

***“Youth is wasted on the young...as they say in England. I want to save them their youth, so it should be expended, not ending up like we are, wishing back something else then— they can live now maybe their dreams.”***

(Roberta Hodes in The Women’s Happy Time Commune)

**Welcome to**

**THE WOMEN’S HAPPY TIME COMMUNE COLLECTION**

*Three 16mm movies and one HD video*

*featuring*

“the first all-women cast and crew western”

**The Women’s Happy Time Commune (1972)**

16mm, color, sound, 47min

*together with*

the film-maker’s first movie:

“women’s liberation” meets the Miss America pageant

**testing, testing, how do you do? (1969)**

16mm, color, sound, 4min

&

“plus ça change...”, to quote J. B. Karr

**A Street Harassment Film (19 75)**

16mm, color, sound, 11.5min

&

a 21<sup>st</sup> c. outlier—death; rebirth and enlightenment

**Time and the Mermaid (2017)**

HD video, 14min

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# INTRODUCTION

by Alexandra Juhasz

**WHAT EVER** could the women's happy time commune collection contribute to academia? A lot! Let's break the question down, word for word. It's all there in the collection's name, starting with the first word...

**“WOMEN'S”** While the four films included here span nearly half a century, they each put gender-experience and expression first. By focusing on women, the films cover a range of topics that constitute a quick sweep of core feminist political engagements over these many years, including sexuality... work... love.... racism... children... violence... discrimination, media critique... and aging, not to mention the critical and ever-changing answer to the question of who qualifies as a “woman” (*Happy Time* engages in comedic but quite serious debates about gender expression and fluidity, albeit using the nomenclature and gender expressions of that time. This reminds us that there's a history to what seems a most current concern within contemporary feminism.) But the apostrophe is also critical; it signals a fundamental commitment to woman-made, woman-focused, woman-owned, woman-circulated film; a fundamental feminist commitment to the labor and ownership of women in all aspects of filmmaking—producing, exhibiting, performing, distributing. Unheard of at the time when men owned and did most everything in film culture, this radical vision and its associated actions and structures is visible in the films made by Sheila Paige and Ariel Dougherty, who were also the co-founders of Women Make Movies. For them, all aspects of the actual work of filmmaking—writing, shooting, acting, watching, distributing—were understood as (and still are) deeply political, given the patriarchal underpinnings of the industry as a whole.

Up next? **“HAPPY”**. A critical, if rare, response to what I just described: the representational and physical violence embodied in the labor, ownership, and norms of the movie industry as it was then. Happy may not be applicable to all the themes raised by these movies—including harassment, mothering, gender roles, or masculinity and femininity, for instance—but it does establish the signature approach of filmmaker Sheila Paige in terms of personal style and production and exhibition processes. Hers is a feminism rooted in connection, warmth, interaction, and, often, *fun*—borne no doubt from the consciousness-raising, social experimentation, and radical zeitgeist through which she found her own feminism and made these movies, placing them within and for that happy community and the ways of being and doing that it reflected. But for students of film and feminism, the can-do spirit of production seen in these films serves as a vital reminder of a political and social mediamaking that precedes “professional” or “corporate,” or even “brandable,” “popular,” or “viral.” Rather, the metric was personal and communal pleasure. Ahead of numbers or views, production standards or prizes, comes a commitment to collectivity and a profoundly feminist engagement with filmmaking and community. This is the critical contribution found in these works as a whole: Paige's belief that all this making and doing and being might make us happier—or at least richer in spirit.

**“TIME”** allows us to perceive the many decades of feminist politics and lifestyle that are held in this collection. We can see changes in nomenclature, analysis, concerns, and politics across these decades of feminism. Also made visible: that some issues stay remarkably the same.

Scholars and students of feminist, activist, independent, or queer film will note changes made in media analyses and theories, as well as in the lifestyles and togetherness that is recorded in the making and seeing of media. We are also asked to see where we still need to fight, for the self-love and support of women filmmakers as they age.

