

Bright Lights Film Festival set to screen controversial film ‘Adam’

By Taina Millsap, Staff Writer

Emerson College plans to screen Adam at the Nov. 12 Bright Lights Film Festival—a movie that has drawn significant criticism from the LGBTQ community and is the subject of a petition advocating for its removal from theaters.

When the 2019 comedy film Adam premiered at Sundance Film Festival in January, it immediately drew negative attention from the LGBTQ community. Many queer people criticized the film for being homophobic and transphobic, with many calling for bans on the film with petitions.

One petition with over 4,100 signatures at the time of publication claims the film’s subject matter represents lesbian and transgender culture in a harmful way.

“This movie is putting down trans men as not being real men. By implying that a lesbian would date a trans man,” the petition read. “Which isn’t true, because a lesbian only finds women sexually or romantically attractive. This movie puts down Lesbian and Trans culture. Which the LGBT+ community does not tolerate.”

The movie currently has a 2.2/10 star rating on IMDb.

The film is adapted from a book known by the same title, written by author Ariel Schrag. Wicked Queer, a Boston-based LGBTQ film festival, will co-present the film as part of Trans Awareness Week.

Anna Feder, the Bright Lights Film Festival curator, said the story follows a cisgender boy named Adam who goes to New York City to spend the summer with his queer sister. While in New York with his sister’s friends, Adam meets a lesbian and tells her he is a transgender man to trick her into dating him.

Feder said she has heard the complaints made against the movie, but she believes the film holds its main character accountable for his actions in the end.

“I think a lot of the critiques I read about the book says that it’s misogynist and it’s racist and transphobic, and that’s the character of Adam,” Feder said in an interview. “You’re getting his perspective so this isn’t the voice of the author. It’s very much that character and yes it’s a problematic character and he’s not let off the hook in the book, and certainly not in the movie. This character is not shown to be a good person.”



Anna Feder works as the curator of the Bright Lights Film Festival, which will bring controversial film ‘Adam’ to campus on Nov. 12. Montse Landeros / Beacon Staff

The film was directed by Rhys Ernst a trans man known for producing and directing *Transparent*, an Amazon web series about a family who discovers that their father is a trans woman.

Feder said the film highlights Adam's ignorance and growth processes and does not let his mistakes go unnoticed.

"This character is largely ignorant, it's not that he is a hateful character," Feder said. "It's trying to address the people who are just completely ignorant when it comes to trans lives, trans issues, trans health."

Diane Griffin, director of shorts programming for *Wicked Queer*, will attend the screening to discuss the film.

"I know that it's very controversial and I understand the reasons why people say it's lesbophobic and transphobic but I ended up focusing on the characters," Griffin said in an interview. "I mean this is a 15 year old boy who really hasn't figured things out at all for himself yet and I thought it was interesting."

Feder believes the film presents a chance to educate viewers and start a conversation around the problems surrounding Adam's character.

After growing up as a queer individual and spending most of her adult life defending her trans siblings, Feder wants students to trust her and give the film Adam a chance.

"I wouldn't show a film that I didn't think we should be engaging with," Feder said. "I always air with the side that even if film is a problem it's worth watching it and discussing and talking about the problem."

Junior Kyle Eber, a trans man, called for a meeting on Nov. 12 with Feder and James Hoppe, vice president and dean of campus life, to discuss trans students' issues with the film.

"I think the goal of the meeting is to come to a compromise where everyone is satisfied and feels comfortable with the end result of the meeting," Eber said. "If the coordinators are like, 'Right, I'm sorry this is absolutely horrible we won't do it' that'll be ok, but if it's like, 'ok, let's have a conversation before the movie so people go aware go into watching it with an understanding of the issue, that's the solution.'"

Eber, a former Emerson Advancement Group for Love and Expression member, said his main issue with the story comes from its portrayal of one dimensional trans characters that gives viewers the impression that every trans person is the same.

"The author is a cis woman and it's not necessarily her story to tell, and she can't write about the ignorance when she hasn't faced it," Eber said.

Despite being a strong believer that boycotting the film is not the way to further the conversation around trans issues, Feder said she respects those who feel personally affected by the content.

"I understand how some folks don't want to engage with it because it's too emotional and too painful and that's entirely fair," Feder said. "But what I have a problem with is this idea of boycotting a film, especially a film by a trans director. I certainly understand the place where they are coming from, this emotional response to what you think the movie is about and wanting to be protective of a community that has been through so much."

After the screening, Feder will moderate a conversation between the audience, Griffin, and Schrag, who will join via Skype.

Griffin said the film brings a lot to the conversation around transphobia through the characters and their development.

"It's a very complex thing, the first time I watched it I was very uncomfortable and I had to stop in the middle and come back and finish," Griffin said. "I personally have a hard time with deception and there was a lot of that going on in the film, but ultimately I thought it was a good film, as uncomfortable as it made me."

Feder said the film is nothing like other films she's seen regarding LGBTQ issues.

"This film shows a variety of trans bodies, there's a scene where everyone goes swimming and you see a diversity and it's such a beautiful scene," Feder said. "I feel very strongly that this is an overall very positive film, not that every film needs to be positive,

but it's a film that folks might be really surprised by how sort of uplifting in lots of ways it is.”

Correction 11/12: A previous version of this article said the character Adam pretends to be a transgender woman when he actually pretends to be a transgender man. It has been updated with the proper information.