

Boys Don't Cry

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Film 1070

When I chose to reflect on the artistic merits of the film, “Boys Don’t Cry,” I was geared up to speak mainly about the way a young transgendered person and possible lesbian (Lana) were discriminated against in a small town, but as I delved deeper into the plot, I realized that is not all the film is about. The story revolves around a young Brandon Teena, born Teena Brandon, who (this is never revealed in the story) is molested by a man as a young girl and enters into a gender identity crisis. Her mother states that she decided to dress like a man, so men would not find her attractive and put her through that trauma again. (Chasing the Frog)

Since “Boys Don’t Cry” is based on a true story, I researched similarities between the film and actual events. Storylines for most films are highly stylized since real-life stories may not always hold the audience’s attention. “Boys Don’t Cry” is one of those stories. If you want a film to make money, it must appeal to the audience. While the basic premise is close to the truth, the real Teena Brandon/Brandon Teena was not in fact transgendered.

The movie itself portrays a group of young adults in a small town in mid-west America. Stereotypically, Nebraska trailer parks may not breed the most open-minded of people. When a young man becomes entwined in their lives, they all seem quite inviting. There always seemed to be some hostility between John Lotter, one of the main men, and Brandon. The hostility stems from the attraction that Lana, the leading female actress, has for Brandon and not John. This hostility, coupled with the uneducated/un-accepting nature of

trailer park boy, John, ultimately led to Brandon Teena's death. I hope that someday there will be nationwide standards on diversity-g geared education that will in turn lower the amount of hate crimes committed.

Although the real Brandon Teena was not transgendered, in the film "Boys Don't Cry" he is a pre-op transgendered female who hopes to become male once he accrues the money for the operation. The director's use of wardrobe and hair/makeup made Brandon Teena's character highly believable, down to the bandaging of the breasts, cliché sock bulge and use of the rubber phallus.

Because of an intense rape scene and lengthy sex scene, the MPAA initially rated "Boys Don't Cry" NC-17. There was some dispute about cutting the length of the sex scene. The director, Kimberly Peirce, was convinced the MPAA showed opposition toward the scene because technically one woman is pleasuring another. Since the MPAA does exhibit many conservative attributes, this may or may not be true. After much thought, the director/writer made some cuts and the film received an R rating. (Entertainment Weekly)

National Women's Health Network recognizes transgendered youth as a topic that must gain recognition. According to their website, one-third of transgendered youth have attempted suicide, mainly because it is an issue that many parents may not be familiar with. The website states that many transgendered youth exhibit self-harming behavior such as drug abuse,

criminal activity and homelessness. Brandon Teena's character is homeless, in and out of jail with outstanding warrants, and steals regularly. (National Women's Health Network)

Film has changed vastly over time. Sexuality is something that people seemed to fear in the fifties and prior. There were rules against both feet being off the ground while a kiss occurred. The depiction of characters with any sexuality other than heterosexuality was simply unfathomable. These were the days when homosexuals were institutionalized because people did not understand them.

"Boys Don't Cry" was the one of the first films in American history to illustrate the hardships of a female to male transgendered person. It is quite amazing that it was such an accepted film. "Boys Don't Cry" began as an independent film and reached monumental heights with its two Golden Globe nominations and Oscar win for leading actress Hilary Swank. All the publicity brought about awareness of transgendered people and the discrimination they face. (Entertainment Weekly)

While homosexuality in film and television has gained acceptance over the years, a positive portrayal of transgendered people might have to wait a while longer. As with all big leaps in the film industry, it takes time to diversify. With organizations like LGBT (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender) spreading awareness, the world will, hopefully be relatively free of discrimination one day.

“Boys Don’t Cry” was part of the New Queer Cinema movement that took place in the independent film industry in the early 1990’s. “New Queer Cinema openly challenged notions of taste, form, and ideology, as well as race, class, gender, and sexuality.” (Griffin) The popularity of the film at independent film festivals coupled with Hilary Swank’s Oscar win for leading actress, led Fox Searchlight to purchase and distribute the film to a wider audience.

For an independent turned mainstream film, “Boys Don’t Cry” was a hit at the box office, making a profit of over 9.5 million dollars. The elements that were incorporated into the making of the film made the tragic story of Brandon Teena as real could be. The character development was masterfully done. I felt as though I knew the characters personally and was there with them throughout the film. The accents, script, wardrobe, film style and location choices all seemed to be chosen with the utmost care to ensure the audience would decode the film the way the director intended.

As the Sundance Channel states on their “Top 10 Transgender Film” website “People are human first, transgendered second. I hope that one day everyone will recognize people as people regardless of class, race, (dis)ability, sexual orientation, sexuality and gender. America is the land of diversity, where people flock for opportunities. (Sundance Channel)

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