

The Craft: Legacy (2017)

DIRECTOR: Zoe Lister-Jones

SCREENPLAY: Zoe Lister-Jones, Peter Filardi (based on characters created by)

CAST: Cailee Spaeny (Lily), Zoey Luna (Lourdes), Gideon Adlon (Frankie), Lovie Simone (Tabby), David Duchovny (Adam), Michelle Monaghan (Helen), Nicholas Galitzine (Timmy)

SPECS: 97 minutes; color

AVAILABILITY: DVD/Blu-Ray (Sony Pictures Home Entertainment)

In 1996, Columbia Pictures released *The Craft*, a supernatural horror film about four Los Angeles teens at a parochial high school who form a coven. As they start practicing magic, they face unforeseen negative consequences. Nearly 25 years later, in 2020, Columbia Pictures released a sequel to the film titled *The Craft: Legacy*. The movie follows protagonist Lily Schechner who moves to a new town with her mother to live with her mother's new husband and her three sons. At school, Frankie, Tabby, and Lourdes, take notice of Lily and when they discover she has magical abilities, they welcome Lily into their coven. The four high school witches start practicing magic with their first targets being misogynistic boys at school who harass female classmates. As in the original film, unforeseen consequences develop and the four witches must combine their powers to save the day. The movie, as directed and written by Zoe Lister-Jones, is a calling card for Millennials and Gen Z, presenting itself as unabashedly woke, progressive, and diverse. This may sound cringey and in some scenes and lines, it may in fact be so, but decidedly not with its LGBTQ representation, which is a breath of fresh air and genuinely progressive. A big part of why the representation is so progressive is not just how the LGBTQ characters are portrayed, but also who, exactly, is represented because two of the main characters are transgender and bisexual.

Every year, GLAAD puts out its *Studio Responsibility Index*, a thorough report of LGBTQ representation in major studio films. The report looks at films theatrically released by eight major studios — Lionsgate, Paramount Pictures, Sony Pictures, STX Films, United Artists Releasing, Universal Pictures, The Walt Disney Studios, and Warner Bros. — as well as four smaller imprints, including Focus

Features, Roadside Attractions, Searchlight Pictures, and Sony Pictures Classics. An intersectional document, the *Studio Responsibility Index* analyzes not only the number of LGBTQ characters in films released by these companies, but how much time they have on screen, sexual orientation, gender identity, race, LGBTQ characters with disabilities, and genres. For repeat years, GLAAD found a troubling lack of bisexual characters, transgender characters, and LGBTQ characters of color, all of whom *The Craft: Legacy* depicts with authenticity. Despite bisexual+ people making up the majority of the LGBTQ community, the report found in 2019 that bisexual+ characters decreased by one percentage point from 2018, and only three of the eight major studio films had bisexual+ characters (12). Further, none of the bisexual+ characters from 2019 were male-identifying (12). In terms of transgender characters, “film continues to lag behind other media as a third straight year passes with zero transgender characters in major releases” (15). A majority of 2019’s LGBTQ characters were also white and male-identifying (12). These statistics have been the trend in Hollywood according to the *Studio Responsibility Indexes*, which first began in 2013.

First in *The Craft: Legacy* is Lourdes, a transgender member of the coven, who is also played by transgender actor Zoey Luna. Furthermore, Luna is also a woman of color. The film quickly establishes Lourdes’ gender identity in an affirming and non-exploitative way. As the witches discuss their periods and tampons at school, Lourdes jokes about not being able to relate. Her friends quickly apologize and the scene moves on, simple as that. “They did it in such a beautiful way that I had been waiting for, I guess, studios and movies to address it,” Luna told *IndieWire*.” Because Lourdes is trans, Lourdes is Latina, but that’s not her arc. That’s not what makes her different, necessarily. I think it’s approached perfectly in the sense that it’s not overkill, and it’s not her arc” (Dry, “Just One of the Witches”). It is important that Lourdes is both explicitly made transgender and also played by a transgender actor. In the 2020 *Studio Responsibility Index*, GLAAD acknowledges four transgender and/or non-binary actors appeared in major studio films, and while the organization noted they were “pleased to see trans actors being cast in roles that are not explicitly written as transgender” (15), the lack of acknowledgement or making the characters they played explicitly transgender did lend itself to a lack of representation and ability to be included in

the report. In the film, Lourdes' gender identity is a fact, something that can be acknowledged, but it is not the only part of her identity nor a spectacle; it is as simple as the color of her hair. She is also depicted as good and powerful, and without any of damaging stereotypes depicting LGBTQ people, and particularly transgender people, as "duplicitous" or "dangerous". Further, Hollywood has been mired by numerous controversies surrounding cisgender actors playing transgender characters and the lack of opportunities for transgender actors. Luna noted in the same *IndieWire* interview that Lister-Jones "was willing and able to listen to anything I had to say" but that because of Lister-Jones' prior work with GLAAD, Luna found she did not have to share as much because Lister-Jones had already taken on the responsibility of educating herself ("Just One of the Witches").

