<sup>9</sup> The attitudes of that time towards Princess Diana, Thatcher and the AIDS crisis are made clear in those news sources.

Retrospective primary sources will be used as well. Those are first-hand accounts of healthcare workers who met Diana during the AIDS crisis. Doctor Rob Miller and Nurse David T. Evans both wrote about their experiences. Their accounts were written decades after the AIDS crisis and after they met Diana. This could mean that their recollections could be altered because details could be forgotten over time. Nevertheless, they are important sources since they are personal accounts of specific events.

Academic articles and books will be used to describe the contexts of the era. For example, to illustrate the progression of the social status of homosexuals in Britain, the work *A Gay History of Britain: Love and Sex Between Men Since the Middle Ages* by historian Matt Cook is used. Furthermore, the article 'Celebrity and the Politics of Charity' by Professor of Media Studies Arvind Rajagopal will be used to explain the role charities had in remembering Princess Diana after she died.

Other secondary sources that this thesis relies on are newspaper articles written between 2010 and the present day. Those articles contain interviews with doctors, nurses and gay activists who lived through the AIDS crisis. Some of them even met Princess Diana during those turbulent times. Those articles are used because nowadays newspapers are more interested in reporting on gay-centric stories. Also, the participants might have not felt at ease 40 years ago to share their story, because Western society was not as tolerant towards queer people and their struggles with AIDS back then. Ian Green notes that even though society has

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<sup>9</sup> Mark Simpson, 'Diana 1961-1997: The gay icon - Glamorous, tragic, a drama queen - but never camp', *The Independent*, 6 September 1997.

progressed, discrimination against AIDS patients is still very much alive. “Of course, it didn’t change everything overnight and abhorrent stigma and discrimination remain today.”<sup>10</sup>

Therefore this thesis needs to rely more on those news articles because the accounts of AIDS patients are otherwise too few and far between.

Additionally, the interest in Princess Diana has also grown in the last 15 years. Journalist Hannah Strong explains that recently there have been a staggering amount of movies, television series and stage plays about the life of Princess Diana.

In the past few years, Diana’s popularity has skyrocketed in the rest of the world, influencing popular culture perhaps even more than she did during her lifetime.

Visible across film, fashion, and television, rarely a day goes by without her name appearing in headlines, more than two decades after her death.<sup>11</sup>

Because of the presence of Diana in popular culture, the public’s memory of her gets refreshed and therefore a new interest in her starts to develop. According to the Chief Royal Correspondent from *Newsweek* Jack Royston, this interest in Diana even occurs among the younger generation of British people who were not alive during Diana’s lifetime “The younger generations growing up now feel just as strongly I think as people did back then.”<sup>12</sup> Consequently, the press, the royal family and Charles are portrayed as villains.

They love the legacy that she left, her humanitarian streak, her warmth and kindness and they feel she was the victim of an injustice basically. That she was, to use Diana's own words, 'a lamb to the slaughter' when she married Charles.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ian Green, ‘How Princess Diana challenged HIV stigma with every hug’ (30 June 2021) <https://www.tht.org.uk/news/how-princess-diana-challenged-hiv-stigma-every-hug> (accessed 9 January 2023).

<sup>11</sup> Hannah Strong, ‘Princess Diana’s Return to the Pop Culture Spotlight’ (4 November 2021) <https://hyperallergic.com/688620/princess-dianas-return-to-the-pop-culture-spotlight/> (accessed 19 February 2023).

<sup>12</sup> James Crawford-Smith, ‘Diana's Popularity With Young People Means Camilla Will Not Be Forgiven’ (12 July 2022) <https://www.newsweek.com/princess-diana-popularity-young-people-camilla-forgiven-1723900> (accessed 13 February 2023).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

In turn, this motivates journalists to write more about Diana and therefore more people get the opportunity to tell their stories about her. Those articles are simply the most comprehensive way of getting retrospective personal accounts regarding homosexuality in the 1980s, the AIDS crisis and Princess Diana.

Nevertheless, there are a few limitations to this research and the primary sources. First of all, more than 40 years of history, from the moment Diana became a public figure to the present day where she is depicted in media, will be discussed. The primary focus will be on homosexual AIDS patients to make this thesis more concise and grounded. For instance, Diana's interaction with gay-friendly celebrities that could be considered influential will therefore be glossed over. Secondly, because the gay community is not just one centralised institution it is impossible to get one final verdict that embodies all the opinions of every homosexual. Therefore a more general statement based on the accounts of multiple queer individuals is the most valid way to discover the relationship Diana had with the gay community. For further research, it would be interesting to discover how Diana changed the royal family's relationship with gay-friendly charity organisations. Also, it would be fascinating to know why associations with controversial or unpopular charities can increase someone's social standing over time.

This thesis is divided into three chapters. In the first chapter, the need of the gay community for a figure like Princess Diana is explained. The discrimination homosexuals faced in Britain before and during the AIDS crisis will be explored. There will be a great focus on the political environment of the 1980s and the preventive measures the British government took to protect its people against AIDS. In the second chapter, the development of the relationship the gay community had with Princess Diana will be researched. Why Diana's fashion style, her visits to the AIDS wards and her difficult personal life transformed her into a figure who was admired by the gay community will be explored. The last chapter

will discuss the lasting effect Diana had on the gay community after her death. The reasons why Diana made an impact on the lives of the gay community and the staying power of that impact will be analysed.

At last, the question of why was the involvement of Princess Diana during the AIDS crisis a step forward for the gay community in Britain will be answered.

## **Chapter 1: Homosexuality and AIDS in Britain**

To understand the importance of Princess Diana during the AIDS crisis for the gay community, the history of the trials and tribulations of the acceptance of homosexuality in Britain should be first understood. According to historian Emma Vickers, the starting point of the most significant change for homosexuals in Britain was during the Second World War. “Indeed, the complexities of group membership and the exigencies of the war meant that it was often more appropriate to turn a 'blind eye' to such activity.”<sup>14</sup> In the long run, this change led to the decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1967. However, this decriminalisation in Britain did not mean that equal rights for homosexuals were achieved. According to AIDS activists Virginia Lehman and Noreen Russell, the AIDS crisis that started in the 1980s unleashed a new wave of homophobia.

Having attained a sense of freedom and pride in homosexuality, he may view AIDS as God's punishment for both his homosexuality and his pride. For a troubled individual who has come to accept his homosexuality, the diagnosis of AIDS reawakens earlier ambivalence.<sup>15</sup>

The main question that will be answered in this chapter is why the discrimination against the gay community developed in such a way that there was a need for a figure like Princess Diana. To answer this question the process of decriminalising homosexuality, the AIDS crisis in Britain and the nationwide AIDS: Don't Die of Ignorance campaign will be researched.

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<sup>14</sup> Emma Vickers, 'Queer Sex in the Metropolis? Place, Subjectivity and the Second World War', *Feminist Review*, No. 96, urban spaces (2010) 58-73, 60.

<sup>15</sup> Virginia Lehman and Noreen Russell, 'Psychological and Social Issues of AIDS and Strategies for Survival', in: Victor Gong (ed.), *Understanding AIDS: A Comprehensive Guide* (Cambridge 1985) 175-189, 178.

## 1.1 The decriminalisation of homosexuality

The main point of this subchapter is to understand why social attitudes surrounding homosexuality changed. This process can be split up into three segments. The first segment will analyse why homosexuals gained more freedom during the Second World War after centuries of suppression. The second segment will analyse why many gay men went back into the closet after the Second World War ended. And the last segment will explain why in the 1960s homosexual men were granted some legislation that allowed them to have sex with each other.

To understand the place of homosexuality in British society during the Second World War, the long and varied history that led up to it should be first understood. In the work, *A Gay History of Britain: Love and Sex Between Men Since the Middle Ages* by Matt Cook multiple historians explain the most important events surrounding homosexuality in a particular era. This more concise look into history is perfect to outline the major events to set up the context of homosexuality in Britain. Historian Robert Mills states that ever since the medieval age discrimination and punishment for engaging in homosexual acts existed in England. However, it was only during the reign of King Henry VIII that between 1533 and 1534, the first laws were implemented on a secular level that punished acts of sodomy like sexual activities among men.<sup>16</sup> According to historian H. G. Cocks, it was commonplace during the nineteenth century for men who were caught engaging in homosexual acts to be punished with fines, life in prison, forced labour and even execution. The death sentence for homosexuality was eventually revoked in 1861.<sup>17</sup> However, it was only when the Second World War started that the perception and place of homosexuals in British society changed significantly.

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<sup>16</sup> Robert Mills, 'Male-Male Love and Sex in the Middle Ages, 1000-1500', in: Matt Cook (ed.), *A Gay History of Britain: Love and Sex Between Men Since the Middle Ages* (Oxford 2007) 1-44, 40.

<sup>17</sup> H. G. Cocks, 'Secrets, Crimes and Diseases, 1800-1914', in: Matt Cook (ed.), *A Gay History of Britain: Love and Sex Between Men Since the Middle Ages* (Oxford 2007) 107-144, 107.

A more accepting attitude towards homosexual men began during the Second World War. In big cities like London, gay men started to gather in bars, pubs and other establishments and build a community for themselves. Because Britain was at war with Germany, the authorities simply did not prioritise chastising homosexuals. According to Cook, the infrequent arrests by the police made certain places like the West End in London almost a gay district. “The police raided pubs... though they were pretty unsystematic and unpredictable.”<sup>18</sup> This gave the developing gay community the protection and security to create and grow their presence.<sup>19</sup> This sentiment is reflected by Quentin Crisp, who was rejected from the military because of his “sexual perversions” and he states that it was very easy to have homosexual sex as a flamboyant gay man in most British cities.<sup>20</sup>

The city became like a paved double bed. Voices whispered suggestively to you as you walked along; hands reached out if you stood still and in dimly lit trains people carried on as they had once behaved only in taxis.<sup>21</sup>

This makes it seem that homosexual desire could only be fulfilled as a civilian. However, historian Stephen Bourne states that homosexual men who were drafted into the British Army had seemingly the freedom to express their sexuality in a way. By turning a blind eye when it came to homosexuality, the army created almost a tolerant environment during the Second World War.<sup>22</sup> The army simply could not punish every man who had engaged in consensual homosexual acts because it would be too time-consuming and every man was needed for the war. This statement is mild compared to the interviews Vickers did with old World War II veterans. According to the different veterans, homosexuality almost was normalised in the

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<sup>18</sup> Matt Cook, ‘Queer Conflicts: Love, Sex and War, 1914-1967’, in: Matt Cook (ed.), *A Gay History of Britain: Love and Sex Between Men Since the Middle Ages* (Oxford 2007) 145-178, 152.

<sup>19</sup> Cook, ‘Queer Conflicts’, 152-153.

<sup>20</sup> Quentin Crisp, *The Naked Servant* (New York 1997) 154-155.

<sup>21</sup> Crisp, *The Naked Servant*, 154-155.

<sup>22</sup> Stephen Bourne, *Fighting Proud* (London 2017) 43-44.

British Army. A veteran under the pseudonym Richard Briar stated that on his first day in the army, he already started a sexual relationship with his superior.

What I remember was that my sergeant had developed his manoeuvre on me to the point that he was with me when we were boarding the lorry and he very kindly helped me... and the explicit sexual manoeuvre on me was made during that journey... they had really got this absolutely worked out.<sup>23</sup>

After the Second World War ended, changes started to occur for homosexuals in Britain. Director Daisy Asquith created the documentary *Queerama* in 2017, by studying archived footage from 1919 to the present and concluded that the 1950s was the hardest time for queer people in Britain. “It was easier to go under the radar in the 19th century than in the 50s when Churchill encouraged prosecutions of gay men, which made life very frightening for them.”<sup>24</sup> Instead of turning a blind eye to homosexuality, British society became more conventional and family-focused. There was a greater emphasis on building up a war-torn Britain and many gay people preferred a heterosexual family life of conventional domesticity over a more authentic openly queer life. Cook states that homosexuality was considered not only anti-Christian but also antipatriotic. “In either case, queers were undermining postwar social reconstruction, not least by turning their back on family life.”<sup>25</sup>

The perception of the public regarding homosexuals started to shift as well. Homosexual men were not simply viewed as just criminals but as sickly. Homosexuality was seen as a disease that can be remedied by using psychology and hormone therapy. The thought process was that if homosexuality can be cured, there is simply no reason to tolerate homosexuals. According to Professor of Modern European History Chris Waters, newspaper

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<sup>23</sup> Vickers, ‘Queer Sex in the Metropolis?’, 67.

<sup>24</sup> Kate Kellaway, ‘Glad to be gay: leading figures on 50 years of liberation’ (21 May 2017) <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/may/21/glad-to-be-gay-50-years-liberation-mens-lives-hollinghurst-antony-sher-waheed-alli> (accessed 4 February 2023).

<sup>25</sup> Cook, ‘Queer Conflicts’, 167.



articles were written in the 1950s about possible parental problems that could lead to homosexuality. For instance, *The Sunday Times* from 13 December 1953 wrote that a close mother-son bond could lead to homosexuality. “The most potent factor of all in the causation of homosexuality is an over-prolongation of female influence on a boy’s life.”<sup>26</sup>

Cook states that this social attitude of the public surrounding homosexuality caused the police and local authorities to arrest many men who were suspected of homosexuality. British law enforcement became more active because the war was over and many queer people felt unsafe and were afraid of prosecution.<sup>27</sup> This had a devastating effect on many gay men since they could be easily blackmailed if someone found out about their sexuality. This caused the suicides of men who were suspected or convicted of homosexuality to rise. However, when so-called respectable members of society like aristocrats, politicians and writers were convicted because of homosexuality something seemed to change.<sup>28</sup> Cook does not go into further detail when it comes to those high-ranking people. However, to elaborate further, one can look at one of the most famous court cases regarding homosexuality. In 1954, prominent writer Peter Wildeblood got a jail sentence of 18 months after being caught having a flirtation with a few other men in the private estate of Lord Montagu of Beaulieu. The relatively high penalty for something so minor to a member of the upper crust of society caused a lot of debate in Britain. This can be seen by the fact that this news was printed on the front page of the newspaper the *Daily Mirror*.<sup>29</sup>

The apparent public interest in numerous high-profile court cases surrounding homosexuality gave rise to the Wolfenden Committee. Historian Patrick Higgins states that the Wolfenden Committee was an advice organ that was active from 1954 to 1957 and

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<sup>26</sup> Chris Waters, ‘The Homosexual as a Social Being in Britain, 1945—1968’, *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 3 (July 2012) 685-710, 695.

