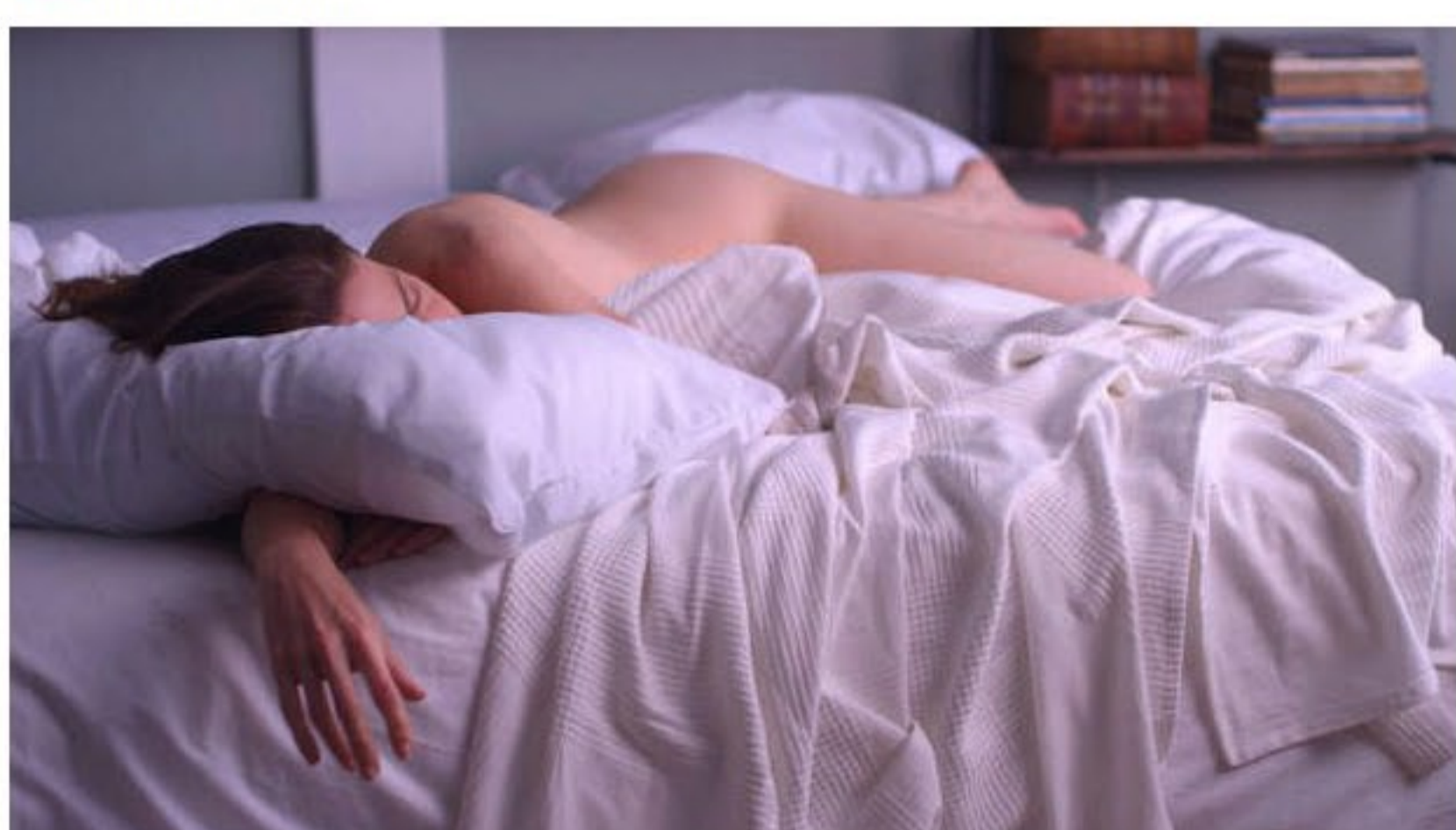


“Concussion” Just Might Be The Lesbian Independent Film That Breaks Through

Condensed to a synopsis, this queer take on a suburban housewife’s midlife crisis may read like a [pulp novel](#), but what director Stacie Passon does with those tropes is what you’ll remember.

