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The Miseducation of Cameron Post

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Abstract

This is a film review of *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* (2018), directed by Desiree Akhavan.

Keywords

Gay Conversion Therapy

Author Notes

John Lyden became Editor of the Journal of Religion & Film in 2011. He was Professor of Religion at Dana College from 1991-2010 and is now the Director of the Liberal Arts Core at Grand View University. He is the author of *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* (New York: NYU Press, 2003), and the editor of the *Routledge Companion to Religion and Film* (Routledge, 2009) and co-editor (with Eric Michael Mazur) of the *Routledge Companion to Religion and Popular Culture*. He was the 2008 recipient of the Spiritus Award for Outstanding Contributions to the study of Religion and Film.



The Miseducation of Cameron Post (2018), dir. Desiree Akhavan

This film is an adaptation of Emily Danford’s novel of the same name which tells the story of a young lesbian who is sent to a gay conversion therapy school in 1993. Although the story is fictional, all of the things said and done in the film are based on actual events in the lives of those who have been sent to such centers. The actors interviewed survivors of gay conversion therapy to gain insight into their experiences—some of whom were at the showing at Sundance. The film uses humor to tell its story (like many Young Adult books) but it also has a dark and extremely disturbing tale to tell.

Cameron was being raised by her aunt and uncle after the death of her parents, and they are much more religiously conservative than her own parents. In any case, Cameron doesn’t seem particularly repentant when she is caught having sex with a girlfriend: she’s just sorry she was caught. Her aunt and uncle force her to attend the conversion camp, and when she arrives she finds a group of similar teens who “suffer” from “same sex attraction” (SSA). The Christians who run

the center seek to get the teens to uncover the “reasons” they are gay through amateur psychoanalysis; as they do not believe God creates anyone to be gay, the attraction can only be explained in their view by some events that confused them and that can be undone through therapy. Several of the teens seem to sincerely want to believe they can change, but of course no one really does, creating even more guilt and repression. Cameron makes friends with two other students who are more skeptical, Jane and Forrest, who smoke pot together and mock the therapy: they have no self-delusion about their gay identities, and are only there because they were forced to be. But Cameron at least entertains the possibility that the therapy is not totally misguided, until one young man has a breakdown after his father refuses to let him come home—and the consequences are tragic. Cameron confronts one of the leaders after this, and tells him, “you don’t know what you are doing... you’re making this up as you go.” These children who are rejected by their families and told to hate themselves finally have no community except each other.

Gay conversion centers still exist, and only five states have outlawed them; nine states have made it unlawful to force minors to go there. This leaves a lot of places where this sort of misguided emotional abuse is still practiced. While attitudes about homosexuality have changed a great deal since 1993, they clearly have not changed enough. I hope that the people who see this film realize how much work is still to be done, in changing attitudes as well as changing laws.