<sup>27</sup> Cook, ‘Queer Conflicts’, 153-154.

<sup>28</sup> Cook, ‘Queer Conflicts’, 170-171.

<sup>29</sup> Peter Woods, ‘Guilty Montagu – 12 Months’ Pitt-Rivers and Wildeblood each get 18 Months’, *Daily Mirror*, 25 March 1954.

worked on ideas on how the British government could manage homosexual men in society.

The Wolfenden Committee stated in their report that was published in 1957 that homosexuality should be decriminalised.<sup>30</sup> Higgins makes it seem that the Wolfenden Committee was progressive.

The reason that a modern-day historian might have this assumption, could have something to do with the opinions of a few members of the Wolfenden Committee.

Psychiatrist Karl Menninger stated in 1963 that some of the more “radical” members of the Wolfenden Committee viewed homosexuality as natural. “Some have preferred to regard it as a state of arrested development. Some, particularly among the biologist, regard it as simply a natural deviation.”<sup>31</sup> However, those opinions were not the norm. Homosexuality was viewed and described by the majority of the Wolfenden Committee as morally dubious and a sickness.<sup>32</sup> Homosexuals should therefore not be punished for their sexual activities but society should help them with the use of social sciences.<sup>33</sup> The criminality of homosexual relationships between consenting adults should be removed and even though homosexuality was seen as a vice it should not be viewed as a crime. Every man could be homosexual regardless of profession or social standing. This makes homosexuality a universal issue that the government cannot ignore.<sup>34</sup> Therefore the main point of the Wolfenden Committee was to help homosexuals overcome their sexual preferences by not criminalising them.

As the decade progressed, more and more people agreed with those “radical” members and this was the start of another societal change. In 1964, the government of Harold Wilson came into power and passed in light of the changing social attitude of the time certain reforms on divorce, abortion and the death penalty. According to Cook, the reasons for this changing

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<sup>30</sup> Patrick Higgins, *Heterosexual Dictatorship* (London 1996) 17.

<sup>31</sup> Karl Menninger, *The Wolfenden Report* (New York 1963) 33.

<sup>32</sup> Menninger, *The Wolfenden*, 7.

<sup>33</sup> Menninger, *The Wolfenden*, 5-6.

<sup>34</sup> Menninger, *The Wolfenden*, 33.

social attitude were the rising popularity of American concepts like capitalism, individuality and equal rights in British society. “But there was nevertheless a change in attitudes which came with economic expansion and affluence, and a growing frustration with puritanical moral codes which ran counter to civil rights notions of individual liberty filtering through from the USA.”<sup>35</sup> Cook attributes the cultural shift to external factors and makes it seem like the British are simply copying American culture. However, sociologist Christie Davies stated that the relaxed attitude among the British people regarding sexuality was the driving force behind the more accepting stance towards homosexuality. The hypocrisy and double standard surrounding homosexuality became visible thanks to this relaxed morality. “If “normal” people can have queer and kinky sex why shouldn’t homosexuals?”<sup>36</sup>

This led to a revisit of the advice the Wolfenden Committee gave a decade prior. This inspired the Sexual Offences Act of 1967 which gave some legal protection to men engaging in homosexual acts. “A homosexual act in private shall not be an offence provided homosexual that the parties consent thereto and have attained the age twenty-one years.”<sup>37</sup> This meant that in certain circumstances, homosexuality was not seen as a criminal offence. The main difference between Davies and Cook is that Davies sees this law as the epitome of equality for homosexuals in Britain. “Now that the law against homosexual behaviour between consenting male adults in private has been repealed, it is very difficult to see why such behaviour should ever have been subject to legal sanction.”<sup>38</sup> The reason for this could be that Davies made this claim in 1975 and the issues with the law might not be well known at the time.<sup>39</sup> Cook points out certain flaws of the Sexual Offences Act of 1967. Not only was homosexuality still illegal in public, but the private sphere could only consist of two persons.

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<sup>35</sup> Cook, ‘Queer Conflicts’, 175

<sup>36</sup> Christie Davies, *Permissive Britain* (London 1975) 93-94.

<sup>37</sup> UK Public General Acts, ‘Sexual Offences Act 1967’ (27 July 1967) <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1967/60> (accessed 20 November 2022).

<sup>38</sup> Davies, *Permissive Britain*, 94.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

If a third person was included, even in a private residence, homosexuality would still be considered a public event and thus be illegal. “The distinction between public and private was key: for the purpose of the law ‘public’ was anywhere where a third party was likely to be present: and it remained illegal for more than two men to have sex together.”<sup>40</sup> Moreover, homosexual relationships could only be conducted if both participants were 21 years or older. The age limit was much higher and more explicit than in heterosexual relationships.<sup>41</sup>

The criticisms of this law are confirmed by gay men who lived during the time that the Sexual Offences Act of 1967 was in effect. In 2017, Mark S. Surrey stated in an interview that as a gay man, he felt immense pressure when he and his boyfriend would make love. “I had my first physical relationship with another man in 1974, when we were both 19. We had therefore committed criminal offences... I believe this reinforced my sense of shame, culminating in problems with anxiety, depression and alcohol.”<sup>42</sup> Another gay man named Collin Livett stated in that same interview that things only got worse.

Under extremely limited circumstances it was now legal to have sex with a lover, it was illegal to try to meet anyone, with convictions for such crimes as “importuning for an immoral purpose”. How dare they make judgment that my love was an immoral purpose?<sup>43</sup>

Concluding, during the Second World War there was a more tolerant attitude regarding homosexuality simply because there were bigger problems that the military and society had to deal with. Attitudes changed during the 1950s. People became more conservative because creating a family was a key part of rebuilding a war-torn Britain. This caused men who were

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<sup>40</sup> Cook, ‘Queer Conflicts’, 176.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Matthew Holmes, ‘True equality took longer’: gay people on the Sexual Offences Act’ (27 July 2017) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/27/true-equality-took-longer-gay-people-sexual-offences-act-1967> (accessed 23 December 2022).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

suspected of homosexuality to be blackmailed and that could even result in suicide. In light of all this, the Wolfenden Committee advised in 1957 that homosexuality should be decriminalised. In the 1960s, there was a relaxation in Britain regarding sexuality. Because of that, the Sexual Offences Act of 1967 was enacted which decriminalised homosexuality. Even though homosexual sex was legally allowed, there were still many restrictions compared to heterosexual sex. For instance, homosexual relationships were restricted to the private sphere. However, there were bigger challenges ahead. In the 1980s, moral conservatism thrived, homophobia increased and the AIDS crisis began. This caused many homosexuals to lose their livelihoods, loved ones and their lives.

## 1.2 AIDS and the gay community

Linda Hill worked at a homeless shelter in the Soho neighbourhood in London during the 1970s and 1980s and explains in a recent interview why queer people were drawn to the capital city during that era.

London is many things to many people, and has always been a beacon city for the UK's LGBTQ+ youth... that feeling of not fitting in draws them to places like London where there is thought to be a sense of belonging, thanks to its long-established LGBTQ+ communities.<sup>44</sup>

All things considered, the gay community was in an upward spiral in Britain. However, this trajectory all changed when Terry Higgins died on 4 July 1982 from a rare form of pneumonia. In a recent interview, his former lover Rupert Whitaker stated that Higgins was the first named person in Britain who died of AIDS.<sup>45</sup>

The main point of this subchapter is to understand why the AIDS crisis changed the identity of the gay community. First of all, it is important to know why AIDS was so prevalent in the gay community. The second point of importance is to comprehend why the AIDS crisis changed the gay community from the inside out. The third point will clarify why the British population developed a more homophobic attitude during the AIDS crisis.

First of all, to understand the effects AIDS had on the gay community one first needs to understand why AIDS was so widespread in that community. According to anthropologist E. Michael Gorman, the American gay community played a key role in spreading AIDS to

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<sup>44</sup> Pascale Day, 'LGBT History Month: Memories of Centrepoint During The AIDS Crisis' (26 February 2021) <https://centrepoint.org.uk/about-us/blog/lgbt-history-month-memories-of-centrepoint-during-the-aids-crisis/> (accessed 27 December 2022).

<sup>45</sup> Simon Hattenstone, 'He taught me about love, affection and great sex': the untold story of Terrence Higgins' (23 June 2022) <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/jun/23/taught-me-love-affection-great-sex-untold-story-terrence-higgins> (accessed 23 February 2023).

Britain.<sup>46</sup> Unsafe sex, drug use and having many sexual partners were the cause of the spread of the disease among the American gay community. The main reason for this carefree attitude surrounding sex was that common sexually transmitted diseases like syphilis and gonorrhoea could be relatively easily cured. Therefore safe sex was not popular with the gay community.<sup>47</sup> However, Social Studies Professor Michele L. Crossley gives a different reason why the gay community was not fond of safe sex. She points out that the nature of gay sex was not the cause of unsafe sex but a more liberal attitude towards sex among homosexual men themselves was the key reason that AIDS could spread so rapidly among the gay community. Gay sex and the gay identity itself were considered by a growing number of people not shameful anymore. Therefore during the 1970s, gay men became more comfortable about their sexuality.<sup>48</sup> Writer Alan Hollinghurst states in a recent interview that it was during the 1970s he truly started to feel proud of the fact that he was a gay man. “Glad to be Gay” was the first gay lib lapel badge I saw, in 1972, and I always have been.”<sup>49</sup>

Just like in America, a similar phenomenon of sexual liberation occurred in Britain. The Sexual Offences Act of 1967 still discriminated against homosexuals in Britain. Nevertheless, bit by bit British society allowed for more freedom or at least a more permissive attitude when homosexual activities occurred. Cook states that this more permissive attitude in Britain can be seen in the support the gay community found among a large portion of the political landscape. “Indeed in the 1970s, it was prominent Tories- amongst them Margaret Thatcher...- who supported a relaxation of the law of homosexuality on the basis of their

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<sup>46</sup> E. Michael Gorman, ‘Anthropological Reflections on the HIV Epidemic among Gay Men’, *The Journal of Sex Research*, Vol. 28, No. 2, Anthropology, Sexuality and AIDS (May 1991) 263-273, 268.

<sup>47</sup> Gorman, ‘Anthropological Reflections’, 268.

<sup>48</sup> Michele L. Crossley, ‘Making sense of ‘barebacking’: Gay men’s narratives, unsafe sex and the ‘resistance habitus’, *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 43 (2004) 225–244, 230.

<sup>49</sup> Kate Kellaway, ‘Glad to be gay: leading figures on 50 years of liberation’ (21 May 2017)

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/may/21/glad-to-be-gay-50-years-liberation-mens-lives-hollinghurst-antony-sher-waheed-alli> (accessed 4 February 2023).

liberation politics’’<sup>50</sup> Later in the decade, the gay community fell into a more Marxist line of thinking by joining feminism, anti-racist and pro-union ideologies. Therefore the gay community started to get the support of the Labour Party. The gay community gained more freedom and equality because of the backing of the two major political movements in Britain.<sup>51</sup>

This more liberal social attitude in most metropolitan areas can be seen in accounts of gay men. For instance, Ronnie Heyfron was a gay man who left his hometown and went to the capital to find a life fitting with his sexuality. His sister Charli describes in a recent interview the excitement he felt in London.

For Ronnie, life was a party before Aids landed in London, his sister recalls. He had featured in several pop videos, scoring a prominent role in Frankie Goes to Hollywood's hit Relax, Charli said.<sup>52</sup>

The liberal climate of the 1970s seems to be the key reason for the abundance of unsafe sex in the gay community since there were few legal risks involved. Therefore it seems that cultural changes around sex have a much bigger influence on the rise of unsafe sex in the gay community.<sup>53</sup>

Secondly, the gay community in Britain changed significantly during the AIDS crisis.

According to Crossley, the gay community which was vibrant and filled with young hopeful people who were fighting for a better future turned in a matter of years into a community which was trying to survive. For the gay community in the 1970s, casual sex was viewed as part of the gay liberation movement and part of the gay identity. However, in the 1980s,

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<sup>50</sup> Matt Cook, ‘From Gay Reform to Gaydar, 1967-2006’, in: Matt Cook (ed.), *A Gay History of Britain: Love and Sex Between Men Since the Middle Ages* (Oxford 2007) 179-214, 186.

<sup>51</sup> Cook, ‘From Gay Reform’, 186.

<sup>52</sup> Sarah Lee, ‘Life was a party before Aids arrived in London’ (26 February 2021) <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-55983269> (accessed 24 December 2022).

<sup>53</sup> Crossley, ‘Making sense of ‘barebacking’, 230.



casual sex which was still a vital part of the gay experience became a death sentence. Many prominent activists who celebrated the liberal morals surrounding sex changed their tune because of AIDS.<sup>54</sup> For instance, novelist John Rechy, one of the greatest supporters of the sex-positive culture in the gay community stated in a 1986 interview with the *New York Times* that sex was first an act of pleasure and because of AIDS turned into a life-threatening danger.

Sex was once a daily part of my life. It took me and many other intelligent people a while to believe that this was really happening. Believe it. There are so many dangers present. The spectrum of no sex is healthy.<sup>55</sup>

However, this was easier said than done. In 1985, Lehman and Russell already noticed that sex played a large part in the social lives of many gay men. “For those used to a very active sexual life, abstinence also represents the loss of an entire social support network. This is particularly true for homosexuals accustomed to a "fast lifestyle" of bars, bathhouses, and anonymous sex.”<sup>56</sup> But even in monogamous homosexual relationships distrust and uncertainty grew. Cheating could literally kill you and your partner if you got infected with AIDS and abstinence in a committed relationship often led to frustration.<sup>57</sup> Logically, numerous gay men became solemn, angry and depressed as their community, friends and lovers died one by one. Ian Green explained in a recent interview that sex turned from fun and exciting into dangerous.