Another crucial character in the film is Timmy, a classmate of Lily, Frankie, Tabby, and Lourdes'. He starts off in the film as one of their first targets — a boy at their school who harasses and humiliates girls. When the coven performs their first major spell on someone outside of their foursome, they perform a spell to "awaken Timmy to his highest self, aka a 'woke spell'" (Menta, "Bi Coming Out Scene"). While there is certainly a conversation to be had about the coven performing a spell on someone without their consent, but likely the film wants the audience to see the spell less as brainwashing or changing Timmy, but rather giving him a chance to be his true self. In fact, he becomes a close friend of the four leads and an outspoken ally. In one scene, he hilariously uses the phrase "womxn with an 'x'," which again, may be a little obvious or heavy-handed, but is also equal parts endearing. His most important scene comes later in the film, when he's playing Two Truths and a Lie with our leads. When it's his turn, he states: "My mom gave me this [necklace], I'm a virgin, and, um, Isaiah and I hooked up." At first, Lily, Frankie, Tabby, and Lourdes think the last statement is the obvious lie, but as Timmy begins tearing up and crying, they realize, in fact, it's one of the truths. In an emotional and vulnerable admission, he opens up to his new friends about his sexual orientation. "It's felt good when it's been with girls as well, so. It's just hard for dudes," he confesses. "I feel like there's no room to be... everyone assumes you're just gay, and that's fine, there's nothing wrong with that at all, I just... I like both." This scene is revolutionary not only because it depicts a bisexual male-identifying character, which as the *Studio Responsibility Index*

revealed, are sorely lacking in film representation, but because of how bisexuality at all is treated in media.

One of the most harmful stereotypes and impressions of LGBTQ people are about those who identify as bisexual. Because bisexuality is the attraction to two or more genders, a grossly inaccurate view of them is that they are overly sexualized, unfaithful and “loose,” or indecisive. Many pieces of media, in fact, have fallen into this trap when depicting LGBTQ characters. In the Netflix film *Alex Strangelove*, for example, the titular main character explores his sexuality, first identifying himself as bisexual, and then ultimately deciding he’s gay by the end. While this is undoubtedly a realistic experience for some, when it is too often the depiction of LGBTQ characters in media, it sends the harmful message that being bisexual is not as valid or is simply a stop on the way to being gay. Several other pieces of media, from Hulu’s *Love, Victor* to *Sex and the City*, also suffer from intense biphobia. In Netflix’s wildly popular *Orange Is the New Black*, the show never acknowledges its lead character’s bisexuality until the seventh season. There is context and history to explain why bisexual people experience a phobia and erasure very different than homophobia or straight-washing. As Abby Webb writes for *Study Breaks*, research in the 80s labeled bisexuality as “secondary homosexuality” and:

Dominated by bias toward monosexuality, researchers presumed that heterosexuality and homosexuality were the only legitimate orientations; therefore, anyone claiming to be bisexual was either a closeted gay clinging to heterosexual norms, or just experimenting beyond their actual preference. (“Why Bisexuals”)

Throughout the entirety of *The Craft: Legacy*, Timmy remains both a good person and bisexual, never suddenly deciding he’s gay and his bisexuality was just a “phase,” nor being depicted through any biphobic lenses. Anna Menta explains why this subversion of people’s expectations and assumptions about teen boys is so powerful:

Suddenly, in retrospect, so many things about Timmy’s behavior make sense: Compensating for his insecurities by acting aggressively heterosexual. Taking out his fear, anger, and loneliness on Lily. Striving to fit himself into the box that society expects him to slot into.

None of that makes his behavior right—or even forgivable—but it does make it make *sense*.

(“Bi Coming Out Scene”)

Unfortunately, the movie then, however unintentionally, falls into the Bury Your Gays trope. In the last third of the film, Timmy dies. The students at school are told he killed himself, but it becomes clear later on that he was murdered by the movie’s antagonists. Though the film clearly does this from purely a narrative and plot standpoint, it is disappointing regardless to include the death of an LGBTQ character, especially one who just found a newfound sense of freedom and happiness by coming out to a support network. As Menta acknowledges, however, his coming out scene is an “undeniable grand slam out of the park” and if that scene “helps even just one confused bi teen, that’s a net win” (“Bi Coming Out Scene”). It does not make up for the movie killing him off, but it showcases that representation is not always as neat or black-and-white as we wish it could be.

The original *Craft* movie has a large LGBTQ following. Davion Smith explains why for the *North Texas Daily*:

The film analyzes a lot of the gay experiences of othering and alienation and uses the contextual history of the occult to provide an enriching experience. The girls find each other through longing glances, realizations that they are like one another and are different from everyone else. In a society that does not accept you and actively seeks to harm you for your differences, it makes sense to hide who you are. The whole encounter mimics the search for the romantic attention and affection queer teenagers often engage in.

In both real life and media, people who possess magical abilities and LGBTQ people share the experience of being shunned and othered by society. This is part of why things like witchcraft have become ingrained in LGBTQ culture. However, while *The Craft* franchise has clearly always had its LGBTQ fans, it is very different for a film to be queer-coded and adopted by LGBTQ fans, and another thing entirely for a film to be explicitly queer. This is why *The Craft: Legacy* is so groundbreaking and exciting in terms of its LGBTQ representation — it doesn’t shy away from the representation or using clear, affirming language. It is also intersectional in its LGBTQ representation, which is especially crucial

for transgender women of color, who face a high rate of violence and hate crimes committed against them in the United States. In 2019, the American Medical Association (AMA) labeled the increase in violence against transgender people as an “epidemic” and the media doubles down on the experienced pain by misgendering transgender victims (Torres et al., “Each Day Is a Fight”). Lourdes gets to not only survive as a transgender woman of color in the film, but she gets to win and experience happiness and success.

In discussing her decision to consciously and explicitly depict such progressive LGBTQ representation, Lister-Jones said:

For me as a filmmaker I’ve taken the responsibility very seriously when it comes to representation. So this film was an incredible opportunity to portray the world as it actually exists. And especially when looking at young people and the ways in which young people can be other-ed. I really wanted to include queer and trans characters in that conversation. Whether or not I would category this film as feminist, in any discussion of feminism or looking a feminist issues, trans and queer voices must be included. So that was really important to me. (“Director Reveals”)

The Craft: Legacy exists as a beautiful example of LGBTQ representation, especially in regards to fictional storytelling, but also, and just as importantly, as an example of *how* to depict LGBTQ representation through education and intersectionality.

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