

## ‘Love, Simon’ is a Palatable Queer Film Entry That Leaves Us Wanting

Submitted by [JonHC](#) [1] on March 18, 2018 - 7:09pm

- [20th Century Fox](#) [2]
- [Alexandra Shipp](#) [3]
- [Becky Albertalli](#) [4]
- [Elizabeth Berger](#) [5]
- [Gay](#) [6]
- [Greg Berlanti](#) [7]
- [HollywoodChicago.com](#) [8]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [9]
- [Isaac Aptaker](#) [10]
- [Jennifer Garner](#) [11]
- [Jon Espino](#) [12]
- [Josh Duhamel](#) [13]
- [Katherine Langford](#) [14]
- [Keiynan Lonsdale](#) [15]
- [Love, Simon](#) [16]
- [Movie Review](#) [17]
- [Natasha Rothwell](#) [18]
- [Nick Robinson](#) [19]
- [Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda](#) [20]
- [Tony Hale](#) [21]



Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Anyone who has ever held a big secret knows that the weight of it is usually worse than the secret itself. The only thing worse than that is when the secret you’re holding back is your true self. “Love, Simon” explores the all-too-familiar, high school coming of age story, but with the added complication of coming to terms with your sexuality and identity.

The importance of this film is undeniable, especially when it comes to mainstream representation. Director Greg Berlanti understands this and shows all due respect to the tough topic. With all of Berlanti’s work on teen-based television shows (“Dawson’s Creek”, “No Ordinary Family”, “The Tomorrow People”, etc), he clearly understands how to highlight the emotional complexity, while keeping the character relatable and grounded. “Love, Simon” isn’t lacking in flair either, with a colorful dance sequence and more red herrings than a fishing trip. Berlanti makes sure that every scene is vibrant and intoxicating, helping emphasize the film’s high moments and to remind the audience that they always outweigh the lows.

The film provides a subtle visual feast, but it never lets you forget that this is a human-centered story, and Simon’s (Nick Robinson) journey is the clear focus of the entire film. Elizabeth Berger and Isaac Aptaker develop Becky Albertalli’s novel “Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda”, making sure to keep the story’s youthful energy while raising the dramatic impact. Berger and Aptaker channel their past collaborations, especially “This is Us”, and deliver powerful emotional gut punches tempered with enough feel-good moments to turn what could have been a roller coaster into a balanced and fluid Ferris wheel.



Looking for love is harder than it looks in ‘Love, Simon’

*Photo credit: 20th Century Fox*

As I mentioned before, representation matters and is extremely important, which is why “Love, Simon” will hopefully be a great stepping stone into more queer and diverse stories that will be more representative of true LGBTQ+ lifestyles. Much like the endearing “Call Me by Your Name” last year, “Love, Simon” presents us with an almost fairytale-like premise that is not representative of the experience the majority of LGBTQ+ people face. Simon comes from a very supportive, suburban family and has a close group of open-minded friends. His privileges include white and straight-passing privilege, all while living in an upper-middle-class environment. As an intimate look into the mind of a person coming to terms with their sexuality and the process of self-acceptance, this film excels. As a gripping look into the way society and culture clash with LGBTQ+ coming out (like “Moonlight” depicted), “Love, Simon” leaves us wanting.

The biggest problem with palatable stories like these are that they don’t accurately depict the level of risk involved when deciding to come out. In many cultures, including my own, homosexuality is an actionable offense that may lead to excommunication from your family or even physical harm from others. This is acknowledged by Alexandra Shipp’s character (Abby) when commenting on the differences between their suburban school and some of the past schools she had attended. This film suffers from the same thing the novel did, and it is the fact that it was not written by a gay male. That’s not to say that as a writer, Becky Albertalli can’t creatively write about the gay male perspective like she did with Simon. There are just nuances that get lost when you mostly approach the topic from a clinical point of view, or even that of a parent.