HIV was a major worry for me as a young gay man. There wasn't a day when I didn't think about it, and certainly every time I had a sexual encounter it was in the front of

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<sup>54</sup> Crossley, ‘Making sense of ‘barebacking’’, 233.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Lehman, ‘Psychological’, 179-180.

<sup>57</sup> Lehman, ‘Psychological’, 180.

my mind. It inhibited me developing good close relationships. A lot of my sex experiences were very furtive because of that.<sup>58</sup>

Gorman points out that the surviving gay men felt an enormous amount of guilt for being able to live while their peers could not. “Specifically, the AIDS epidemic has brought with it an epidemic of grief with attendant depression and suicidality and, for the majority not infected, survival guilt. Those issues also deserve attention.”<sup>59</sup> The changes that the AIDS crisis brought can be seen in the way the gay community started to protest. AIDS awareness became the main point of the gay community and new symbols and slogans were formed to reflect that. This gave gay activism, the gay community and the gay identity more prominence in society. This is confirmed in a 2021 interview with gay activist Lisa Power. She was part of the organisation Gay Switchboard and participated in the protests of the 1980s.

We were basically a helpline to give out information on what gay bars there were in Burnley or to support someone who was feeling lonely and wanted to come out. Then a pandemic hit us and we really didn't know what was coming. People ran in all sorts of directions.<sup>60</sup>

It seems that the pain that was felt by the gay community during the AIDS crisis became a strength to fight the illness. However, there was another source of contention for the gay community forming in Britain.

The last point that will be discussed is that during the 1980s, it became clear that the gay community was disproportionately affected by the AIDS crisis which caused homophobia to

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<sup>58</sup> Andrew Anthony, ‘We were so scared’: Four people who faced the horror of Aids in the 80s’(31 January 2021) <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/jan/31/we-were-so-scared-four-people-who-faced-the-horror-of-aids-in-the-80s> (accessed 24 December 2022).

<sup>59</sup> Gorman, ‘Anthropological Reflections’, 271-272.

<sup>60</sup> Andrew Anthony, ‘We were so scared’: Four people who faced the horror of Aids in the 80s’(31 January 2021) <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/jan/31/we-were-so-scared-four-people-who-faced-the-horror-of-aids-in-the-80s> (accessed 24 December 2022).

rise. The article ‘AIDS, Mass Observation, and the Fate of the Permissive Turn’ by historian Matt Cook gives a great insight into the homophobic sentiment of that time. Cook collected different opinions of the British people who participated in the Mass Observation Project regarding AIDS circa 1987.<sup>61</sup> Most participants were straight and belonged to the middle class. They are roughly divided into four groups. The first group consist of mostly older people who blame homosexuals for the AIDS crisis because they brought it on themselves by having unprotected sex.<sup>62</sup> A popular sentiment recurring in this group was that homosexuals should be banned from public healthcare since the British taxpayer should not be responsible for their treatments.<sup>63</sup> Co-founder of the AIDS charity the Terrence Higgins Trust Rupert Whitaker states in a 2021 interview that he experienced this treatment first-hand when his boyfriend suddenly died of AIDS. “His family swooped and kicked out all the gay friends and forced him on his death bed to recant his homosexuality and accept the last rites or he was going to burn in hell.”<sup>64</sup>

The second and largest group showed a little more self-awareness regarding their thoughts on homosexual AIDS patients. The participants stated that they agreed that homosexuals are to blame for the AIDS crisis and that they do not deserve any form of help, but would think differently if someone close to them would be affected by AIDS. “The tremendous time and money gone into research for a relatively few people could have been better used... Of course I would think differently if I knew someone afflicted.”<sup>65</sup> Lisa Power stated in 2021 that the reactions of parents of AIDS patients were varied. “Some parents were brilliant and incredibly supportive, and actually started to volunteer with the organisations that

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<sup>61</sup> Matt Cook, ‘AIDS, Mass Observation, and the Fate of the Permissive Turn’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 26, No. 2, (May 2017), 239-272, 239.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. .

<sup>64</sup> Andrew Anthony, ‘We were so scared’: Four people who faced the horror of Aids in the 80s’(31 January 2021) <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/jan/31/we-were-so-scared-four-people-who-faced-the-horror-of-aids-in-the-80s> (accessed 24 December 2022).

<sup>65</sup> Cook, ‘AIDS, Mass Observation’, 254.

were trying to help people with Aids. And then you got others who didn't want to tell anyone what their son had died of.”<sup>66</sup> The lack of empathy is also shown in a 2021 interview with Jane Bruton who was a nurse during the AIDS crisis. “When I first joined as the sister, the patients hadn't been treated very well. There wasn't any sympathy or empathy.”<sup>67</sup> However, Lehman and Russell noticed that this lack of empathy has less to do with unwillingness and more with shame. “Some families are unable to accept the fact that a son or brother is homosexual. Upon learning that a son had AIDS, one family told others that what he had was leukemia.”<sup>68</sup>

The third group thought that Britain had to be more pragmatic when dealing with AIDS. The lack of correct information and the sensational coverage of the AIDS crisis by the media was damaging towards the gay community. This group advocated for a more non-judgemental approach towards AIDS victims.<sup>69</sup> At last, there is a small fourth group that consisted of only a few participants who believed that the government should put more effort into treating the AIDS crisis as a nationwide health crisis, instead of having people fend for themselves.<sup>70</sup>

Even among the more accepting groups, there was a clear differentiation between different “types” of homosexual men. Men who were in a monogamous relationship and lived according to the “guidelines” that were established in the Sexual Offences Act of 1967 were largely viewed as sympathetic and were not blamed for the AIDS crisis.<sup>71</sup> Cook explains that homosexuals who did not follow the monogamous example were viewed much more negatively. “MOers [Mass Observation participants] and others found themselves juggling

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<sup>66</sup> Andrew Anthony, ‘We were so scared’: Four people who faced the horror of Aids in the 80s’ (31 January 2021) <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/jan/31/we-were-so-scared-four-people-who-faced-the-horror-of-aids-in-the-80s> (accessed 24 December 2022).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Lehman, ‘Psychological’, 178.

<sup>69</sup> Cook, ‘AIDS, Mass Observation’, 256-257.

<sup>70</sup> Cook, ‘AIDS, Mass Observation’, 257-258.

<sup>71</sup> Cook, ‘AIDS, Mass Observation’, 264.

with two associations of permissiveness: acceptance of homosexual relationships, divorcees, cohabitation, and single parenthood on the one hand, and acceptance of promiscuity and visible difference on the other.’’<sup>72</sup>

This method is useful to find out the different opinions of the participants of the Mass Observation Project and it seems that this gives a decent general impression of the way British society viewed homosexual AIDS patients. This can be seen in a 2021 interview with Ian Green. He describes the judgement he felt as a gay man during the AIDS crisis.

It was not something I would discuss with my old circle of friends and certainly not with my family. Not only was being gay not socially acceptable but also on top of that there was a deadly virus, a “gay plague”<sup>73</sup>

Concluding, in 1982, the first person in Britain died of AIDS and not long thereafter the disease spread like wildfire. The spread of AIDS among the gay community was the result of the unknown dangers of unprotected sex that was prevalent during the 1970s and the 1980s. AIDS transformed the way the gay community perceived casual sex. Within a few years, sex turned from fun into dangerous. The majority of British people blamed in some way or form the gay community for the AIDS crisis and refused to give any form of help or sympathy. The gay community needed to fight both against AIDS and the British public to not only protect their rights for equality but also their rights to survive. The involvement of the British government seemed necessary to deal with the rise of homophobic attitudes among the public and a national health crisis. However, the 1980s were dominated by Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative Party which did not want to be associated with the gay community.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Andrew Anthony, ‘We were so scared’: Four people who faced the horror of Aids in the 80s’ (31 January 2021) <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/jan/31/we-were-so-scared-four-people-who-faced-the-horror-of-aids-in-the-80s> (accessed 24 December 2022).

### 1.3 AIDS: Don't Die of Ignorance

The AIDS crisis was handled poorly by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Party which was dominating British politics from 1979 to 1990. The perfect way to illustrate this ineptitude is through the enormous amount of blunders made at the time that caused more than 1200 haemophilic patients to end up with AIDS. Mark Ward was just a teenager when he got AIDS in 1983 through a botched blood transfusion. He is still suffering from the consequences 30 years later.

At the age of 43, I am crippled, dependent on a highly toxic cocktail of chemicals, with no idea of the long-term affects. I have irreversible damage to a number of my major organs including renal failure. I suffer from PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) as well as Phobic anxiety disorder.<sup>74</sup>

Even though the haemophilic AIDS patients were considered sympathetic by the public, they were treated terribly by Thatcher's administration to cover up that the government bought and used inexpensive blood that caused AIDS.<sup>75</sup> Therefore it is not hard to imagine that gay AIDS patients who lacked public sympathy were treated far worse by Thatcher's government.

The main point of this subchapter is to explain why it was so hard to launch a nationwide campaign against AIDS. The first point that will be discussed is why Thatcher's political philosophy was so against a nationwide campaign that could benefit homosexuals. The second point will explain why the campaign still happened. And the last point will clarify how other policies from Thatcher's Conservative Party increased homophobia among the British people.

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<sup>74</sup> Ellee Seymour, 'The UK's First AIDS Victims Remember Lost Ones on World AIDS Day' (29 January 2012) [https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/ellee-seymour/the-uks-first-aids-victim\\_b\\_2209916.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/ellee-seymour/the-uks-first-aids-victim_b_2209916.html) (accessed 24 December 2022).

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

The Conservative Party under Margaret Thatcher gained popularity in the 1980s through certain “Victorian values”. According to political scientist David M. Rayside, those values consisted of conventional family values and the importance of personal economic responsibility. The Conservative Party under Thatcher married moral conservatism with economic liberalism.<sup>76</sup>

Because Thatcher saw conventional family values as important, it would be more than logical that she did not want to approve a campaign targeted mostly at homosexuals. However, many scholars state that Thatcher and her government were not homophobic in their central beliefs. According to Rayside, the reason they did not want to support a campaign that was targeted towards the gay community was that they became more family-oriented to fit in with the changing attitudes of the British public.<sup>77</sup> The Conservative Party needed to put a stop to the progression of gay rights to maintain their image of caring for family values, which were very popular among the middle and working class.<sup>78</sup> This statement is confirmed by historian Jeffrey Weeks. He implies that the Conservative Party was not necessarily homophobic, but that homophobia became just a very powerful tool to decrease support for the rivalling Labour Party. “Part of the government’s motivation came from an attempt to embarrass an opposition Labour Party which had already experienced electoral setbacks because of its association with the pro-gay policies of left-wing local authorities.”<sup>79</sup> This can be seen in a 1981 speech from Thatcher, where she emphasised the traditional family while vilifying the Labour Party.

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<sup>76</sup> David M. Rayside, ‘Homophobia, Class and Party in England’, *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (March 1992) 121-149, 122-123.

<sup>77</sup> Rayside, ‘Homophobia, Class and Party in England’, 124.

<sup>78</sup> Rayside, ‘Homophobia, Class and Party in England’, 124-125.

<sup>79</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society* (New York 2014) 379.

One of the most revealing things about the rhetoric of the Left is the almost total absence of any reference to the family. Yet the family is the basic unit of our society and it is in the family that the next generation is nurtured.<sup>80</sup>

However, this did not mean that there were no blatant homophobic statements made in Thatcher's cabinet. Conservative politician Edwina Currey said that "good Christian People... will not get AIDS".<sup>81</sup> Her colleague Rhodes Boyson states "current fashion for the flaunting and propagating of homosexuality and lesbianism is both anti-family and anti-life."<sup>82</sup>

The second "Victorian value" is the importance of personal economic responsibility. Thatcher prided herself on her Christian upbringing as seen in this quote from a 1981 speech she gave. "I am indeed thankful that I was brought up in a Christian family and learned the message of the Christian faith."<sup>83</sup> Professor of Public Theology Graeme Smith explains in his article why economic responsibility fitted with Thatcher's beliefs. "Her brand of responsible individualism means protection of people's freedom from state and organizational control so that they can be economically successful"<sup>84</sup> Thatcher's faith was a major factor that influenced the Conservative Party's attitude on the role the state played regarding people's economic freedom.<sup>85</sup> Thatcher was drawn to the concept of soteriology, which means the study of religious doctrines and texts that centred around salvation. Thatcher believed that any individual has unique skills granted by God that allow them to reach this salvation. If a state becomes collective, those skills would be forfeited since people cannot use them because

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<sup>80</sup> British Political Speech, 'Margaret Thatcher, 'Leader Speech, Blackpool' (16 October 1981) <http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=127> (accessed 23 February 2023).

<sup>81</sup> Cook, 'AIDS, Mass Observation', 244.

<sup>82</sup> Cook, 'AIDS, Mass Observation', 245.

<sup>83</sup> British Political Speech, 'Margaret Thatcher, 'Speech at St Lawrence Jewry' (4 March 1981) <http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=338> (accessed 23 February 2023).

<sup>84</sup> Graeme Smith, 'Margaret Thatcher's Christian Faith: A Case Study in Political Theology', *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (June 2007) 233-257, 253.

<sup>85</sup> Smith, 'Margaret Thatcher's Christian Faith', 255.



they have to adjust to the part the state has assigned them to. ‘‘Individuals must be responsible for the choices and actions they undertake, and ultimately this is an eschatological responsibility.’’<sup>86</sup> This means that without that responsibility humanity’s autonomy would cease to exist.<sup>87</sup> Thatcher’s biggest fear can be seen in this speech from 1985. This fear was that government involvement would lead to stronger unions that would cripple the country economically.

