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“It’s Not The Same Anymore” (2023): A Reflection on The Creative Process Behind My Queer
Coming-of-Age Short Film

by
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An undergraduate honors thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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Bachelor of Science
in
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and
Film

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Introduction

The art of filmmaking, in its essence, is an act of self-pleasure. It is driven by the yearning to be understood and seen as an individual — expressed through the medium of creative storytelling. Just like any other art form, whether it is intended for a wide audience or solely for personal enjoyment, there is always an element of the “self” woven into the fabric of the artwork. By sharing intimate realities and lived experiences, inner musings, and emotions transcend the realm of the personal and become actualized. The realization that these experiences are not unique to oneself, but rather shared by many, brings about a profound sense of catharsis.

The desire to be seen, heard, and understood is what draws me inexorably into the world of filmmaking, particularly within the genre of coming-of-age narratives. Coming-of-age films delve deep into the introspective realm of inner monologues — the silent voice that resonates within each of us. They possess a remarkable ability to unveil thoughts, emotions, intrusive notions, and concealed secrets — those intimate revelations that one may hesitate to divulge to the world — directly upon the silver screen. What makes this genre so impactful, especially for teenagers and young adults, is its exploration of the intricate process of identity formation. The coming-of-age genre transcends the mere depiction of physical experiences; it unveils the profound psychological journey one embarks upon during the pivotal phase of transitioning into adulthood. While this genre may visually encompass familiar milestones such as first love, first heartbreak, and the daunting transitions into college or high school, its true essence lies in introspection.

As I find myself in my early twenties, on the precipice of adulthood, the coming-of-age genre resonates with my life in a profoundly relatable manner. This period of life is synonymous with constant exploration and transformation — be it in terms of identity, community, career, or

love. During such moments, my inner monologue amplifies to its peak. Visually, the coming-of-age phase may appear as a romanticized version of life, but mentally, it tells a different story altogether. The journey of identity formation during young adulthood can feel isolating at times, and thus, I have always sought solace in films that offer introspection and share lived experiences on the screen. As I navigate my own coming-of-age journey, I have turned to filmmaking as a means to release, process, and overcome complex emotions, experiences, and periods of uncertainty. In her book, *Not Just a Phase: Queer Girlhood and Coming of Age on Screen*, Monaghan examines how coming-of-age narratives, specifically those centered on queer girlhood, provide a platform for marginalized voices and their unique experiences of self-discovery and personal growth. The book investigates ways in which these films challenge societal norms and offer representation, validation, and a sense of belonging to queer individuals navigating their own journeys of self-realization. Throughout the creative process behind my own coming-of-age film, I was keenly aware of the impact that this genre had on shaping my perspective and identity as a queer Asian American woman. It is within this context that my thesis film, *It's Not The Same Anymore* (2023), aims to capture a small yet meaningful glimpse of the coming-of-age experience from a queer and BIPOC perspective.

The Story

By exploring the complexities of love, heartbreak, and self-discovery in the modern day, *It's Not The Same Anymore* seeks to investigate these universal themes that resonate with audiences of all backgrounds, while also platforming the lived experiences of young queer individuals. Through the character of Reece, a queer college student navigating her first heartbreak and embarking on a journey of healing and personal growth, the film portrays the challenges and triumphs that come with the process of self-discovery. It delves into the

intricacies of online dating, awkward interactions, unexpected revelations, and the collision of past and present relationships. Will Reece find what she seeks, or will she be drawn back into the echoes of her past? These questions serve as the driving force behind the narrative, inviting viewers to reflect on their own personal lives and find solace in shared human experiences.

Origins

The genesis of this film dates back nearly two years ago to the first screenwriting class I took at Portland State University. The course allowed us to develop a full-length feature film screenplay exploring any topic of our choice. Drawn to the allure of coming-of-age narratives, I gravitated towards crafting a film centered around the college experience, inspired by the romanticized portrayals I had admired in my favorite coming-of-age movies. However, during the process of writing this script, external challenges emerged, hindering my clarity of thought.

