

# Whip It - What Could've Been

By Payton Simonson

What is more queer-coded than roller derby?

Nothing. That's why I watched *Whip It*, a 2009 movie found on Hulu directed by Drew Barrymore, featuring Elliot Page in the main role. The story follows 17-year-old Bliss Cavendar as she finds an



escape from her home in the form of a rebellious roller derby team. I came into this movie expecting very few things, mostly just that there would be lesbian characters. I was pleasantly surprised by how much I learned that I actually like roller derby, how great the soundtrack was (any movie with Radiohead in the soundtrack is automatically great), how funny the casting is (why is Jimmy Fallon in this movie?), and how much I enjoyed the costumes for this film.

The glaring absence of gay people within this movie was honestly shocking.

[Refinery 29's](#) review of the film by Marianne Eloise in 2019 expresses how as a bisexual woman, she was disappointed by how the only romance in the film is centered around some random guy who screws over the protagonist and expresses how easy it would have been for the film to include lesbians. Elliot Page himself even stated in a [2018 interview](#) that "A movie like *Whip It*, you know, should be more queer. It's just that simple," and expresses excitement toward the possibility of a sequel where the protagonist would be canonically lesbian.

While many film analysts describe this film as having queer subtext, I personally feel that in the modern-day there are too many instances of explicitly gay characters in

film today to be content with that kind of writing. For example, *Booksmart*, the 2019 coming of age comedy features a lesbian protagonist and her love life is a significant part of the movie's plot. In the same year, the iconic film *A Portrait of a Lady on Fire* was released, centering entirely around women in love. These movies have shown how much better the story is when the elephant in the room is addressed: the sexuality of the characters.

GLAAD, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation [reported on their website](#) that in 2017, only 12.8 percent of films released by major studios that year included LGBT characters, and only 36 percent of that being lesbians. But why does that even matter? Well, [racetoacure.org](#) explains that "Underrepresentation, as a result, has the potential to establish harmful views and negative perceptions. For children who are developing their thoughts and behaviors, and for teenagers who are searching for identity and their place in society, media takes the role of a significant influence."

I do understand why these movies didn't take the extra step and say what the audience was thinking. Because it wasn't profitable. The 2014 article made by [indiewire.com](#) found that despite making millions in the box office in the past, LGBTQ+ movies were barely making anything at the time. However, in the modern-day, audiences are overwhelmingly interested in LGBTQ stories, and I would love to see a sequel with real representation.