It was a Britain in which union leaders held their members and our country to ransom; a Britain that still went to international conferences but was no longer taken seriously; a Britain that was known as the sick man of Europe.<sup>88</sup>

Many initiatives for campaigns to combat AIDS were declined since they did not fit the Conservative Party’s ideals. However, the AIDS: Don’t Die of Ignorance campaign was finally launched in 1986. According to Professor of Science and Technology Studies Jon Agar, the two major concerns that caused Thatcher some hesitation to approve the campaign had been mostly nullified. Those concerns were the sexual themes in the campaign and that the government would dictate the behaviour of the public. Thatcher was worried that the campaign would damage the image of the Conservative Party regarding conventional family values. Sexual education to fight against the spread of AIDS was according to Thatcher ‘‘too vulgar’’ and ‘‘off-putting’’.<sup>89</sup> Norman Fowler was the health secretary at the time and stated in a 2017 interview that the enormous impact AIDS had on the population was more important than the prudishness of Thatcher. ‘‘We were talking millions and millions of people

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<sup>86</sup> Smith, ‘Margaret Thatcher’s Christian Faith’, 253.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> British Political Speech, ‘Margaret Thatcher, ‘Leader’s speech, Blackpool’ (11 November 1985) <http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=131> (accessed 27 December 2022).

<sup>89</sup> Jon Agar, *Science Policy under Thatcher* (London 2019) 128.

becoming infected.’’<sup>90</sup> According to sociologist Adam Burgess, experts from different fields used historical records to show how the governments of the past reacted to sexually transmitted diseases during World War One.<sup>91</sup> This was confirmed by Malcolm Gaskin who was the designer of the Aids: Don’t Die of Ignorance campaign in a recent interview. He describes how the campaign was sold to Thatcher to make sure she would approve it. ‘‘People from the prison services, the army, immigration and social services – to discuss how to tackle it.’’<sup>92</sup>

The second concern was the increase of the government’s role in the private lives of British citizens. Gaskin stated that the campaign was framed to educate people on safe sex practices and not to police behaviour. This approach fits in line with the small-government ideals of Thatcher’s Conservative Party. ‘‘It was agreed we would attack the disease itself rather than the people who had it’’<sup>93</sup> According to Burgess, the lack of backlash from the Conservative Party constituencies can be attributed to the fact that Thatcher and her government allowed themselves to take a backseat from the process of creating the campaign. Therefore critical response from her constituency was quite minor since in their mind, Thatcher was only involved in approving the campaign and not creating it.<sup>94</sup>

However, the nationwide AIDS campaign was for most homosexuals in Britain an empty gesture. Thatcher stated in a 1987 speech that schools should not be allowed to teach children about homosexuality. ‘‘Children who need to be taught to respect traditional moral values are

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<sup>90</sup> Tim Jonze, ‘It was a life-and-death situation. Wards were full of young men dying’: How we made the Don't Die of Ignorance Aids campaign’ (4 September 2017) <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2017/sep/04/how-we-made-dont-die-of-ignorance-aids-campaign> (accessed 27 January 2023).

<sup>91</sup> Adam Burgess, ‘The development of risk politics in the UK: Thatcher’s ‘Remarkable’ but forgotten ‘Don’t Die of Ignorance’ AIDS campaign’, *Health, Risk & Society*, 19:5-6 (2007), 227-245, 237-238.

<sup>92</sup> Tim Jonze, ‘It was a life-and-death situation. Wards were full of young men dying’: How we made the Don't Die of Ignorance Aids campaign’ (4 September 2017) <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2017/sep/04/how-we-made-dont-die-of-ignorance-aids-campaign> (accessed 27 January 2023).

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Burgess, ‘The development of risk politics’, 238.

being taught that they have an inalienable right to be gay.’<sup>95</sup> In 1988, just two years after the campaign aired, laws were passed like Section 28 that made teaching about homosexuality in schools illegal. The belief of many queer people that homophobia was not just a by-product of the Conservative Party’s focus on conventional family values was confirmed. Graham McKerrow founder of the gay-centric newspaper *Capital Gay* stated in an interview in 2014 that Thatcher not only emphasised conventional family values but that she actively used homophobic rhetoric to win votes. “Under her leadership, the party used anti-gay election campaign posters and television broadcasts to try to win votes.”<sup>96</sup>

Concluding, Thatcher was opposed to a nationwide health campaign to prevent AIDS. Straying away from conventional family values and a small government was thought to be detrimental to the Conservative Party. It would alienate their constituency because those values were particularly appreciated by the middle and working classes. Thatcher’s own Christian beliefs in economic responsibility and her distrust of socialism played also a major part in her decision-making. To convince Thatcher to launch a campaign, many experts from different organisations stated that AIDS was a national threat and that the campaign was educating people and not dictating people’s behaviour. After the AIDS: Don’t Die of Ignorance campaign was launched laws like Section 28 were also implemented which increased homophobia. However, the gay community did find in this conservative climate an important figure who was sympathetic towards them. This was Princess Diana.

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<sup>95</sup> Margaret Thatcher Foundation, ‘Margaret Thatcher, ‘Speech to Conservative Party Conference’ (9 October 1987) <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106941> (accessed 23 February 2023).

<sup>96</sup> Gillian Richardson, ‘Gay activists remember Margaret Thatcher’s homophobia’ (8 February 2014) <https://xtramagazine.com/power/gay-activists-remember-margaret-thatchers-homophobia-58110> (accessed 22 February 2022).

## **Chapter 2: Princess Diana and the gay community**

On 29 July 1981, Diana Spencer married Prince Charles and became the Princess of Wales. Homosexual journalist Charles G. Thompson describes this event as a fairy tale. “For many gays in the early '80s, a fairy tale was just what they needed.”<sup>97</sup> However, Princess Diana was after her wedding part of the establishment that did not treat the gay community during the AIDS crisis with any sense of empathy. This can be seen in a 2021 interview with David Orr, a social worker who worked at a homeless shelter during the height of the AIDS epidemic and he describes how in “Thatcher’s England” there was no place for homosexuals. The increased homophobia during the AIDS crisis and the implementation of laws like Section 28 that forbid schools from “promoting the teaching of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship” were the driving forces for this homophobic environment.<sup>98</sup> However, Professor of American Literature and Culture Jude Davies states in a 2017 interview that Diana was capable to reach out to the gay community in the intolerant climate of the 1980s by communicating through her fashion choices and body language. According to Davies, Diana’s biggest asset was “her apparent ability to communicate in personal terms across mass media.”<sup>99</sup>

The main question in this chapter is why the gay community started to find Princess Diana appealing even though she was part of the establishment. To answer this question the appeal of Diana’s fashion style, the impact Diana made with her visits to the AIDS wards and Diana’s turbulent life will be researched. Those three components are the most important

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<sup>97</sup> Charles G. Thompson, ‘Why Princess Diana's Wedding Was a Gay Coming-of-Age Moment’ (17 November 2020) <https://www.advocate.com/commentary/2020/11/17/why-princess-dianas-wedding-was-gay-coming-age-moment> (accessed 17 November 2022).

<sup>98</sup> Pascale Day, ‘LGBT History Month: Memories of Centrepoint During The AIDS Crisis’ (26 February 2021) <https://centrepoint.org.uk/about-us/blog/lgbt-history-month-memories-of-centrepoint-during-the-aids-crisis/> (accessed 27 December 2022).

<sup>99</sup> Cara Kelly, ‘20 years later, Princess Diana's fashion still transmits messages’ (28 August 2017) <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/life/people/2017/08/28/20-years-later-princess-diana-still-communicating-through-fashion/544523001/> (accessed 8 February 2023).

reasons why the gay community started to be attracted to Diana. This is stated by Davies as well. “The intensely personal messages coded in her clothing, particularly in tandem with her charitable work, set her apart”<sup>100</sup>

## **2.1 Clothes make the woman**

The gay community’s interest in Diana’s choice of wardrobe will be analysed in this subchapter. This is done by researching why Diana embodied the concept of “camp” and why that over time was attracting the attention of the gay community. Furthermore, the reason why Diana stood out from the rest of the royal family in the eyes of the gay community will be elaborated on.

In 2021, Professor of British History Charles Upchurch explained that the royal family notoriously ignored the gay community during the AIDS crisis because the monarch has to be a symbol above the law and therefore could not be political.<sup>101</sup> Human rights activist Peter Tatchell stated in 2022, when the social climate was much more accepting towards queer people, that the most important royal Queen Elizabeth II has done nothing to acknowledge them. “To my knowledge, [the Queen] has never publicly acknowledged that LGBT+ people exist. The words lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender have never publicly passed her lips and she has never visited or been a patron of any LGBT+ charity.”<sup>102</sup>

The gay community might not have felt supported by the royal family but an attraction towards Diana did start to develop. The main reason for this initial attraction was her fashion sense. When Diana first appeared on the scene as the fiancée of Prince Charles she looked like an average young woman. Her clothes and overall appearance came across as frumpy and

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Jo Yurcaba, ‘Queen Elizabeth II ruled through decades of change on gay rights, but her LGBTQ legacy is complicated’ (18 September 2021) <https://www.nbcnews.com/nbc-out/out-news/queen-elizabeth-iis-legacy-lgbtq-rights-complicated-rcna48152> (accessed 28 December 2022).

<sup>102</sup> Helen Pidd, ‘LGBT campaigner Peter Tatchell refuses ‘national treasure’ jubilee offer’ (15 May 2022) <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/may/15/lgbt-campaigner-peter-tatchell-refuses-jubilee-invitation-to-be-declared-national-treasure> (16 January 2023).

docile. Therefore Diana did not catch the attention of the British people and the gay community. This was not surprising since Diana worked as a kindergarten teacher before her engagement, so her clothing style was a bit more pedestrian as seen in *Image 1: Diana in*



*Image 1: Diana in pedestrian clothing.*

*pedestrian clothing.*<sup>103</sup> This observation is reflected by journalist Felicity Hawkins who wrote the news article ‘The private life of Lady Di’ for *The Sunday People* and there she called Diana “a country maid”.<sup>104</sup> Diana needed to transform herself to be seen as a princess. The newspaper acknowledges Diana’s transformation during her engagement by publishing a teaser for next week’s issue which was called “How Lady Di Became A Dazzling Princess”.<sup>105</sup> From a feminist perspective, this kind of transformation can be considered a sign of a woman’s submission to her husband’s will.

Anthropology Professor Sarah Green explains how this transformation from Diana to Princess Diana could be viewed by the public as giving up one’s identity to perform an idealised heterosexual female role.<sup>106</sup>

Clothes which restrict movement and suggest vulnerability; clothes and make-up which expose and enhance, appearing to 'sell' the body to a male onlooker; But most of all, clothes which are primarily about sexuality - not a representation of sexuality to

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<sup>103</sup> 6 May 1981, Prince Charles, Prince of Wales with his fiancée Lady Diana, *Tim Graham Photo Library*, <https://www.gettyimages.nl/detail/nieuwsfoto%27s/prince-charles-prince-of-wales-with-his-fiance-lady-diana-nieuwsfotos/79733072?adppopup=true> (accessed 13 January 2023).

<sup>104</sup> Felicity Hawkins, ‘The private life of Lady Di’, *The Sunday People*, 16 July 1981.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> Sarah Green, ‘Making Transgressions: The Use of Style in a Women-Only Community in London’, *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (1991) 71-87, 77.

the self, but a representation of sexuality for the male gaze. An object cannot represent itself to itself.<sup>107</sup>

Queer theorist Don Mager states that such a demonstration of femininity might alienate queer people since they cannot relate to partaking in a stereotypical display of gender.<sup>108</sup>

However, the gay community did not seem to agree with those views. Many homosexuals were attracted to Diana's display of traditional heteronormativity. Thompson is a gay man who grew up during Princess Diana's lifetime and writes that she was an inspiration to him. Thompson was around the same age as Diana when she married and he wished for a similar thing happening to him.

I wanted someone to rescue me. In that way, those fairy tales tell their story. The knight in shining armor on a white steed sweeps in and rescues the damsel in distress. The prince marrying the commoner saves her from a life of sadness and poverty. I was the damsel and the commoner.<sup>109</sup>



*Image 2: Diana in her wedding dress.*

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<sup>107</sup> Green, 'Making Transgressions', 77.

<sup>108</sup> Don Mager, 'Gay Theories of Gender Role Deviance', *SubStance*, Vol. 14, No. 1, Issue 46 (1985) 32-48, 37

<sup>109</sup> Charles G. Thompson, 'Why Princess Diana's Wedding Was a Gay Coming-of-Age Moment' (17 November 2020) <https://www.advocate.com/commentary/2020/11/17/why-princess-dianas-wedding-was-gay-coming-age-moment> (accessed 17 November 2022).

The reason why the gay community embraced Diana's transformation into a fairy-tale princess like in *Image 2: Diana in her wedding dress* can be explained by the concept of "camp".<sup>110</sup> According to the work *Notes on Camp* by writer Susan Sontag, homosexuals have an affinity towards camp.

The peculiar relation between Camp taste and homosexuals has to be explained.

While it's not true that Camp taste is homosexual taste, there is no doubt a peculiar affinity and overlap...So not all homosexuals have Camp taste. But homosexuals, by and large, constitute the vanguard – and the most articulate audience – for Camp.<sup>111</sup>

One of the reasons camp resonated so much among homosexuals was because it was the key to being accepted in society for many queer people. "Homosexuals have pinned their integration into society on promoting the aesthetic sense. Camp is a solvent of morality. It neutralizes moral indignation, sponsors playfulness."<sup>112</sup> Linguist Chi Luu agrees with Sontag. Camp is a secret language in the gay community. Camp conveys expressions of homosexuality and gender non-conformity in a way that is acceptable in a homophobic society.<sup>113</sup>

According to Sontag's definitions, Diana's wedding dress can certainly be interpreted as camp. One of the ways something can be considered camp is when it is extraordinary. "Again, Camp is the attempt to do something extraordinary. But extraordinary in the sense, often, of being special, glamorous"<sup>114</sup> This was something that *Image 2: Diana in her wedding dress* reflects. The dress has enormous puffy sleeves, a dramatic skirt shape and of

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<sup>110</sup> 29 July 1981, Princess Of Wales, *Hulton Royals Collection*, <https://www.gettyimages.nl/detail/nieuwsfoto%27s/formal-portrait-of-lady-diana-spencer-in-her-wedding-nieuwsfotos/3239308?adppopup=true> (accessed 13 January 2023).