It was my first year living in Portland, having moved alone from Texas to attend film school at PSU. The city, teeming with novelty and unfamiliarity, became both a sanctuary and a labyrinth, challenging my resolve and forcing me to confront my deepest fears and insecurities. As I sought to establish my sense of belonging within this new social, cultural, and mental landscape, a pervasive sense of paralysis engulfed me. My once vibrant love and passion for filmmaking receded into the background, overshadowed by intrusive doubts that questioned the very path I had chosen.

Fortunately, my screenwriting professor served as a guiding light throughout one of my most difficult terms in college. He inspired me to write from the depths of my heart, encouraging me to explore impactful and compelling storytelling. Although initially uncertain about my ability to craft meaningful narratives, a moment of clarity emerged during the course. Faced with

creative blocks, I turned inward, drawing inspiration from my own lived experiences. It was during this time that the seed of a coming-of-age story—a tale of a young queer woman navigating the complexities of college, young adulthood, love, identity, and heartbreak—began to take shape.

Initially, I never envisioned bringing this script to life. It felt almost meta, a reflection of my own struggles and uncertainties. Yet, as I delved deeper into the development of this story, the narrative just flowed effortlessly. The themes explored in the story mirrored my own reality—an exploration of new territories, self-discovery, and the challenges of navigating my identity as a student, filmmaker, and young adult. For the first time, I wrote from a place of genuine honesty and authenticity, resonating not only with my professor but also with my classmates. They encouraged me to continue forward and so, fueled by a newfound sense of purpose, I embarked on the journey of bringing *It's Not The Same Anymore* to fruition.

Reflection on the Filmmaking Process

Bringing *It's Not The Same Anymore* to life has been a labor of love and dedication. In the film industry, the process behind making a movie typically spans across three distinct phases of production: pre-production, production, and post-production. As a fore note, I would like to say that it would be misleading to suggest that the production phases follow a linear and rigid structure. In reality, the filmmaking process is constantly in flux, with no guarantees. Setbacks and delays are not uncommon, and *It's Not The Same Anymore* certainly encountered its fair share of obstacles throughout these stages.

The pre-production phase of *It's Not The Same Anymore* officially commenced in May of 2022 when I first presented the film idea to a group of classmates. From that point forward, the

project began to snowball. Everything from funding, crew recruitment, casting, scheduling, and scriptwriting was happening all at once. Over a span of approximately three months, the crew was assembled, and the script underwent an intense iterative process. Numerous revisions were made, each contributing to the refinement of the story.

Production officially commenced in August, marked by the shooting of our inaugural scene. Initially, I had planned for a four-day shoot during that month. However, as anticipated in the tumultuous world of filmmaking, plans often deviate. Whether due to scheduling conflicts, financial constraints, or any number of unforeseen issues, the estimated production timeline expanded exponentially. It wasn't until this past April that we finally wrapped up filming. Script revisions ended up playing a significant role in both the pre-production and production phases of filmmaking and these changes actually led to a complete overhaul of the film's ending after almost a year into production. These story adjustments became necessary due to changing seasons and alterations in our main character's appearance. Nonetheless, these adaptations proved to be for the better, resulting in an alternative ending that surpassed our original vision. Throughout the entire process, our script underwent approximately ten significant revisions, an astonishing testament to the evolving nature of the project.

The last stage of the filmmaking process called “post-production”, predominantly involves the meticulous art of editing. It is during this stage that the film truly comes to life, or potentially faces its demise. Currently, *It's Not The Same Anymore* is in its final stages of post-production. If everything goes according to schedule, the film will be ready for an official release at the end of June 2023. At that time, *It's Not The Same Anymore* will also be entered into the festival circuit in hopes of gaining recognition and awards from local and national film

festivals. As the director, co-producer, and co-writer of this film, my involvement does not cease until the film's official release, and even then, there is further promotion and work to be done.

The amount of hard work and time invested into the making of a film may seem daunting, but I assure you it is a fulfilling and gratifying journey. The opportunity to create, shape narratives, and share meaningful stories with audiences is a privilege I cherish deeply. The process of bringing *It's Not The Same Anymore* from conception to fruition has been a transformative experience, allowing me to grow not only as a filmmaker but also as an individual.

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