This is what a supportive family looks like in ‘Love, Simon’

*Photo credit: 20th Century Fox*

As an outsider looking in, “Love, Simon” stands above its Young Adult (YA) film contemporaries. We witness his life and are allowed to live in his psyche, where his joy is our joy, and likewise, his fear is ours. Regardless of how irrational the fear may outwardly appear, the film props us into his place and convinces us that there is a real danger. The problem is that there really isn’t any danger, especially when the film pivots to a queer character of color (Ethan), whose life should have really been the focus of the film. There are several points in the film where Simon comments on Ethan’s (Clark Moore) open flamboyance and even wishes that Ethan would stop “acting so gay.” Throughout the rest of the



film, there are several events and sequences where he comments on gay stereotypes and states his own superiority by saying that he's not THAT gay.

Thanks to his character's self-proclaimed lack of flamboyancy, Nick Robinson effectively plays his Everyman-type character perfectly. Simon is meant to come off as inoffensive and agreeable so that the average viewer will sympathize with his homosexuality, especially because he doesn't fit the socially constructed mold of a gay person. Robinson brings depth to his character with his natural charm. Even the moments where we hate the character, we still completely love him. Some of the most powerful moments of the film come from the love-affirming conversations from Simon's parents, played by Josh Duhamel and Jennifer Garner. In what is already the frontrunner for best parental speech of this year (last year's winner being the speech Michael Stuhlbarg's character gave near the end of "Call Me by Your Name"), Garner delivers a heartfelt, tear-inducing speech that every person who is coming out wants to hear (even if most never do). To keep the film from being all tears, there is a great amount of humor, with TMI teachers Mr. Worth (Tony Hale) and Ms. Albright (Natasha Rothwell) schooling us on the proper delivery of punchlines.



John Lennon isn't the only costume Simon is hiding behind in 'Love, Simon'

Photo credit: 20th Century Fox

It's true that you're harder on the things and people you love because you want them to live up to their potential. "Love" isn't a strong enough word to describe how I feel about "Love, Simon". This film is good and will do untold amounts of good purely by existing. The positive effect of this kind of story being told in a mainstream environment is incalculable. It is because of the mainstream outlet that I hoped the film would do more for representation and diversity, helping inspire people who don't have all or even some of the privileges Simon has. As a start, "Love, Simon" is a beacon of hope for those who need it most, and a promising beginning to what hopefully turns into more diverse queer stories being told in a mainstream market.

*"Love, Simon" opened everywhere on March 16th. Featuring Nick Robinson, Josh Duhamel, Jennifer Garner, Alexandra Shipp, Katherine Langford, Keiynan Lonsdale, Tony Hale, Natasha Rothwell and Clark Moore. Directed by Greg Berlanti. Written by Elizabeth Berger and Isaac Aptaker. Rated "PG-13"*



[22]

By [JON ESPINO](#) [23]  
Film & Video Game Critic  
[HollywoodChicago.com](http://HollywoodChicago.com)  
[jon@hollywoodchicago.com](mailto:jon@hollywoodchicago.com) [22]

© 2016 Jon Espino, HollywoodChicago.com

**Source URL (retrieved on Apr 23 2024 - 8:04am):**

<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/28350/love-simon-is-a-palatable-queer-film-entry-that-leaves-us-wanting>

#### Links:

- [1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/jonhc>
- [2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/20th-century-fox>
- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/alexandra-shipp>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/becky-albertalli>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/elizabeth-berger>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/gay>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/greg-berlanti>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/hollywoodchicagocom>
- [9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/hollywoodchicagocom-content>

[10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/isaac-aptaker>  
[11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/jennifer-garner>  
[12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/jon-espino>  
[13] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/josh-duhamel>  
[14] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/katherine-langford>  
[15] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/keiynan-lonsdale>  
[16] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/love-simon-0>  
[17] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/review.html>  
[18] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/natasha-rothwell>  
[19] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/nick-robinson>  
[20] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/simon-vs-the-homo-sapiens-agenda>  
[21] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/tony-hale>  
[22] <mailto:jon@hollywoodchicago.com>  
[23] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/about#JON>