<sup>111</sup> Susan Sontag, *Notes on Camp* (New York 1964) 12.

<sup>112</sup> Sontag, *Notes on Camp*, 12.

<sup>113</sup> Chi Luu, 'The Unspeakable Linguistics of Camp' (6 June 2018) <https://daily.jstor.org/unspeakable-linguistics-camp/> (accessed 17 November 2022).

<sup>114</sup> Sontag, *Notes on Camp*, 7.



course a train longer than seven meters.<sup>115</sup>

After her wedding, Diana started to express herself more androgynously. Sontag describes how a thin genderless body like Diana's body can be considered camp. "What is most beautiful in virile men is something feminine; what is most beautiful in feminine women is something masculine"<sup>116</sup> A great example of that masculinity is that Diana was no stranger to wearing typical men's garments like suits and tuxedos as seen in *Image 3: Diana in a*



*Image 3: Diana in a tuxedo.*

*tuxedo.*<sup>117</sup> Those oversized pieces obscured her shape which made her body even more genderless and androgynous. Magazine editor Lauren Pellerano Gomez archives those pictures of Diana and states how her fashion style warmed the hearts of the gay community and how she became part of queer culture. "I think the account leads with aesthetics and humor, and it could be read in any number of ways. She's definitely part of the queer lexicon."<sup>118</sup>

However, this more androgynous approach was not perceived well by everyone and Diana required the help of homosexual couturiers like Bruce Oldfield to change her image. He started to dress Diana in the mid-1980s until 1990 and he explained in a 2022 interview that Princess Diana became a much more revered figure when she fell into his hands. He made Diana into a different kind of princess who was not seen before by the public. "But he made her so much more beautiful. 'Well, I helped. I pushed her

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<sup>115</sup> 29 July 1981, Princess Of Wales, *Hulton Royals Collection*, <https://www.gettyimages.nl/detail/nieuwsfoto%27s/formal-portrait-of-lady-diana-spencer-in-her-wedding-nieuwsfotos/3239308?adppopup=true> (accessed 13 January 2023).

<sup>116</sup> Sontag, *Notes on Camp*, 4.

<sup>117</sup> 20 April 1988, Diana At The Races, *Hulton Royals Collection*, <https://www.gettyimages.nl/detail/nieuwsfoto%27s/diana-princess-of-wales-attends-a-charity-greyhound-nieuwsfotos/1190827339?adppopup=true> (accessed 13 January 2023).

<sup>118</sup> Hilary Weaver, 'The Instagram Account That Makes Princess Diana a New Kind of Gay Icon' (7 June 2018) <https://www.vanityfair.com/style/2018/06/princess-diana-looking-gay-instagram-account> (29 December 2022).

in a certain direction, towards this more glamorous, more international look, and away from that English-y, big collars thing.”<sup>119</sup> With this more updated look seen in *Image 4: Diana in Bruce Oldfield*, Diana represented a different kind of camp.<sup>120</sup> For instance, drag performer Fagulous explains in a recent interview how much power Diana had with her new look. “It’s about her performativity as a princess. It’s very camp being able to do that. She was almost



*Image 4: Diana in Bruce Oldfield.*

Joan Crawford-esque: she could lure people in and tell a story.”<sup>121</sup> In that sense, Diana conveys what Sontag calls: “The great stylist of temperament and mannerism”<sup>122</sup> This more glamorous look and form of camp that Princess Diana exuded was even more noticeable since she was the only member of her generation in the royal family who used it to her advantage. A great comparison to Princess Diana would be her sister-in-law Princess Anne. Journalist Jack Slater states that nowadays by most accounts, the media is praising Princess Anne for her achievements in philanthropy and commenting that she is the hardest-working royal. But during

the era that Diana was still in the picture, Anne was often pushed to the side because she was

<sup>119</sup> Liz Jones, ‘Bruce Oldfield: ‘I gave Diana her glamour and Camilla her confidence’, (16 February 2022) <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/you/article-2557743/Bruce-Oldfield-I-gave-Diana-glamour-Camilla-confidence.html> (accessed 18 November 2022).

<sup>120</sup> 20 July 1989, Diana Claridges Rolls Royce, *Tim Graham Photo Library*, <https://www.gettyimages.nl/detail/nieuwsfoto%27s/princess-diana-arriving-by-rolls-royce-car-for-a-banquet-nieuwsfotos/52118491?adppopup=true> (accessed 13 January 2023).

<sup>121</sup> James Greig, ‘What Princess Diana Means to Queer People in 2019’ (20 February 2019) <https://www.vice.com/en/article/qvyzbp/what-princess-diana-means-to-queer-people-in-2019> (accessed 28 December 2022).

<sup>122</sup> Sontag, *Notes on Camp*, 4.

missing the camp that Diana possessed.<sup>123</sup> Richard Kay was a good friend of Diana and said that Princess Anne very much played by the book and did not have the spontaneity that Diana had during charity events. “Anne had a much more traditional approach to monarchy and royal duty.”<sup>124</sup> A camp appeal was something that the royal family was not providing. This made Princess Diana stand out and made her the object of affection for members of the gay community.

Concluding, even though the royal family was not considered accepting towards homosexuals, Diana knew how to grab the attention of the gay community. Initially, Diana was seen as plain and boring by the gay community since she was still dressing like an average young woman. However, Diana eventually grabbed the attention by dressing in a camp style that appealed to the gay community’s sensibilities. She achieved this by wearing a combination of extravagant, glamorous and androgynous outfits. This made Diana stand out compared to other members of the royal family that lacked this camp factor. But Diana’s clothing style was just a superficial aspect that attracted the gay community. Diana made a much more meaningful connection when she started to visit the AIDS wards. This act of kindness truly made the gay community admire her efforts of helping them.

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<sup>123</sup> Jack Slater, ‘Hard-working Princess Anne hailed as ‘credit to the royal family’ as she launches back into work following pandemic’ (27 November 2021) <https://www.womanandhome.com/us/life/royal-news/hard-working-princess-anne-hailed-as-credit-to-the-royal-family-as-she-launches-back-into-work-following-pandemic/> (accessed 15 August 2022).

<sup>124</sup> Sophie McCabe, ‘The truth between Princess Diana and Princess Anne’s longstanding ‘feud’ (26 July 2022) <https://www.express.co.uk/news/royal/1646047/princess-diana-princess-anne-feud-royal-family-spt> (accessed 16 August 2022).

## 2.2 Choosing AIDS

Doctor Rob Miller met Princess Diana when she first started to visit the AIDS wards on 9 April 1987. Miller was instantly delighted by Princess Diana for making the effort to visit AIDS patients. In the eyes of the gay community, the campy clothing style made Diana more interesting in comparison to the royal family. But because she visited the AIDS wards, the adoration of the gay community for the princess truly ignited.<sup>125</sup>

This subchapter will analyse three aspects that will show the importance of Diana's visits to the AIDS wards. The first aspect that will be analysed is why Princess Diana decided to visit the AIDS wards which were associated with homosexuals. The second aspect that will be researched is the importance of a person like Princess Diana visiting AIDS-inflicted homosexuals. And the final aspect that will be examined is why the behaviour of Princess Diana during the visits to the AIDS wards was so impactful.

Princess Diana's choice to visit the AIDS wards might have seemed controversial at first. In the 1980s, AIDS and homosexuality were still provocative topics to be associated with and especially for someone like the Princess of Wales who embodied the conservative values of the British royal family. However, sociologist Steven Epstein explains that as the decade progressed, advancements were made in viewing and treating AIDS patients. Activist groups like ACT UP started to take form and pushed AIDS on the political agendas of the United States and other Western countries.<sup>126</sup> Burgess states that because in Britain the AIDS: Don't Die of Ignorance campaign was started in 1986, the topic of AIDS was at least discussable.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Rob Miller, 'I met Princess Diana on one of her AIDS ward visits – she changed everything' (31 August 2022) <https://metro.co.uk/2022/08/31/i-met-princess-diana-on-one-of-her-aids-ward-visits-2-17272748/> (accessed 10 November 2022).

<sup>126</sup> Steven Epstein, 'The Construction of Lay Expertise: AIDS Activism and the Forging of Credibility in the Reform of Clinical Trials', in: *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, Vol. 20, No. 4, Special Issue: Constructivist Perspectives on Medical Work: Medical Practices and Science and Technology Studies (Autumn, 1995) 408-437, 415.

<sup>127</sup> Burgess, 'The development', 236.

The Western world seemed to be ready to tackle the problem of the AIDS epidemic. And therefore it was not too farfetched that an individual like Princess Diana could be involved with AIDS charities.

This sentiment is confirmed recently by Patrick Jephson who was Princess Diana's Private Secretary from 1988 to 1996 and he describes how Princess Diana chose her charities. Princess Diana was "guided by her heart" and chose people she could identify with. Those people were usually outcasts in society because just like them, Princess Diana felt excluded. Homosexuals held a special place in Diana's heart because just like her they experienced stigmatisation every day. Homosexuals were repressed by an intolerant society and Princess Diana was repressed by the media and the royal family. Princess Diana loved to surround herself with so-called "outsiders". Because Diana could relate the most to those people. "In fact, she said to me the first day I got there, Patrick, you'll like it working for me because we are all outsiders here, we're all incomers."<sup>128</sup>

According to Ken Wharfe, who was the bodyguard of Princess Diana from 1987 to 1993, the opinion of the royal family and especially that of Queen Elizabeth II about Princess Diana's charity work with AIDS patients was dismissive. Queen Elizabeth II argued that Princess Diana should be involved with more "pleasant" charities. Princess Diana felt misunderstood by the royal family. "Diana was angry the Queen could not see what she was doing. She felt a member of the Royal Family should be involved with campaigns to find a cure for AIDS."<sup>129</sup> However, Dickie Arbiter who was the former Press Secretary to Queen Elizabeth II from 1988 to 2000 discredited the claims made by Wharfe by stating that there was no such opposition from the royal family. "I mean, 50 years ago, cancer was whispered

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<sup>128</sup> Lauren Welch, 'Princess Diana's heartbreaking link to causes she chose 'She could identify with them' (6 September 2022) <https://www.express.co.uk/news/royal/1665623/princess-diana-news-causes-charities-supported-relatable-royal-news-vn> (accessed 27 October 2022).

<sup>129</sup> Lewis Knight, 'Did The Crown do justice to Princess Diana and her work in the AIDS crisis?' (19 December 2020) <https://www.irishmirror.ie/tv/crown-justice-princess-diana-work-23193116> (accessed 13 November 2022).

about nobody talked about cancer, but royals took on cancer charities. And the same can be said for AIDS during the 1980s.”<sup>130</sup> According to him, the royal family was very comfortable with picking charities that might sound controversial and Princess Diana was not constrained in her choice. It must be noted that his statement was made in a recent interview where the royal family tried to defend themselves after their unflattering portrayal in the television series *The Crown*.<sup>131</sup> Therefore it is difficult to view the statement as truthful or as a form of damage control. What is undoubtedly true is that Princess Diana was able to visit the AIDS wards and she was not visibly stopped by the royal family in her pursuit.

However, the idea that Diana was the first person in the royal family that visited the AIDS wards is disputed by Lady Glenconner. She was a close friend of Princess Margaret and according to her, Margaret was the first prominent royal to visit the AIDS wards. She describes in a recent interview that Princess Margaret visited the AIDS wards and was capable of making the AIDS patients laugh. “It was long before Diana, Princess of Wales, went with her posse of photographers.”<sup>132</sup> The reason that Diana is credited to be the first royal to visit the AIDS wards has mostly to do with the fact that Princess Margaret wanted to be secretive about her charity visits.<sup>133</sup> Because of this secrecy, the royal family was far less worried about a possible backlash.

Secondly, Princess Diana embodied the British idea of power, elitism and authority and this gave her visits to the AIDS wards a sense of importance. Rob Miller states how valuable Diana’s involvement was.

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Joe Camp, ‘Princess Margaret secretly visited Aids patients at same London hospice as Diana’ (19 October 2019) <https://www.express.co.uk/news/royal/1193004/royal-news-latest-princess-margaret-lady-glenconner-the-queen-princess-diana> (accessed 4 March 2023).

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

Looking back at Princess Diana's visit, it was hugely important. The iconic photograph of Princess Diana shaking hands with a patient with HIV and not wearing gloves or protective clothing changed everything... It marked the start of her outstanding efforts to help change public and media attitudes towards people with HIV.<sup>134</sup>

Diana's status as the Princess of Wales showed that it was not shameful to visit AIDS-stricken homosexuals. David T. Evans was a nurse at St Mary's Hospital and was there when Princess Diana visited the AIDS department on 1 December 1989. According to Evans, after Princess Diana visited other important people followed her example, for instance, the Archbishop of Canterbury. One of the most high-ranking patients was even a personal friend of Queen Elizabeth's sister Princess Margaret.<sup>135</sup> The elite status of both the visitors and the patients indicated that AIDS was an illness that can affect everyone and that a nationwide plan of action to combat the disease was necessary. According to Evans, even though Diana was not the only prominent figure who cared for the well-being of homosexual AIDS victims, she became the most recognisable face linked to AIDS charities. Another prominent royal that visited the AIDS wards was the beforementioned Princess Margaret.

Diana wasn't the only Royal to visit and get involved with people living with HIV, but she was the most visible, the most iconic, and therefore the one with the greatest international 'clout' for raising HIV awareness, and challenging both HIV and AIDS-related stigmas.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Rob Miller, 'I met Princess Diana on one of her AIDS ward visits – she changed everything' (31 August 2022) <https://metro.co.uk/2022/08/31/i-met-princess-diana-on-one-of-her-aids-ward-visits-2-17272748/> (accessed 10 November 2022).

