

Queering our lives on film

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Some weeks back, my **LGBT** friends and I wondered when a straight colleague of ours announced that he is currently writing a film script for an independently-produced gay film. We looked at each other first before we peppered him with our questions and strove to appease our curiosity, all the while struggling to pull down our raised eyebrows.

"So what point of view will you be employing?" my bisexual guy friend asked.

"The straight male point of view!" our colleague answered.

My lesbian friend turned to me and whispered, "But isn't that what we've always been seeing, every decade, on film?"

I nodded at her and smiled at our colleague as I asked, "So why are you doing that?"

He smiled and said, "There are so many **indie films** now being made by gay men about gay life. This will be different. It's a gay film by a straight man."

Hm. Should I lend him my copy of Vito Russell's book *The Celluloid Closet*, or maybe he would enjoy the documentary film version of that. I could lend it to him, too, if it would help. Whatever needs to be done to educate one's self, I guess, I'm all for that.

For a while now, my friends and I have been thinking about this topic: Who should be making queer films? Should **queers** like us be the ones to "officially" make them? What about straight folks like our colleague, are they "permitted?" It's not that we want to limit other people's creativity. It's just that maybe, people should do more research whenever they would create stories about lives they know nothing about. And no, the defense of "*but I have gay friends so I know what it's like*" doesn't really hold much water in some cases. In the end, no matter how many gay friends a straight filmmaker has, his gay film will still reflect what he thinks about gay life. And this is the fact we are worried and wary about, I guess.

Just how do we LGBTs want to be presented in film anyway? For one, as a lesbian, I don't want to be presented as a man-hating wannabe man anymore, and I don't want to see more films with such negative lesbian characters again. The reason why my friends and I were worried and wary of this "straight's queer project" was because, time and again, straight filmmakers were always the ones presenting LGBT characters on film, and their depictions of us aren't always spectacularly superb. Oh, where do I begin? **Carlitos Siguion Reyna's** 1998 lesbian film *Tatlo Magkasalo?* **Danny Zialcita's** 1982 film *Ang T-Bird at Ako*, or his 1980 film *Si Malakas, Si Maganda at si Mahinhin?* **Seiko Films'** 1997 film *Nang Mamulat Si Eba Part 2?* Hm, I don't know; too many to mention. And those are just the lesbian films.

But I guess everyone has their own "artistic" reasons for making a queer film, like our colleague. Of course, we LGBTs know our own reasons for making our own LGBT-themed films: for proper LGBT representation on film. Yet one could argue that not all gay-themed films made by queer-identified filmmakers are excellent works of art. I have to agree with that. There's also the other side of that premise: that some LGBT-themed films made by straight filmmakers are not all bad. Take the case of the film *Bound*, helmed by **The Matrix** filmmakers **Andy and Larry Wachowski**. The film produced a cool lesbian icon out of **Gina Gershon** (as the butchy Corky) and **Jennifer Tilly** (as

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the **femme fatale** Violet) and I was pleasantly surprised to see how accurate the lesbian storyline was treated in that film. I guess it all boils down to depiction and intent. If straight filmmakers want to present a story with LGBT characters without demeaning the status of their being an LGBT, then that's fine. But it's another thing if a macho shit-identified straight man would do a queer-themed film; that we have to be wary about.

What about those straight filmmakers who want to make LGBT films because our community is an untapped market? That is what a straight filmmaker told me once, that she made a lesbian film because lesbians are an untapped market. And sadly, she hit the jackpot with that one. The lesbian-theme filmed she made was cited by the [Robinson's Galleria Indie Sine](#) operators as one of the top-grossing films they have shown in their programming line-up. No matter how bad or unprogressive some views about lesbianism are in that film, lesbian viewers still flocked to the cinema in the hopes of watching people like them—women like us—on the silver screen. I guess it didn't matter that once we stepped outside the theater, some of us would delude ourselves into thinking that the film is cool because the lead female stars were so hot and sexy. I mean hey, we paid for the tickets, we watched the film, even if it was crappy. Win-lose. I stormed out of that film's screening because I didn't agree with most of the arguments it presented about lesbianism, the foremost of which is that lesbianism is merely something straight women turn to when they are bored or frustrated with their constrictive straight lives. Not good. I had to run out and hide from the filmmaker because she wanted to get my opinion about the film, and I didn't feel like lying that night. I haven't talked to her since then.

But at least there are some of us—or films about us—that are making strides. I was happy to learn about openly out lesbian [Sigrid Andrea Bernardo's Little](#) making it to the screening of the [Frameline](#) LGBT Film Festival in San Francisco last month. And the [Cinemalaya](#)-produced indie film [Ang Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros](#) was a hit on the international festival circuits. Let's hope more of those kinds of queer films come out – regardless of whoever makes them. We're queer, we're here, we want positivity, so please show us that. //

queeringfilm2 forpoc



Libay Linsangan Cantor is a Palanca-award winning fictionist and a scriptwriter of children's TV shows. You can email her at leaflens@gmail.comleaflens@gmail.com . She blogs at leaflens.blogspot.com and leaflenspopmedia.wordpress.com.

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