

DVD

# Not Even Close

BY BENNETT LAW

**Almost Normal**  
**Wolfe Video**  
 Written and directed by  
**Marc Moody**  
 Produced and edited by  
**Sharon Teo**  
**J. Andrew Keitch, Joan**  
**Lauckner, Tim Hammer**  
**Video release Nov 2005**  
**92 minutes**

I hold gay films to a different standard than I do more mainstream Hollywood fare. I can generously overlook wooden acting, stilted dialogue,

is a film called *Almost Normal*. It is supposed to be about coming to terms with your "otherness" – even when the cultural norm shifts to an environment in which what made you different is the norm. In this case, a 40-ish gay man relives his high school days in an alternate gay-centric universe. Suddenly his parents, his siblings, the neighbors, and practically everyone else he knew growing up are gay. And yet, somehow, he retains an inability to fit in – to be "normal."

There's an interesting idea for a film here – that as gay people we are hard-wired or

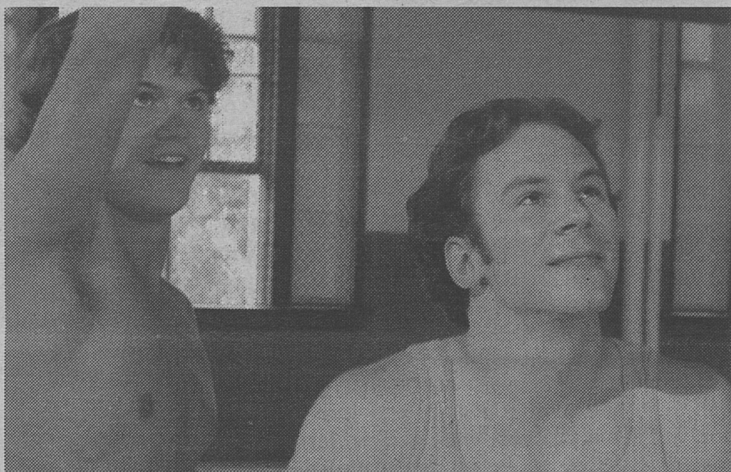
showering partner in gym class. Promising premise, right? But then out of nowhere our protagonist promptly penetrates his showering partner. Yes, the lonely gay boy brought home to a world of healthy homos eager to slip into the shower with him is suddenly (and inexplicably) interested in pussy. And that's the sex scene the filmmakers apparently felt I had sat through this movie to see.

This indignity proved too much for me. I passed betrayal and moved quickly to disgust and contempt. What was left of this movie? Wooden acting, stilted dialogue in which everyone speaks their subtext, disarmingly uneven direction that whiplashed the tone between campy farce and dewy melodrama, and characters who act inconsistently (I was particularly confused by the college student who repeatedly stalked his professor for the chance to haltingly tell him "you look nice today," – code in this movie for "let's get our freak on" – apparently for no other reason than to warm the teacher up for his dear old dad).

There was one scene I did totally love: this film was set in Lincoln, Nebraska – America's heartland – and the weak, pathetic, bullied straight boy in this gay-centric high school wore a University of Nebraska sweatshirt. This did my heart proud. As a UNL grad myself, I found acres of irony in dressing the sole straight boy in a Nebraska sweatshirt. If the late summer "reality" show *Tommy Lee Goes to College* brought the mighty Big Red to its knees (Tommy Lee's producers kept a steady stream of gay and lesbian Cornhuskers on screen), this acknowledgment of the university as a bastion of heterosexuality will surely help soothe sensitive Red State sensibilities.

My advice is that you skip this unfortunate movie, get yourself a University of Nebraska sweatshirt, and live a fully realized gay life. Luckily for us, it's almost normal. ▼

*Bennett Law of Bethel, Vermont is an honest-to-God graduate of the University of Nebraska. Nebraska sweatshirts may be ordered on-line from the merchandise link at [www.huskers.com](http://www.huskers.com).*



## A "gay" movie minus a gay sex scene is just a bad movie that flirts with gay content.

uneven direction, characters who act inconsistently, and even poor lighting and lousy sound. But these weaknesses come to matter if the film fails to deliver on its unspoken promise – if it fails to include a gay sex scene.

I can't abide movies marketed to the gay community that come up short in this regard. Anticipation of a hot sex scene – even in a relatively lousy movie – keeps me watching. Without good production values and real emotional resonance (the wonderful film *Big Eden* comes to mind as a counter-example), a "gay" movie minus a gay sex scene is just a bad movie that flirts with gay content.

To add insult to injury, there is no betrayal greater than a "gay" movie that not only lacks a gay sex scene but, for reasons beyond my comprehension, includes a straight sex scene!

This month's major offender

socially conditioned to be outside the mainstream, and that hard-wiring would keep us separate even in a world that was predominantly gay. What defines us isn't so much the nature of our distinction, but that we are different at all. Being gay, in a sense, is but one manifestation of our separateness.

*Almost Normal* isn't the film that explores this conceit. This film is, instead, an unsatisfying rehashing of memorable scenes from *Peggy Sue Got Married*, *Back to the Future*, *Big*, and *The Wizard of Oz*. Virtually every scene in *Almost Normal* is lifted from one of these films and then shabbily reconceived in an alternate universe in which boys love boys and girls prefer girls.

Well, every scene except that straight sex scene. In this alternate universe, to keep everyone on the gay-and-narrow, each high school boy has a female

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