<sup>135</sup> David T. Evans, 'TV interview: Princess Diana and HIV' (5 October 2019) <https://davidsmemoirs.wordpress.com/2019/10/05/tv-interview-princess-diana-and-hiv/> (accessed 17 September 2019).

<sup>136</sup> David T. Evans, 'Trilogy of a beautiful Princess' (25 August 2016) <https://davidsmemoirs.wordpress.com/2016/08/25/blog-post-title-2/> (accessed 18 September 2022).

Cynically, one can make the argument that the reason Diana visited the AIDS wards with the media following her, was to make her look more sympathetic. The idea that Princess Diana tried to increase her popularity among the British people is not a strange assumption to have when one remembers her antagonistic relationship with Charles and the royal family at that time. However, not all of Princess Diana's visits to the AIDS wards were reported by the media. According to a 2017 interview with Ian Green, a lot of the effort that Diana put into her visits to homosexual AIDS patients went under the radar of the general public. "We've also heard stories of when the Princess would pop into the Lighthouse, with no media, to spend time with people who were very ill."<sup>137</sup> Those visits without the media showed Diana as very likeable and genuine in the eyes of the gay community. The gay men visited by Diana saw her as someone who cared about their safety. The reason for this anonymity is that there was still a lot of judgement from the British public towards AIDS victims and homosexuals. Some patients feared that the media that accompanied Princess Diana during her public visits would bully them and delegitimise their struggle with AIDS.<sup>138</sup> By doing her charity work without cameras Diana earned great respect from the gay community.

Thirdly, the way Diana conducted herself during her visits to the AIDS wards was exceptional. Not only was she socialising with the homosexual men who were present but she also did not wear a mask or medical gloves. Rob Miller explained that it might not seem like much today but at that time many myths about the contamination of AIDS prevailed.

On that day, she famously shook hands with AIDS patients and stated: 'HIV does not make people dangerous to know. You can shake their hands and give them a hug.'

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<sup>137</sup> Matilda Long, 'Princess Diana's secret visits to HIV and AIDS patients' (31 August 2017) <https://uk.news.yahoo.com/princess-dianas-secret-visits-hiv-aids-patients-081230270.html> (accessed 10 October 2022).

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.



Heaven knows they need it. What's more, you can share their homes, their workplaces, and their playgrounds and toys.'<sup>139</sup>

The Head of the PR of the Terrence Higgins Trust Fraser Wilson states a similar assertion in a recent interview that through ‘‘handshakes and hugs’’ Princess Diana made a statement that hysteria and fear of AIDS were unnecessary. ‘‘Through her actions she made it clear you couldn't contract HIV from touching or close contact. The impact of Princess Diana putting the spotlight which followed her on people with HIV should not be underestimated or forgotten.’’<sup>140</sup> Diana made a clear assertion when it came to her personal feelings about the gay community.

This seemingly simple act of kindness by touching homosexuals who had AIDS showed more sympathy for the gay community than it had received from most people in Britain. Evans stated recently that Princess Diana not only touched AIDS patients without gloves but also took further measures to show the world that fear of AIDS was not necessary when it came to day-to-day contact. Princess Diana sat next to a homosexual AIDS patient who had an open wound on his leg and his bare knees were touching the Princess's knees. ‘‘So, all the fears, all the stigmas, around HIV she broke those barriers down just by having knee-to-knee contact.’’<sup>141</sup> Evans stated that this seemingly straightforward action of Diana brought tears to his eyes as it was a major sign of acceptance for him.<sup>142</sup>

Concluding, Princess Diana chose to visit the AIDS wards and the homosexual AIDS patients because she felt a certain kinship with them because just like her, they were ‘‘outsiders’’. She

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<sup>139</sup> Rob Miller, ‘I met Princess Diana on one of her AIDS ward visits – she changed everything’ (31 August 2022) <https://metro.co.uk/2022/08/31/i-met-princess-diana-on-one-of-her-aids-ward-visits-2-17272748/> (accessed 10 November 2022).

<sup>140</sup> Josh Milton, ‘Princess Diana changed how the world saw HIV and AIDS with one simple but profound gesture’ (31 August 2022) <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2022/08/31/princess-diana-hiv-aids/> (accessed 10 September 2022).

<sup>141</sup> Natalie Olivier, ‘The single gesture that saw Princess Diana 'break down barriers' and change the world's attitude towards AIDS’ (16 July 2021) <https://honey.nine.com.au/royals/princess-diana-shake-hands-with-aids-patient-no-gloves-knees-touching> (accessed 18 September 2022).

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

was not the first member of the royal family to visit the AIDS wards, but she was the one that was most remembered since she brought the media with her. Many members of the gay community believe that thanks to Diana's visits to the AIDS wards, the public gained more sympathy for AIDS patients. Princess Diana also interacted with AIDS patients without gloves on and showed the public that there was no need to be afraid. The visits to the AIDS wards were not the only reason that there was also a deeper connection between Diana and the gay community. Her life seems to have a lot of similarities with the lives of many homosexuals.

### 2.3 A gay icon in the making

Diana's fashion choices showed her camp sensibilities and her visits to the AIDS wards showed her empathy. Those attributes made the gay community admire Diana. However, the aspect of Diana that the gay community found even more appealing was her personal life. Dale states that at first glance Princess Diana grew up in an idyllic aristocratic family. However, her family life and marriage were far less ideal. Diana and Charles were separated in 1992 and divorced in 1996.

Her story reflects the gendered roles of fairytales: three sisters, a wicked step-mother, a prince charming or two, and even a poisoned apple, as tension then begins to mount again with the re-awakening of romance and a renewed hope of living happily ever after.<sup>143</sup>

In this subchapter, three factors will be discussed that gave Diana a deeper connection with the gay community. First, Diana's unhappiness in her life will be analysed and why that is relatable to many homosexuals. The second aspect that will be examined is why the gay community was attracted to Diana's new "bad girl" persona. And the third thing that will be researched is why the gay community saw Diana in a positive light when she was sincere about her eating disorder.

Diana became truly a staple in the gay community because of her distorted personal life. In 1992, writer Andrew Morton published the book appropriately titled *Diana: Her True Story*. He proved by Diana's own accounts that the speculations and allegations of the ill-treatment of her by Charles and the royal family, which were already circulating in the media, were true. "We now know that Andrew Morton's *Diana, Her True Story* was based on the Princess's

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<sup>143</sup> Dale, 'Reading the Text', 154.

own words.’’<sup>144</sup> The constant infidelities of Prince Charles and later of Diana herself were an enormous strain on their relationship. The royal family ignored Princess Diana’s problems during her time as the wife of Prince Charles. To top it all off, Princess Diana was expected to keep up appearances by suppressing her unhappiness during her marriage.<sup>145</sup>

Princess Diana’s misfortune made the gay community draw similarities between themselves and her. The feeling of getting shunned by your loved ones was an all too familiar struggle for the members of the gay community back in the 1980s and 1990s. Professor of Sociology Peter M. Nardi explains that many members of the gay community had experienced distorted childhoods, family rejections and the duty to keep up appearances.<sup>146</sup> Homosexuals who were open about their sexuality had a chance of being rejected by their biological family and had to find a new form of support network in the shape of a “found family”. Since many young gay persons got disowned by their biological families because of their sexual orientation, they formed tight-knit groups with their peers. Those groups functioned as surrogate families. “For many of them, often alienated and rejected from their families of origin... transformations of kinship relations organized around the principle of choice.’’<sup>147</sup>

According to Dale, Morton and Nardi both Diana and the gay community have the desire to belong somewhere. There could be an argument made that this caused a deeper understanding between the gay community and Diana. This is confirmed by columnist Skylar Baker-Jordan who describes how Diana’s failing marriage and the experience he had as a gay child created a sense of kinship.

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<sup>144</sup> Deborah Ross, ‘Interview: Andrew Morton: He couldn’t Shout: ‘Diana was in on this. ‘She trusted me. I would have been a Betrayal’, *The Independent*, 1 December 1997.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Peter M. Nardi, ‘Friends, Lovers, and Families: The Impact of AIDS on Gay and Lesbian Relationships’, in: Martin P. Levine, Peter M. Nardi and John H. Gagnon (eds.), *In Changing Times* (London 1997) 55-82, 58.

<sup>147</sup> Nardi, ‘Friends, Lovers, and Families’, 59.

We saw in her so much of what we felt ourselves. Here was someone who so desperately wanted to be herself, to find her place in a world which routinely rejected her. There was strength in her vulnerability and pain in her courage.<sup>148</sup>

When Diana divorced Charles in 1996, she was no longer part of the royal family. The gay community became attracted to a new aspect of Diana and that was her “bad girl” persona. In a way, this was similar to the paths that many American movie actresses have followed to gain admiration from a gay audience. Writer Daniel Harris states that the thing that made female movie stars like Marlene Dietrich, Joan Crawford and Mae West into gay icons and “bad girls” was that they used their sexuality and gender to assert a form of power.<sup>149</sup> Those actresses exuded a certain type of strength that the gay community could use to their advantage. Their sharp tongues and quick wits assured them to win any verbal argument with any man. Those women used their strengths to make their mark in a society that was not built for them.<sup>150</sup> In other words, the actresses showed the gay community how to stand up for themselves in a patriarchal society that both suppressed women and queer people. Even though those actresses may be dubbed “bad girls”, they gained the admiration of many gay men.

Homosexuals were drawn to the image of the bitchin part because of her wicked tongue, her ability to achieve through conversation, through her verbal acuity, her snappy comebacks, the control over others that gay men were often unable to achieve in their own lives.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Skylar Baker-Jordan, ‘Princess Diana desperately wanted to just be herself – that’s why she will always be a gay icon’ (31 August 2017) <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/princess-diana-20th-anniversary-death-gay-icon-hiv-aids-epidemic-acceptance-a7921616.html> (accessed 30 December 2022).

<sup>149</sup> Daniel Harris, ‘Gay Men and Hollywood Diva Worship, from Reverence to Ridicule’, *Salmagundi*, Fall 1996, No. 112 (1996) 166-191, 167.

<sup>150</sup> Harris, ‘Gay Men and Hollywood’, 167.

<sup>151</sup> Harris, ‘Gay Men and Hollywood’, 173.

However, Diana was not well known for her wit or sharp remarks. For instance, journalist Mark Simpson would even consider Diana to be too dull to function as a gay icon. “For a new generation of gays who were asserting their right to indulge their appetites rather than apologise for them, Di's shy, quietly spoken strengths were just not in-her-face enough.”<sup>152</sup> Though one can argue that Diana used a more subtle way to assert her power and make a mark on the world. Diana broke officially free through her divorce from the pressures of maintaining conservative family values by being married to Prince Charles and being part of the royal family. Traditional media like the newspaper *Daily Mirror* described Diana as “utterly destroyed” by the divorce.<sup>153</sup> But many members of the gay community saw it differently. This newfound personal freedom was very inspiring and familiar to the gay community. Harris states that many gay men have experienced similar situations of being an outcast in their own families and hometowns and fought for the right to finally be able to truly express themselves. “At the very heart of gay diva worship, in other words, is not the diva but the almost universal homosexual experience of ostracism and insecurity”<sup>154</sup> So in that sense, the gay community could relate immensely to a woman like Diana, who after so much hardship found the strength to move on and live an authentic life. A gay man named Sam stated in a 2019 interview for *Vice* that he saw Diana truly as a “bad girl”. “She was a bad bitch, she owned what she was about – she fucked off Prince Charles and did what she wanted to do.”<sup>155</sup> Diana’s strength in the face of adversity was noticed as well by gay journalist David Levesley who writes in 2018 about how inspirational she was for queer people.

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<sup>152</sup> Mark Simpson, ‘Diana 1961-1997: The gay icon - Glamorous, tragic, a drama queen - but never camp’, *The Independent*, 6 September 1997.

<sup>153</sup> Christian Gysin, ‘Sad Diana faces up to life as a divorce’, *Daily Mirror*, 13 July 1996.

<sup>154</sup> Harris, ‘Gay Men and Hollywood’, 168.

<sup>155</sup> James Greig, ‘What Princess Diana Means to Queer People in 2019’ (20 February 2019) <https://www.vice.com/en/article/qvyzbp/what-princess-diana-means-to-queer-people-in-2019> (accessed 28 December 2022).

Diana was never the fantasy fable that Royal weddings are always meant to be. Like all great icons, some have come to admire Diana for her beauty and her dignity. Others — especially queer people — admire her for how long she lasted in the face of a shitty situation.<sup>156</sup>

There was another reason why Diana was so adored by the gay community. According to Harris, there also needs to be an element of vulnerability present if an actress wants to be respected by the gay community. For instance, a gay icon like Judy Garland suffered from drug addiction and because of that, her place in the gay community was even more potent.<sup>157</sup> Diana's struggles were not drug related but she did suffer from an eating disorder. Diana spoke openly and unashamed about her struggles with food.<sup>158</sup>

I have it, on very good authority, that the quest for perfection our society demands can leave the individual gasping for breath at every turn. This pressure inevitably extends into the way we look. And of course, many would like to believe that Eating Disorders are merely an expression of female vanity - not being able to get into a size ten dress and the consequent frustrations!<sup>159</sup>

The reason why Diana's openness about her bulimia caused a connection with the gay community can be explained by the high amount of eating disorders among queer men in comparison to heterosexual men. Professor of Social Work David J. Brennan explains that this has mostly to do with the high expectations in the gay community about how a desirable male body should look. Moreover, a certain body type gives men within the gay community a

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<sup>156</sup> David Levesley, 'Why Princess Diana Is An Enduring Queer Icon' (19 May 2018) <https://www.them.us/story/princess-diana-queer-icon> (accessed 18 November 2022).

<sup>157</sup> Harris, 'Gay Men and Hollywood', 176.

<sup>158</sup> Iowa State University, Archives of Women's Political Communication, 'Diana Princess of Wales - On Eating Disorders - April 27, 1993' (27 April 1993) <https://awpc.cattcenter.iastate.edu/2017/03/09/on-eating-disorders-april-27-1993/> (accessed 20 November 2022).