**“COMMUNE”** ... a perfect example or perhaps a dated word, that points to an emancipatory and utopian idea—and sometime lived practice—that history has proven hard to accomplish and maintain in the long term. The pleasure and amusement that this possibility presents in the movie of the same name, and in the collection as a whole, is perhaps more needed today than ever—for women, and for everyone. As we watch *Happy Time* now, it seems clear that the women making the film in the ‘70s, both as filmmakers and actors, fully understood that such an idealistic project was untenable, even laughable. But all the same, it was something they could laugh about together, on film, and with us, their viewers. Their joyful attitude about the dreams of the commune, especially in the face of violence, racism, homophobia, and patriarchal might, are of great solace. Then, there are the playful ideas about family, capitalism, sexuality, and perhaps most critically, filmmaking itself as an actual form to hold the commune which could and did emerge from such a dream. The film’s willful play with genre and method (a Western... a comedy... a documentary... an improvisational scenario and set of performances), stemming as it did from the practice of an art outside of professional norms and imperatives, but committed in other ways to the idea of working together, recalls and celebrates feminism’s rich roots in the methods of collectivity.

So, finally, there is **THE “COLLECTION.”** It is necessary and moving to see one filmmaker’s interests and tactics reflected in her own experiences of feminism across two American centuries. In *Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies*, this collection offers, in one sitting, a litany of the changing concerns of one woman’s and her community’s feminist outlook. Cinema Studies students will have the rare treat of seeing, close up and personal, joyful and diverse examples of the early community-based, independent media upon which feminist film would ultimately be established, soon to emerge as a myriad collection of directors, film professionals, scholars, fans, communities, and their changing concerns and styles. The films collected here are diverse in approach, topic, even decade. But, as one woman’s capturing of happy times communes, they remind current scholars and students of the power and impact of self-expression, irreplaceable and irascible personal vision, and the environments that nurture it.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT/BACKGROUND

by Shilyh Warren

“... the origin and development of feminist film work are largely unexamined.” (B. Ruby Rich)<sup>1</sup>

In 1972, when the author and film scholar, B. Ruby Rich saw Carolee Schneemann's film, *Fuses* (1967) for the first time, over 400 people packed the Chicago Art Institute auditorium. Women's liberation had exploded in Chicago, evidenced by the numerous consciousness-raising groups throughout the area, and this was an audience deeply invested in the new women's movement. Rich writes that it was “radical feminism, early seventies style.”<sup>2</sup> Women's consciousness-raising groups were reading Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex*, Anne Koedt's “The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm,” and *Voices from Women's Liberation*, a Chicago-based newsletter printing essays, letters, and position papers.

As described by Rich, the tension in the auditorium was palpable. Tumult erupted when one audience member criticized Schneemann for allowing a man (and not a “sister”) to project her film. During the post-screening discussion, audience members assailed Schneemann for romanticizing practices that some women argued secured women's subservience to men. The stakes were intensely felt, and Schneemann's representation of female sexuality in *Fuses* created a heated atmosphere for debate. Today, the film is acclaimed as far ahead of its time.

Decades later, when Alex Juhasz interviewed Schneemann for her book and documentary, *Women of Vision: Histories of Feminist Film and Video*, she asked the feminist pioneer what she felt she was “owed” by later generations of filmmakers: “You owe me the vulva... You owe me heterosexual pleasure and the depiction of that pleasure. And you owe me thirty years of lost work that's never been seen. That's what you all owe me. I guess what I'm also owed is a living, an income. I'm owed the chance to produce the work that I've envisioned and that I've never been able to do. I'm owed the chance to preserve the works that already exist. And I'm glad you've asked. Nobody has ever asked me. And you can see, I'm fuming underneath.”<sup>3</sup> When Schneemann died in 2019 at the age of 79, she was in the midst of a new, albeit too late, wave of attention to her groundbreaking work.

In the early 2000s, when I began to research the feminist film movement of the 1970s, my proposed project met with a resistance suggesting that those of us who became feminists in the 1990s already knew all there was to know about “second wave feminism” and were lucky to have been able to move above and beyond its limited scope. Yet when I saw feminist films of the 1970s, I was consistently blown away by the radical ambitions projected there— utopian ideas about freedom, gender, and sexuality and a wild and exciting range of cinematic languages in documentary, fiction, animation, and experimental film. I wanted others to experience these films—and to inhabit that version of feminism, which seemed to me so much more alive and ambitious than what I lived within.