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When we first meet Abby she is sweating among a group of finely toned housewives in a sunlit spin class. She stares into the camera, unblinking — an expression that reads weary, determined.

Just seconds later, Abby, played by Robin Weigert, is cradling the side of her head and calling her son “a little shit” after being hit in the head by his softball, an accident that results in the film’s titular concussion. “I hate this,” Abby blurts out, a bloody paper towel in hand. “I don’t want this. I don’t want it.” She recoils in the passenger seat of a car that is driven by her lawyer wife, their two kids silent in the back.

The “concussion” in director and writer Stacie Passon’s debut film is more than a plot point setting the story into motion. It is a manifestation of what might be called Abby Abelman’s midlife crisis. Shortly after being hit in the head, Abby decides that what she wants is to spend less time in the Jersey suburbs and go back to work in New York City where, eventually, “work” becomes soliciting sex from curious women.

A recipient of this year’s Adrienne Shelly Foundation Director’s Grant and the Teddy Award Jury Prize at the 2013 Berlin International Film Festival, Passon has already received much praise for her film — the release of which will take place in New York and Los Angeles on Oct. 4 and then spread to more cities from there. Rose Troche, known for her work on *The L Word* and the landmark *Go Fish*, produced *Concussion*, with Robin Weigert giving a resonant performance.

After returning from the hospital, head bandage intact, Abby drives across the bridge to pursue her latest project, renovating a rundown loft in Manhattan. We watch her go back home that very night and kiss her wife goodnight before rolling to her side of the bed. We watch her sprint on the treadmill until she is sick. We watch her grocery shop and fold laundry and pick her daughter up from class.

Written down, these actions may sound tedious. But on screen they are deeply revealing. Each moment is portrayed so honestly, each action so specific to the character, that it becomes impossible to see Abby as anything less than a breathing, complex person; and we really must understand her as such to believe what she does next. In the film’s turning point — one of those rare story moments that is just as surprising as it is inevitable — Abby drives into the city and pays a junkie hooker for sex. Sexually abandoned in her marriage and unhappy in the life she has spent half of her life building, Abby begins to use the loft as a space to meet the women who pay her for sex.

“Stacie’s an old friend,” Troche told me in a recent interview, “and we hadn’t seen each other for 10 years, so I think there was a reunion aspect to this project, where it was like, ‘Oh, I like this person, this person’s really smart.’ That showed up in the writing, and the story, I didn’t know that anyone had done it before. I mean, people have done stories about women who become prostitutes, absolutely. But I had not seen a story of this type.”

While only a handful of films tell stories that follow lesbian characters, countless films explore prostitution. *Working Girls*, *Risky Business*, *My Own Private Idaho*, and *Belle de Jour* are a famous few. What separates *Concussion* from its predecessors, in both queer and mainstream cinema, is its ability to transcend the categorizations of prostitute, queer, mainstream. Instead, it builds on and combines those genres in a way that is rarely seen. *Concussion* explores sexuality and sexual independence through a lens specific to its characters, giving the traditional story line of “housewife seeks escape from her bourgeois lifestyle” a queer perspective.

“I think that we’re seeing a shift,” Rose said, “and I hope that that continues to happen — where things are not so in a box, and the box is only for the people inside the box, and the box is where I feel safe, and the rest of the world can fuck off. I think this film might have two walls of a box, or three walls of a box, but it’s definitely opening out to the rest of the world.”

In contrast to a large number of films starring LGBT characters that have come before it, *Concussion* is not about the consequences of homosexuality. The consequences Abby faces are not treated as a result of whom she loves. They are treated as a result of the risks she takes at this point in her life.

“Generally people who see the film think it’s very much about the experience of marriage and the loss of independence and the loss of intimacy, and those are issues that are universal,” Passon said. “However, there is a component to the film that is uniquely gay. In this piece, I wasn’t interested in telling a story about the right to have a relationship. I was interested in starting 20 years into a relationship and seeing what that was like. To see that story articulated through the prism of a lesbian relationship, for people who are gay or straight, I think is interesting and new because there haven’t been a lot of films about that.”