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

higher status.<sup>160</sup> Therefore the gay community could relate to Diana's unhealthy eating habits. Homosexual journalist James Greig states that Diana's struggles with bulimia truly resonated with him.

When I was a teenager, struggling with bulimia myself, Diana often came to mind (she was probably the only person I'd heard of who was bulimic). I would think about her hidden away where no one could hear, in some lonely bathroom in a far corner of the palace, doing the exact thing that I was doing. It was a kind of scaled-up relatability, satisfying a childish fantasy of suffering in splendour; wanting not even to be less lonely or sad, but to be beautiful and adored while being so.<sup>161</sup>

Concluding, the gay community started to see Diana as an icon because they could relate to her experience. The mistreatment Diana faced from her family, her husband and the royal family was familiar to many homosexuals. Just like Diana, homosexuals often felt that they did not belong within their own families. Even though Diana might seem demure, her divorce made her admirable in the eyes of the gay community because she fought back in her own way against the conservative establishment. This was similar to what many gay-friendly movie stars had done before her. Those actresses used their quick wits to fight back against the patriarchy. Diana's vulnerability about her eating disorder formed an even greater connection with the gay community since homosexual men were more likely to suffer from it. This connection that Diana had with the gay community grew even stronger after her untimely death. Diana's death transformed her life into a symbol of the gay experience.

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<sup>160</sup> David J. Brennan, 'Factors associated with a drive for muscularity among gay and bisexual men', *Health & Sexuality*, Vol. 14, No. ½ (January-February 2012) 1-15,1-2.

<sup>161</sup> James Greig, 'What Princess Diana Means to Queer People in 2019' (20 February 2019) <https://www.vice.com/en/article/qvyzbp/what-princess-diana-means-to-queer-people-in-2019> (accessed 28 December 2022).



## **Chapter 3: The death of Diana**

The gay community seemed to take a liking to Princess Diana. Diana's camp fashion style made her stand out and her visits to the AIDS wards warmed the hearts of queer people. But her defiant attitude towards the royal family and her openness about her insecurities truly validated her place in the gay community. Writer Anthony Holden described in *Vanity Fair* Diana as truly an aspirational figure towards the AIDS inflicted gay community. "To global victims, from AIDS patients to deprived children, she is a saint, a genuinely devoted guardian angel with the perfect bedside manner."<sup>162</sup> However, Diana could not enjoy this praise for long since her life ended tragically in a car crash on 31 August 1997. Diana's death deeply impacted a lot of people. The newspaper *The Record* stated that the world was mourning Diana.<sup>163</sup>

The main question in this chapter is why Diana had a lasting impact on the gay community after her death. The topics that will be researched are the effect of Diana's death on the gay community and why the gay community still holds on to Diana's legacy.

### **3.1 The end of an era**

The main point of this subchapter is to explain why the untimely death of Diana had such an impact on the gay community. The first thing that will be discussed is why the general public reacted so strongly to Diana's death. The second point that will be examined is why the death of Diana in the eyes of the gay community had a symbolic meaning. And the last segment to be researched is why the death of Diana had both positive and negative effects on her charity work involving homosexual AIDS patients.

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<sup>162</sup> Anthony Holden, 'Diana's Revenge', *Vanity Fair*, February 1993.

<sup>163</sup> John-Thor Dahlburg, 'World Mourns Diana', *The Record*, 1 September 1997.

Understanding how the media and the general public reacted to the death of Diana is the key to understanding the perspective of the gay community. After all, the opinions of homosexuals are formed by the media as well. According to Hermes, there was a clear shift in the way the media reported on Diana after her death.<sup>164</sup> The media saw Diana not just as a celebrity anymore but as almost divine. “Diana became the epitome of human kindness, warmth and caring, the only one to suffer with all and alleviate the suffering from others at the same time.”<sup>165</sup> This is a solid point. After Diana’s divorce until her death, she was mostly viewed as a celebrity and therefore salacious articles were written about her. For instance, in the summer of 1996, the magazine *Woman’s Day* gave Diana the nickname “Divorced Bombshell” and speculated about her love life.<sup>166</sup> However, when Diana died publications began to be more respectful. For instance, *The Sunday Times* called Diana a figure from a Greek tragedy.<sup>167</sup>

Nevertheless, there seems to be a divide among social scientists on how the public saw Diana after her death. Some are convinced that the tragic circumstances of Diana’s death transformed her into a folk hero. Caputi states that Diana after her death took the role of a goddess for many people.<sup>168</sup>

In a world saturated by the male point of view, Diana's life represented feminine wisdom, beauty, vulnerability and nurturing. She was as close as our planet is likely to come to having a Goddess figure.<sup>169</sup>

Diana’s divine appeal was a phenomenon that occurred all over Britain. This so-called “devotion” to Diana was so intense and widespread that even the Archbishop of York, David

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<sup>164</sup> Hermes, ‘Diana. Death’, 78.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> ‘Di’s sex life cost her millions’, *Woman’s Day*, 22 July 1996.

<sup>167</sup> Andrew Alderson and Charles Masters, ‘Princess Diana and lover Dodi die in Paris car crash’, *The Sunday Times*, 31 August 1997.

<sup>168</sup> Caputi, ‘The Second Coming’, 104.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

Hope, chimed in with the warning that this form of worship could be considered sacrilegious. “We should be careful that she is not worshipped. That worship should be directed to the God who created her.”<sup>170</sup> That a clergyman commented on this kind of matter is truly a sign that the worship of Princess Diana was in full swing and that large groups of British people were involved in this kind of dedication. Dale writes that the reason why the death of Diana was so devastating for many people was that Diana herself fell into a certain female archetype that was revered in Western society. This archetype was that of a young white mother who experienced hardships in her marriage and family life.<sup>171</sup> Diana’s negative traits became part of her likability.

The life of Diana was also read as something far from admirable, created within the (socially produced) feminine neurosis of a need to deserve or win the love and esteem of others: self-centered, "touchy-feely," indulgent and manipulative. Fallibility becomes part of the Diana myth, enacted within the feminine and glamorized by being written large, so there are significant feminist implications in this focus on female suffering.<sup>172</sup>

A lot of women started to identify with Diana because they understood why she acted that way. Diana’s negative traits became therefore more comprehensible to many people.<sup>173</sup> Chancey states that Diana’s negative traits have mostly been downplayed in the media after she died. The remaining memory of the public of Diana’s unsympathetic qualities fitted neatly in her portrayal as a more heroic figure who needed to act that way to overcome her struggles.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Christopher Morgan, ‘Archbishop urges end to ‘cult of Diana’, *The Times*, 5 July 1998.

<sup>171</sup> Dale, ‘Reading the Text’, 154-155.

<sup>172</sup> Dale, ‘Reading the Text’, 155.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> Chancey, ‘The Fairytale’, 172.

Instead of the living and complicated Diana defined by scandals, eating disorders, and friction within the royal family, a newer, streamlined, prettified post-mortem version is being created. The Diana memorial industry has edited the massive visual record of Diana's life so that we see only the fairytale side of her life; even her tribulations are part of a folklore heroine's life.<sup>175</sup>

Both Caputi and Dale state that Diana's tragic death made her an iconic figure remembered by the British people. However, Hermes states that the outpour of grief was simply stirred up by the media. Just after a year, those same people who mourned intensely about Diana seemingly forgot about her. "Memorial books are much reduced sales items in discount stores; only a mere 300 attend a memorial march following the route of the funeral while the organisers had hoped to draw at least 15,000 people."<sup>176</sup> Chancey agrees with this by stating that the mourning of Diana is far more artificial and that it is stirred up by the so-called "Diana memorial industry".<sup>177</sup>

The reaction of the gay community to the death of Diana is similar to the observations made by Caputi and Dale. Executive Director of Aidsmap Matthew Hodson was present during Diana's funeral and explained in a 2022 interview how the gay community was affected by her death. "The mourners surrounding me on that section of the route seemed to be mainly Black men and women, people with visible disabilities, and gay men and lesbians."<sup>178</sup> This statement showed that Diana's death caused an outpour of grief from communities that were affected the most by the AIDS crisis. This showed the support that Diana had created among the gay community.

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Hermes, 'Diana. Death', 76.

<sup>177</sup> Chancey, 'The Fairytale', 172.

<sup>178</sup> Josh Milton, 'Princess Diana changed how the world saw HIV and AIDS with one simple but profound gesture' (31 August 2022) <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2022/08/31/princess-diana-hiv-aids/> (accessed 10 September 2022).

Moreover, Diana's death can also be viewed through a queer lens. According to Professor of English William J. Spurlin, Diana became after her death a symbol in the eyes of the gay community.<sup>179</sup> Diana's heteronormative life of having a husband, experiencing childbirth and motherhood was viewed as a kind of suppression by the gay community. The divorce on the other hand was seen as a rebellious act for Diana to free herself from the patriarchal system represented by the royal family.<sup>180</sup>

During most of her adult life, except for that brief period following her separation from Charles, the queer aspects of Diana's image were difficult to ascertain as they were often socially obscured by official images of her connections to royalty.<sup>181</sup>

Through the queer lens, Diana's divorce can be mirrored by a gay person's coming out and her time as a single woman can therefore be seen as a gay man who lives his life out in the open.<sup>182</sup> Hodson noted the similarities between Diana and himself. "Diana, with all her privileges of birth, spoke of feeling like an outsider. I think many who felt marginalised by society related to her and were hit particularly hard by her death."<sup>183</sup> That Diana's death changed her life into an analogy for many members of the gay community can be seen in an interview done by journalist James Greig in 2019. He interviewed a queer woman named Hannah about her opinion of Diana and she described how Diana's life was not only an inspiration for gay men but also for lesbians. "Although Diana is mostly considered in relation to queer men, she's definitely an icon for queer women too, with Charles as the

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<sup>179</sup> William J. Spurlin, 'I'd Rather be the Princess than the Queen! Mourning Diana as a Gay Icon', in: Adrian Kear and Deborah Lynn Steinberg (eds.), *Mourning Diana: nation, culture, and the performance of grief* (London 1999) 155-168, 156-157.

<sup>180</sup> Spurlin, 'I'd Rather be', 156.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Spurlin, 'I'd Rather be', 165-166.

<sup>183</sup> Josh Milton, 'Princess Diana changed how the world saw HIV and AIDS with one simple but profound gesture' (31 August 2022) <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2022/08/31/princess-diana-hiv-aids/> (accessed 10 September 2022).

embodiment of male patriarchal power, and her rebellion against that, her journey of self-discovery.’’<sup>184</sup>

The untimely death of Diana was both a blessing and a curse for AIDS charities. From a pragmatic standpoint, AIDS charities lost an enormous endorsement figure. Diana was a major form of publicity. Therefore her death was a great loss. Hodson, who himself was a child during the visits of Diana to the AIDS wards explains that she was a media darling and therefore she was able to shine a spotlight on the struggles of homosexual AIDS patients.

She was there every day, laughing or crying on the front pages of the newspapers...

Shaking the hand of someone with AIDS, at a time when there was no effective treatment, may seem tiny now but at the time it was pivotal.<sup>185</sup>

Diana was so beloved by the media at that time, that her involvement in the AIDS movement could be tremendously helpful in creating support for the gay community. Now that Diana was dead this became impossible.

On the other hand, Diana’s death did have a positive effect on the AIDS charities that she supported. Her death brought people together in their grief and made the AIDS charities part of that uniting sorrow. According to Professor of Media Studies Arvind Rajagopal, Diana had a certain overall appeal. ‘‘The extent to which any charitable work Diana performed influenced her popular reception was probably exceeded by her significance as a zone of empathic convergence,’’<sup>186</sup> Diana had the power to be perceived as sympathetic in the eyes of many. This overall representation and identification caused many people to feel a certain level

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<sup>184</sup> James Greig, ‘What Princess Diana Means to Queer People in 2019’ (20 February 2019) <https://www.vice.com/en/article/qvyzbp/what-princess-diana-means-to-queer-people-in-2019> (accessed 28 December 2022).

<sup>185</sup> Josh Milton, ‘Princess Diana changed how the world saw HIV and AIDS with one simple but profound gesture’ (31 August 2022) <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2022/08/31/princess-diana-hiv-aids/> (accessed 10 September 2022).

<sup>186</sup> Arvind Rajagopal, ‘Celebrity and the Politics of Charity’, in: Adrian Kear and Deborah Lynn Steinberg (eds), *Mourning Diana: nation, culture, and the performance of grief* (London 1999) 126-141, 138.

of familiarity with Diana. “The multiple uses of her body, as a body of high fashion, as a sexualized figure, as a hurt single mother and so forth, allowed individuals a variety of subject positions in their identification with her.”<sup>187</sup> Therefore AIDS charities could be seen as admirable because she was associated with them. When Diana died, the people of Britain for a moment turned one in their grief. “These contradictions were registered and symbolically transcended in the media, as a spectacle of mourning created the impression of a nation at one with itself in its grief.”<sup>188</sup> This sense of a collective missing turned the AIDS charities into a memorial for Diana. Fraser Wilson stated in a 2022 interview that Diana was a trailblazer and that because of her death other celebrities, politicians and ordinary people followed her example to honour her memory which in turn gave AIDS charities more publicity and recognition. “She is sorely missed. Princess Diana’s work is now being honoured and built upon.”<sup>189</sup>

Concluding, Diana’s death was greatly mourned by the world. The reason for this was that Diana was capable of making a connection with many different people from many social classes. Moreover, the fact that Diana was a young white woman made Western society value her even more. The gay community in particular seemed mournful. This was because Diana’s death transformed her life into something which could be interpreted as a symbol of the gay experience. Her marriage was seen as suppressive and her short time as a single woman as liberating. Also, the death of Diana had an impact on the AIDS charities that she supported. The AIDS charities lost their most famous spokesperson but gained a lot of sympathy from the public since they became part of Diana’s legacy. This legacy lives on because Diana and the charities she was involved with are still relevant to this day.

