



WHAT IS FEMINISM?

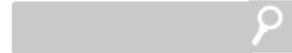
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London Feminist Film Festival: Representations of Lesbianism

By Alisha Rouse

Alisha Rouse attended last week's London Feminist Film Festival at the Hackney Picturehouse for us. In the second of three short blog posts, she reports back on the session on Representations of Lesbianism.

Blue is the Warmest Colour, the latest beautiful but painfully long film to rock out of Cannes, was described by its original feminist writer Julie Maroh as: "a straight person's fantasy of gay love."

The women involved are young, beautiful and rife with passion, drama, intensity and lust. They're vulnerable, impressionable, and will presumably one day change their minds. It's just the kind of lesbianism we're all comfortable with; particularly the kind of lesbianism that male directors are comfortable with.

Take *Black Swan* as another case in point. A ridiculous revenge fantasy with incredibly loose lesbian subtext, where lesbianism – as Linda Fingleton, director and star of *Waiting for You*, told me at the London Feminist Film Festival – is shown as something dramatic and sinful. It's always an affair, or suicide, or a death.

In fact, Linda told me she didn't remember one on-screen gay relationship that didn't end in one or both dying, or realising the error of their ways and running back to their heterosexual partner.

Her documentary, shot entirely with her video camera and starring just her and her partner Rena, is the antithesis of every 'lesbians are subversive and kinky as hell and will inevitably turn back to cock' film you've ever seen.

Filmed while they went through IVF – originally to show their future child – it is touching not just for its frank, emotional depiction of a couple who desperately want a child, but also that it shows a regular lesbian couple. A normal, real-life, living and fucking breathing until long after the credits roll, lesbian couple. They sit in bed, in pyjamas, with a cup of tea and chat.

This is the kind of lesbianism that makes people uncomfortable. Real, frank, and just the same as every hetero relationship going. That's why there are no blockbusters about it; this level of acceptance of sexuality makes society very uneasy – it scares them, and it's not sexy. And lesbians must, flaws and drama aside, always be sexy.

Lesbian representation in cinema seems to have one particular group crusading against the sexualised and hetero-friendly world of lesbianism in modern cinema – the London Lesbian Film Festival. It's the only one in the world and it's in Canada. Not this London, but the much smaller London in Ontario. *Bending the Lens*, a documentary celebrating the lesbian film festival's 20th birthday, was also shown in Hackney for the London Feminist Film Festival.

A large group of volunteers, all of whom had no idea there were any other lesbians in London (no, again, not this one) get together every year and put on an awesome festival, where films are 'by and for lesbians'. It's the only of its kind in the world and aims to show lesbians that it, "doesn't have to be dirty or smutty; you can talk about this stuff."

As one keen Canadian put it, "I like women, I like popcorn, I like movies." Depressingly enough, outside of this valley of sisterhood, it's rare she'll see a film that shows lesbian relationships in the way she knows: serious, stable, and where no one dies at the end.

Alisha Rouse is a Newspaper Journalism MA student at City University, desperately missing the north and praying for a job. Find out more @alisharouse.

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This entry was posted in Relationships and tagged film, lesbian, LGBT, love, sex, women on December 4, 2013 [http://archive.feministtimes.com/london-feminist-film-festival-representations-of-lesbianism/] by Sarah Graham.

2 thoughts on "London Feminist Film Festival: Representations of Lesbianism"



AA

December 8, 2013 at 16:02

I really can't buy this endless repetition of 'Blue is a straight man's fantasy' criticism. "They're vulnerable, impressionable, and will presumably one day change their minds." There is nothing in the film to support that. The film is a character study of Adele, who is, yes, young and impressionable but that's the point; it takes us through her sexual awakening (via some joyless straight sex), a relationship and its breakdown. The relationship very obviously isn't a partnership of equals, and her older, colder, more career oriented partner ultimately leaves her, and we see all the mess and misery of real life relationships – straight or gay – and very little in a way of a hint that their relationship was a teenage bi-try rather than the real thing.

Black Swan *is* ridiculous, I agree with you there 😊



SS

December 9, 2013 at 12:28

Always great to read a piece highlighting the continuing problems in representations of lesbian relationships. *Waiting for You* is not alone, though: *Edie and Thea: A Very Long Engagement* is a wonderful doc about a couple planning their marriage after over 40 years together. (Edith Windsor, one half of the partnership, was one of the central activists working to get DOMA struck down.)

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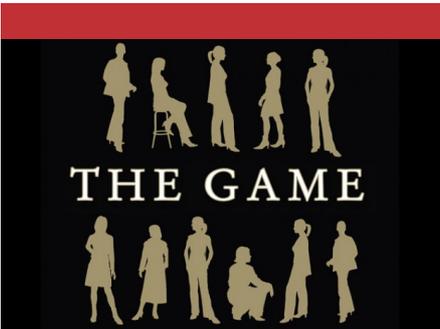
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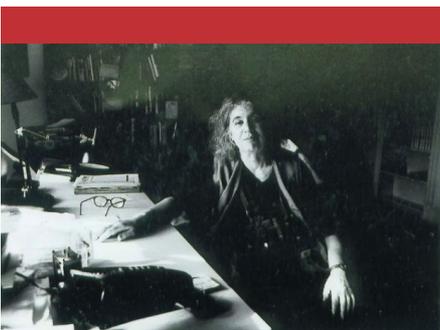
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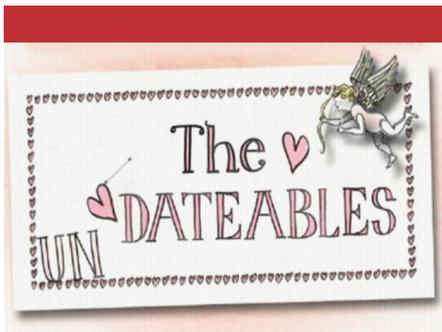
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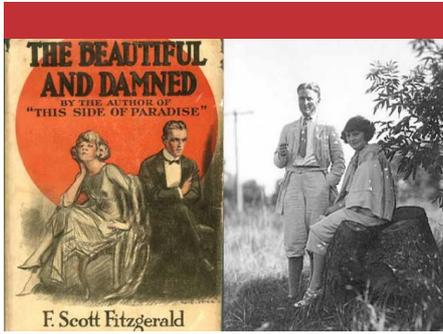
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