

Kissing Off Jessica Stein?

by Amy Andre

Last Friday night, my girlfriend and I went on a date. Dinner and movie. I picked the movie. I had been hearing a lot about this new film, *Kissing Jessica Stein*. I had heard that it was a film about two women in a relationship. I had heard that the ending sucked; that it was full of stereotypes about lesbian relationships; that one of the women "goes back to being straight"; that the two women are "experimenting" and "bi-curious".

Being bi, and curious about this movie (and nothing else), I knew that I had to see this for myself. My girl, a lesbian, was curious about it too. Hence, it became part of our plans for our date.

Before I continue, I have to say this: I loved this movie. This article, therefore, will be biased in this direction. What did I love about it? Well, for one thing, I could definitely relate with the main character, Jessica Stein, in many ways. She's a bisexual Jew living in New York, and I'm a bisexual Jew originally from New York. She's a femme. I'm a femme. She's artistic. I'm artistic. She's obsessed with lipstick shades. I'm... well, maybe the similarities end there. Nonetheless, quality films about bi women are few and far between. I am grateful to see any authentic representation of our lives.



The film follows Jessica Stein's coming out process. It shows us: what draws her to her first female lover (a shared admiration for an author's quote), how she comes out to family and friends (through poignant and hilarious trial and error), the progression of the relationship (sex, love, and the U-haul -- boy does that sound familiar!), and the break-up (bed death, processing, tears, and the establishment of a great post-break-up friendship). Sounds good, huh?

But for some reason, every review I read -- most of which were in the LGBT press -- painted a very negative picture of this story, especially regarding its ending. This strikes me as odd, considering the fact that this film depicts a fairly universal experience in the lives of LGBT people. Who doesn't have a coming out story? A tale of love and loss? A friend who used to be a lover?

I have seen in a number of reviews take issue with the idea that Jessica Stein "ends up straight" because a closing scene shows her flirting with a man. But, how is that "straight"? Some bi women flirt with men. And some bi women flirt with women. (Some of us don't even distinguish between/ among genders; we just flirt with human beings!) It's a fact of bi women's lives.

Jessica's ex-girlfriend ends the movie in a relationship with another woman. Does that mean that she's "ending up lesbian"? No. She's just as bi as Jessica, and for the same reason. Like most bisexuals, the two women experience their sexuality through relationships with both men and women, and remain bi regardless of the genders of the people they "end up" dating. Jessica is not "experimenting"; love is no experiment. The film is about an authentic experience, that of a woman's first same-sex love affair.

Just watching the film was a treat in and of itself. I could tell who in the audience was Jewish and who was bi, just by listening for where the laughter was coming from during the many hilarious pieces of dialogue. It was like a surround-sound effect, only with giggles of recognition and chuckles of appreciation at the many references made to bi and Jewish cultures throughout the film.

The part that touched my heart the most is when Jessica comes out to her best friend, who excitedly launches a barrage of questions. "Is she as smart as you?" "Yes." "Does she get you?" "Yes." Jessica beams and clutches a couch pillow as her eyes dance with the delight of this realization of impending love. Who among us doesn't want someone to "get" us? Who wouldn't radiate with the glee of finding the person who does? It is a moment as real as it gets.

The two lead actresses had performed the script as a play for a few years before turning it into a film. Their familiarity and comfort with the characters is very apparent; yet, the acting is not at all stale. They remain fresh and true, with a clear awareness of their audience that can only come from experience on the stage. For these reasons and more, I recommend that all bi women, as well as our friends, lovers, admirers, and allies in the greater LGBT community, check out this film, and see which scenes ring true for you!

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