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<sup>187</sup> Rajagopal, ‘Celebrity and the Politics of Charity’, 138.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Josh Milton, ‘Princess Diana changed how the world saw HIV and AIDS with one simple but profound gesture’ (31 August 2022) <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2022/08/31/princess-diana-hiv-aids/> (accessed 10 September 2022).

### 3.2 An icon lives on

After Diana's death, the public outpour was intense. The gay community especially seem to have a special connection with Diana. Writer Louis Staples states in the magazine *Bazaar* that even though it is more than twenty years after her death, Diana is still resonating with the gay community. "Twenty-four years on from her sudden death, I am certainly not the only LGBTQ+ person who still feels a special connection with Diana."<sup>190</sup>

The main point of this subchapter is to explain why Diana's legacy is still important to the gay community. Firstly, the reason will be explained why Diana's general appeal influenced her standing with the gay community. The second subject that will be analysed is why media portrayals of Diana played a major part in the lasting attraction of the gay community to her. And the last matter that will be discussed is why Diana's legacy as a charitable figure for the gay community is still emphasised to this day.

Even though Diana was born in the upper crust of British society and checked all the boxes of what a woman of that status should be, she was also involved with people who were considered outcasts by the rest of the country. Caputi notes that this made Diana an inspirational figure to many people regardless of social background. "Though Diana as Princess of Wales was meant to serve as an icon of whiteness, privilege, race and class superiority, she countered this expectation and evolved into ... "Princess of Other".<sup>191</sup>

However, some people thought that Diana's general appeal did chip away at her place in the gay community. Simpson argued a few days after Diana's death that because an enormous part of the British population mourned Diana it was more than logical that the gay

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<sup>190</sup> Louis Staples, 'The Queer Mourning of Princess Diana' (1 November 2021) <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/film-tv/a38092562/the-queer-mourning-of-princess-diana/> (accessed 20 November 2022).

<sup>191</sup> Caputi, 'The Second Coming', 107.



community did that as well. The admiration of the gay community for Diana seems more expected and has not really anything to do with her so-called “gay icon status”.

Of course, thousands of gays loved her, for the same reasons people did from all walks of life - and not just for her work on Aids awareness. But being a gay icon is not simply about love. It's more usually about a fierce, frightening ambivalence towards women or a desperate, driven identification.<sup>192</sup>

This is based on the perception that Diana did not have the right character to be considered a gay icon. “On the other hand, Di's feistiness wasn't brash enough to qualify her as gay icon in the more modern, self-assertive, self-confident, successful, vulgar... Di's shy, quietly spoken strengths were just not in-her-face enough.”<sup>193</sup> Simply being friendly with the gay community does not give a person the right to be considered a gay icon. “Ironically, her famous friendships with gay men and her timely intervention during the Aids panic doesn't make her a gay icon - just gay-friendly and contemporary.”<sup>194</sup> Diana's legacy would therefore not last long and the gay community would not remember her as an iconic figure. Some gay men agree with this opinion. A German gay man who visited a cabaret night called “Dirty Di's Tunnel of Love” in 2019, stated that he did not understand the popularity of the late princess. “Isn't that just giving the monarchy an inverted type of legitimacy? It sounds like she gave it a human face, like Obama with American imperialism. She's not a part of queer culture.”<sup>195</sup> However, it seems that those opinions are in the minority.

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<sup>192</sup> Mark Simpson, ‘Diana 1961-1997: The gay icon - Glamorous, tragic, a drama queen - but never camp’, *The Independent*, 6 September 1997.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> James Greig, ‘What Princess Diana Means to Queer People in 2019’ (20 February 2019) <https://www.vice.com/en/article/qvyzbp/what-princess-diana-means-to-queer-people-in-2019> (accessed 28 December 2022).

The reason that Diana is still remembered fondly by most of the gay community is that she is often portrayed in popular culture like films, plays and television series from a queer angle. Staples explains that there are queer themes present in the stories involving Diana like hiding behind a mask of heteronormativity, being unable to express your romantic interest and rebelling against an established power.<sup>196</sup> Those queer themes get progressively more highlighted when Diana is played by actresses who are queer. This is certainly the case for Diana's most popular and recent portrayals in the movie *Spencer* and the television series *The Crown*. Writer Kira Deshler states that the gay community becomes more sympathetic towards Diana whenever that happens. "Stewart and Corrin's visible queerness clearly adds another layer of meaning to their respective roles as the People's Princess"<sup>197</sup> Writer for *The Independent* Chelsea Ritschel explains that the continuous display of Diana's life in a queer context keeps her memory alive in the minds of the gay community. The link between Diana and the gay community gets therefore reinforced. The younger generation gets the chance to get to know Diana and let her be an inspiration for them. While the older members of the gay community, who were alive during the same time as Diana, remember her nostalgically as an actual human being. "The dramatised depiction of the factors that contributed to the couple's failed relationship has sparked criticism of Charles on social media. Fans have condemned the royal, who later married Camilla, over his treatment of his first wife."<sup>198</sup>

The constant reminders of Diana's life in the mind of the gay community by the media have significant effects in the present day. According to writer Stephanie Merrit, the most notable example of this is how *Netflix* needed to clarify that their television series *The*

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<sup>196</sup> Louis Staples, 'The Queer Mourning of Princess Diana' (1 November 2021) <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/film-tv/a38092562/the-queer-mourning-of-princess-diana/> (accessed 20 November 2022).

<sup>197</sup> Kira Deshler, 'Diana, Princess of Lesbians' (14 November 2021) <https://kiradeshler.substack.com/p/diana-princess-of-lesbians> (accessed 5 January 2023).

<sup>198</sup> Chelsea Ritschel, 'The Crown viewers upset over portrayal of Charles and Diana: 'A whole new generation of Charles haters' (18 November 2022) <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/royal-family/the-crown-charles-diana-affair-b2228084.html> (accessed 20 November 2022).

*Crown* was not an accurate portrayal of events. Otherwise, the reputation of Charles and his wife Camilla would get a major hit when Diana's life was brought into the spotlight again.<sup>199</sup>

Greig interviewed a young queer woman named Roisin and she stated that she gets constantly reminded through the media of how Diana tore down the monarchy. "She was a sexy bitch – I hate the monarchy, but she fucked them over!" Greig himself was too young to remember Diana when she was alive, so his perception of her was based on her portrayals in the media. "Arguably no figure in the 20th century did more to destabilise the institution than Diana"<sup>200</sup>

The other major reason that Diana gets remembered so affectionately by the gay community is that her charity work gets continued by her sons. Royal biographer Ingrid Seward stated in a 2021 interview that both Prince William and Prince Harry continue to support and promote pro-gay and AIDS charities that their mother was strongly emphatic towards. "Her legacy is her sons and her sons have taken up her causes... And in that, that means that they'll continue forever, which is great."<sup>201</sup> Ian Green confirms this statement. Diana set an example when it came to her charity work involving AIDS patients and that is followed by her son Prince Harry.

I see a huge amount of his mother in the Prince. They have the same warmth, compassion and empathy – and the knowhow to utilise their profile to help others.

When he's met people living with HIV at our events, he too has always made sure to

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<sup>199</sup> Stephanie Merritt, 'Judi Dench is right about *The Crown*: the truth counts. But it's not everything' (23 October 2022) <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/oct/23/judi-dench-is-right-about-the-crown-the-truth-counts-but-its-not-everything> (accessed 20 November 2022).

<sup>200</sup> James Greig, 'What Princess Diana Means to Queer People in 2019' (20 February 2019) <https://www.vice.com/en/article/qvyzbp/what-princess-diana-means-to-queer-people-in-2019> (accessed 28 December 2022).

<sup>201</sup> Lewis Knight, 'Prince Harry 'remains passionate and committed to HIV as a cause' after Megxit', *The Mirror* (6 January 2021) <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/prince-harry-remains-passionate-committed-23267457> (accessed 10 November 2022).

hug them or shake their hand, and can go toe to toe with any expert when it comes to HIV.<sup>202</sup>

Moreover, Prince Harry had an interview in 2022 with openly gay rugby player and AIDS patient Gareth Thomas. They discussed the importance of testing for AIDS so that the spread of the disease can be controlled. Prince Harry told that he felt a certain obligation when it came to supporting AIDS charities so that his mother's legacy would continue. "I could never fill her shoes, especially in this particular space, but because of what she did and what she stood for and how vocal she was about this issue... it's a converging of all these different pieces."<sup>203</sup>

Just like Diana, Prince William and Prince Harry are close to the gay community. This can be seen by the fact that Prince William posed for the cover of the gay-centric magazine *Attitude* where he stated that as a parent he would support the gay community. "You should be proud of the person you are and you have nothing to be ashamed of."<sup>204</sup> Matthew Todd the editor of *Attitude* stated how amazing it was that Prince William was so passionate about stopping the bullying of queer people. "I am very happy that the future king of the UK agrees this must stop."<sup>205</sup> The charity work that Prince William and Prince Harry are involved with is a constant reminder of Diana and what she had done for the gay community.

Concluding, some people thought that after her death, Diana would be disregarded by the gay community. The thought was that the gay community simply reacted the same way to Diana's death as most of the country did and when the period of mourning was over Diana would be forgotten. This was because Diana did not have the personality of a typical gay icon. But

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<sup>202</sup> Ian Green, 'How Princess Diana challenged HIV stigma with every hug' (30 June 2021) <https://www.tht.org.uk/news/how-princess-diana-challenged-hiv-stigma-every-hug> (accessed 9 January 2023).

<sup>203</sup> Katie Weston, 'Prince Harry breaks his silence... to pay tribute to Diana' (10 February 2022) <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10496959/Harry-Every-single-one-duty-HIV-test.html> (accessed 10 November 2022).

<sup>204</sup> Haroon Siddique, 'Prince William appears on cover of gay magazine Attitude' (15 June 2016) <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/jun/15/prince-william-gay-magazine-attitude-duke-of-cambridge> (5 January 2023).

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

Diana's legacy in the gay community continued because of the many media depictions that used queer themes in relation to her. Therefore the gay community gets reminded of Diana and what she had done for homosexual AIDS patients. Diana's work with AIDS charities is remembered as well because it is maintained by her sons. Both Prince William and Prince Harry are emphasising the influence Diana had on them. They continue their mother's charity work so that her legacy would not die in vain.

## Conclusion

There are a few things to consider when answering the question of why the involvement of Princess Diana during the AIDS crisis was a step forward for the gay community in Britain. At first glance, the answer seems obvious. If a stigmatised community in its time of need gets support from a person in a position of power then their place in society will most likely elevate. However, in the case of Princess Diana and the gay community circumstances were more complicated.

The gay community needed a figure like Princess Diana. Homosexuals endured centuries of oppression and prosecution and when they finally got some sort of legalisation to express their sexuality, the AIDS crisis happened. Britain was led by Thatcher's Conservative Party during that time and therefore the government gave very few resources to the gay community to protect themselves. The government also did very little to stop the rise of homophobia among the British public who blamed the gay community for the AIDS crisis. Neither the British people nor the establishment had any sympathy for homosexual AIDS patients.<sup>206</sup> The one major exception was Princess Diana. Diana already caught the attention of the gay community because of her "camp" fashion, which has its roots within gay culture.<sup>207</sup> On 9 April 1987, Princess Diana visited the AIDS wards and interacted with homosexual AIDS patients without fear. This caused the gay community to be astonished by her kindness.<sup>208</sup> When it became common knowledge how horrible Diana was treated by her husband and the royal family, the gay community felt a sense of familiarity since they understood the feeling of being unwanted from their own experiences. Those three factors

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<sup>206</sup> Weeks, *Sex*, 379.

<sup>207</sup> Sontag, *Notes on Camp*, 12.

<sup>208</sup> Rob Miller, 'I met Princess Diana on one of her AIDS ward visits – she changed everything' (31 August 2022) <https://metro.co.uk/2022/08/31/i-met-princess-diana-on-one-of-her-aids-ward-visits-2-17272748/> (accessed 10 November 2022).

caused a lasting connection between the gay community and Diana.<sup>209</sup> This lasting connection can be seen in the fact that Diana is still remembered fondly by the gay community after her death. The death of Diana was a major loss for AIDS charities since they lost one of their greatest spokespersons, but the charities also gained more notability since Diana's death united Britain in grief and therefore AIDS charities became more popular.<sup>210</sup> Her legacy keeps inspiring the gay community because of the many media portrayals that focus with a queer lens on her life and therefore make her relatable.<sup>211</sup> Her children are also very devoted to their late mother's charity causes and therefore they keep her memory alive.<sup>212</sup>

I can conclude based on my research that Diana was not simply a blip on the radar, but an admirable figure who stays even decades after her death in the minds and hearts of homosexuals. This adoration has mostly to do with the fact that she was one of the few figures of power that truly on a personal level seemed to care. This was extremely meaningful to the gay community at a time when there was so much hatred. This love for Diana was amplified after her divorce. Diana used her rebellious glamorous appeal and her vulnerability about her eating disorders to be relatable to the gay community. After Diana's death, this image continued to be part of the shared consciousness of the gay community because of the exposure in the media.<sup>213</sup> Even today, Diana is seen by the gay community as a benefactor because she used her platform as the Princess of Wales to show the world that homosexual AIDS patients are still people who deserve compassion.

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<sup>209</sup> Deborah Ross, 'Interview: Andrew Morton: He couldn't Shout: 'Diana was in on this. 'She trusted me. I would have been a Betrayal', *The Independent*, 1 December 1997.

<sup>210</sup> Rajagopal, 'Celebrity and the Politics of Charity', 138.

<sup>211</sup> Spurlin, 'I'd Rather be', 165-166.

<sup>212</sup> Lewis Knight, 'Prince Harry 'remains passionate and committed to HIV as a cause' after Megxit', *The Mirror* (6 January 2021) <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/prince-harry-remains-passionate-committed-23267457> (accessed 10 November 2022).

<sup>213</sup> Chelsea Ritschel, 'The Crown viewers upset over portrayal of Charles and Diana: 'A whole new generation of Charles haters' (18 November 2022) <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/royal-family/the-crown-charles-diana-affair-b2228084.html> (accessed 20 November 2022).

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