So much has changed since the early 2000s. Today, we see a feminist movement that has been reignited, apparently more popular than ever, especially in the wake of the US election of 2016 and the fierce and sustained activism it helped spark around the globe. A newly visible feminist movement has also brought a reconsideration of the legacy of the 1970s. Rather than

rejecting the second wave as too white, too middle-class, and too heterosexist, feminists are drawing more and more inspiration and energy from the ideas, art, and activism of the 1970s.

It's there in the marches, strikes, pussy hats, and posters of today's feminists. Hear it in contemporary demands for economic and racial justice, and in the resistance to misogynist judges and media personalities, and in the celebration of sexuality and difference. Finally, I say. *Finally*. It's about time. And it is also time for a reconsideration of the feminist film movement.

In the early 1970's, feminist filmmakers collaborated to create new distribution networks through which non-fiction films were mobilized in tandem with women's political activism, and particularly consciousness-raising, as a way to incite reflection as a precursor to action. Women documentary filmmakers, in particular, conceived of cinema as an instrument for social change. Films like *Growing Up Female* (1971), *Anything You Want to Be* (1971), *Three Lives* (1971), *Janie's Janie* (1971), and *The Woman's Film* (1971) are some of the dozens of films that reveal this critical trend in feminist filmmaking in the early seventies.

Perhaps a diffused and unwieldy concept today, in the U.S., U.K., and Canada in the early seventies, the notion of "women's cinema" was a breakthrough idea.<sup>4</sup> For the first time, "women's films" denoted films made by and for, not just starring or about, women and emerging out of the political fever and radical demands of the women's movement. Exhibition of these films began in earnest on a new "women's films" festival circuit where it became readily apparent that the relationship between women and cinema was about to shift for good. The decade of the seventies witnessed a veritable explosion of what I would like to embrace as "feminist cinema" and the production of an unprecedented number of films by, for, and about women. One scholar of the Feminist Film Movement claims that before 1969 fewer than 20 "feminist films" existed whereas by mid-decade, in 1976, over 250 films by women circulated, and the number of feminist filmmakers had risen from less than 40 in 1972 to more than 200 in 1976.<sup>5</sup>

Quite unlike the increasingly solitary viewing practices that are taking hold in the twenty-first century, in the seventies, female audiences filled auditoriums, classrooms, and town halls as films made by women began to circulate as a result of newly forged collectives such as Women Make Movies, New Day Films, Iris Films, and the Women's Film Coop. Women Make Movies, Inc., the non-profit was founded in 1972. Today it's the premiere women's film distribution company, but it began as a community-based film-making workshop where all kinds of neighborhood women learned to make their first movies. Individuals of every stripe and persuasion wrote story scripts, produced, cast, directed/shot, edited, and helped screen their movies. As Sheila Paige recounts, "Our raison d'être was 'so the stories that had never been told might be told.'"

Feminist films from the 1970s boldly reimagined possibilities for seeing, feeling, and being. The films centered on women and the issues they faced at home, at work, in the movement, in bed, and in doctor's offices—their quotidian experiences, in other words, and their struggles in a capitalist patriarchy (to use the language of the time). If this sounds quaint today, in the seventies this kind of filmmaking was innovative and radicalizing. The women featured in feminist documentaries were not expected to be glamorous, sexy, conniving, or even talented

like the women in mainstream cinema. They were not femme fatales, smothering mothers, or bathing beauties. They were, in other words, women who had almost never appeared on screen before, telling stories that did not constitute escapist entertainment. On the contrary, the women portrayed in feminist documentaries told stories that were supposed to be kept secret: tales of abduction, rape, and abortion, stories about domestic violence and abuse, analyses of patriarchy and global capital, considerations of forced reproduction and the stereotypes that restrict alternative visions of womanhood. Women also related stories about girlhood and motherhood, grandmothers and children, marriages and divorce. Movies made by women in the seventies captured the escalating sense of the gender role revolution at stake in women's liberation.<sup>6</sup>

And yet, today, the majority of these films are out of public circulation. Very few scholars of my generation are familiar with the titles or names of the filmmakers of feminist documentaries of the seventies, and few publications have been devoted to investigating the films or their legacy in recent decades. How did these films become archival relics rather than living examples of feminist documentary practice? And more, importantly, how can we bring them back into circulation so that future feminists will have access to them?

