

In 2019, college senior Sam Orlowski wrote a script wanting to show characters in sapphic relationships the way she experienced them in her own life. From that script, a short film, “Thanks to Her” was made and uploaded to YouTube in September of 2020. As of March 2022, that film has over 1.5 million views.

Somehow, this small film was able to overcome the algorithm and be seen and responded to by people of all age groups, identities, and backgrounds. As filmmakers, the thing that we were most taken by were some of the comments left in the discussion section of YouTube. Many were from young people, happy to finally see asexual or sapphic relationships in the way that they experienced or wanted to experience them. Many related to it because they had recently been discovering things about themselves and their orientation and saw it as an inspiration. Many viewers were also older, remembering a time when being LGBTQ+ was extremely taboo.

Inspired by the many comments under the video, we decided to re-write and produce the film as a feature, with director Sam McCoy at the helm. The core creative team, Sam McCoy (Director/Producer), Hayley Ulmer (Producer), and Anh Vu (Director of Photography) remained the same, as well as the two leads cast as Millie and Andy (AJ Molder, Julia de Avilez Rocha). During a month of funding on Kickstarter, we were able to raise \$32,000 (after fees) to make the feature in its entirety.

With such a small budget, the only way we were able to make the film was through the support and energy of the Pittsburgh community. Through donated locations, food, time, and equipment, we were able to hire and pay a woman/nonbinary-led crew made up of Pittsburgh film professionals and budding filmmakers. The support we received from the local community during production was overwhelming, with the majority of it coming from people outside the industry.

This experience reminded us that community-led productions are possible, especially when those involved can see themselves in the story. It has been a privilege to be able to finish the story, and we can't wait to share it with the beautiful audience we have cultivated.