## **PRESERVATION: Rescuing cinema on the margins**

by Kirsten Larvick

Motion pictures, whether celluloid, tape-based, or digital in origin, are fragile—vulnerable to time and environment. Especially in jeopardy are independent works without big-studio support. Independent movies may shape history—mold art, culture, and social change, but without resources dedicated to preservation, such voices from the independent margins vanish, leaving an incomplete and falsely narrowed slice of history and stylistic evolution.

Women had carved their cinematic paths since the dawn of the industry, but important shifts in the 1970s spurred a surge in women-led work. The growth of feminism unleashed creative energies of all kinds. Women film-makers acted on their concerns—political and personal—and exposed issues of social and cultural inequality, both on film and on the new video technology. They asserted their positions, creating both original and alternative narratives to mainstream cinema.

These works, however, were primarily independently produced and, often, financed on shoestrings. Few films secured enough funding to provide for a sustainable availability. And now, a rich legacy of ground-breaking work lies largely vulnerable to extinction—and exclusion from film history.

My own discovery of women's contributions to cinema arts was a gradual one, and it wasn't until my involvement with the Women's Film Preservation Fund that I was made aware of the abundance of independent works by women. The heritage—its diversity, depth, and interest—is lush. Its survival, however, isn't guaranteed—rather the opposite; to take it for granted is to ensure its rapid demise, leaving a few pebbles to represent the mountain.

For those at the beginning of their journey into cinema studies, whether through an institution or sheer curiosity, I encourage you to look beneath the surface and note what a small fraction of what was created survives. Lois Weber (1879-1939) made over a hundred films (some would say “hundreds”). She was an auteur, experimenting with the medium, filling multiple creative roles, and including her own personal sociopolitical views within her scenarios. Alas, we are forever barred from study of her oeuvre—only a small number of titles are actually preserved and available to viewers through contemporary formats and platforms.

Fast forward to the 1970s, when much of the artistic fervor behind work by women was coming from independent filmmakers who, like Weber and others, explored the issues that affected them, telling stories from diverse perspectives on their own terms. Many such makers constructed their films outside of the studio system. Following release, media assets might be stored in a home, or studio, subject to humidity and other dangerous conditions. Others left their masters at labs, distribution facilities, or duplication houses, never to return for them. Landscapes change, companies move or go out of business, and items naturally go missing in the shuffle.

Consider, too, that our digital age demands an even more active ongoing and expensive process to ensure preservation and continued access. Digital media suffers from a high mortality rate. All formats have an expiration date; hard drives die in a heartbeat.

There are countless stories of loss in every medium. As we all know, reading about a film is important— but watching it is the essential experience.

As filmmaker Barbara Hammer (1939-2019) once said, *“This work is the work that will inspire women of the future. It gives them a cultural foundation on which to work.”* Thus, the absence of our heritage is a profound failing, both to those who came before us, and to artists of today and tomorrow. Whom do our protégés look to as their guides? It’s our responsibility to prevent further degradation of our cinematic document, and it’s equally imperative that women lead the charge to save their work.

The current system yearns for reform on multiple levels. Educators and institutions should include budgeting for preservation and its best practices in their programs, so creators come to understand the necessity of planning for preservation at the onset of their projects.

Filmmakers should realize the significance of preserving their work for both its income potential and their personal legacies, but also for the larger picture. It is critical that we save an accurate record of the past and the subjects and issues that were evocative of a time. In a 2006 interview, filmmaker and archivist, Pearl Bowser said, *“Young filmmakers need to think about their work, not only as a product that they’re distributing right now, but it has to have a life beyond that.”*

More broadly, the overall lack of regard society affords history and efforts to understand its continued relevance must evolve. We need a seismic shift in the way our educational and social structures frame, consider, and value our past, allowing opportunity for an array of voices to participate.

Distributors and programmers can offer more diverse stories—art house theatres and boutique distributors already carry the torch by regularly curating work of different eras, genres, and perspectives. Unique programming can reach beyond niche cinephiles. The current mainstream model begs for remapping—creators struggle to realize their stories, and preservation is a bridge too far. Filmmakers should be able to monetize their entire professional output throughout their lives because their work remains germane to contemporary viewers. How can filmmakers continue to create new work, distribute and preserve previous work, and make a living wage when they are considered worth only what they are releasing today? Solutions have yet to surface, but it begins with an openness to possibility and change.

The preservation of “Women’s Happy Time Commune” by Sheila Paige was made possible by a Women’s Film Preservation Fund grant awarded in 2016. The film was recognized for its adventurous, non-conformist approach to storytelling and its myriad and timely questions about gender and sexuality. The grant was provided to help secure the film’s place within feminist film history and cinema’s record at large, and to ensure its availability for continued enjoyment and study.

Sheila’s work holds a singular place among her peers. While self-taught as many of her contemporaries, her portfolio differs in genre, discipline and aesthetics. One might argue that “Women’s Happy Time Commune” is a hybrid of sorts; crossing genres, her work represents both Hollywood influence and flagrant resistance toward storytelling norms. It’s for all these reasons and more that her films are crucial.

There are many motion pictures yet to rescue, and finding safe harbor demands tremendous resources. Retaining the scope of cinema is a tall order, but I believe it's possible. Perhaps those who view this collection will find inspiration. My hope is that the Women's Happy Time Commune collection will spark deeper interest, not just in Sheila's work, but in other films of women pioneers from all eras and points of view. They forged ahead with their stories and artistry, bringing voice and invention to the underrepresented. We should watch these movies and talk about them. This is the purpose of filmmaking. The work deserves to be seen, not just at the time of release, but for many years to come.

## FILMMAKER'S STATEMENT

“There is a tide in the affairs of men  
Which, taken at the flood—” (Brutus in "Julius Caesar")

Wait a moment — “...men?” I don’t think so—a “Women’s Liberation” movement is bursting onto the scene!

In 1969, just out of college, I came to NYC to be an art critic. (That lasted about two months during which no one hired me.) Someone at MoMA suggested the Young Filmmakers Foundation, running a storefront 16 mm workshop on the Lower East Side. I visited, and loved the movies the teenagers were making. I asked, but where are the girls? “We had some, but they always leave” was the reply. Where are the women teachers? I asked—having just that much acquaintance with the new zeitgeist. They said, “Why don’t you try?” I volunteered, learning what my students should do next a day ahead of them. Shortly, I was hired. Young women and girls came into the workshop, and stayed.

I made my first movie, “testing, testing, how do you do?” What next? A western—I always liked westerns. (Senior year in college, I discovered daytime movie-going and went to as many John Ford movies as possible.) Through Young Filmmakers, I met and teamed up with Ariel Dougherty. We began planning for the production of what we billed as the “first all-women cast and crew western”. The movie was shot in 1970, but not released until 1972—unscripted material can make for slow editing.

In 1972, Ariel and I hatched a new non-profit, Women Make Movies, Inc.: “So the stories that have never been told might be told.” With the Young Filmmakers workshop as our model, we launched in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan. Women of every age, stripe, interest, and position came to write their scripts, cast, shoot, direct, edit, and do the finishing work with sound and titles. Finally, they helped organize community and festival screenings.

In 1975, I made “A Street Harassment Film”; for the first time, some scenes were loosely scripted.

These were the seminal years of a newborn women’s movement. Women were talking, gathering for “consciousness raising”. Women were taking aim at discrimination and the limits imposed upon their personal liberation; it was a time of re-setting of power and privilege vis-a- vis men. Women looked to one another— collaborating to create new enterprises, excavate feminist history, coin feminist terminology, and hard-edged jokes: “If men could get pregnant, abortion would be a sacrament.” (coinage attributed to Flo Kennedy, but there’s competition— an old Irishwoman quoted by Gloria Steinem)

The collection includes one experimental work from 2017, “Time and the Mermaid”, shot in video. Now, the heroine struggles to reckon with mortality, while all about her, traces of the feminist ferment of the 1970s ripple on—perhaps in her dislocation from norms, or, perhaps in her determination to live freer, beyond time.

PS. Welcome to this Guide; may it prove useful. I wish you happy times—although I’m not sure I’d advise seeking them on a “Happy Time Commune”.

## THEMES

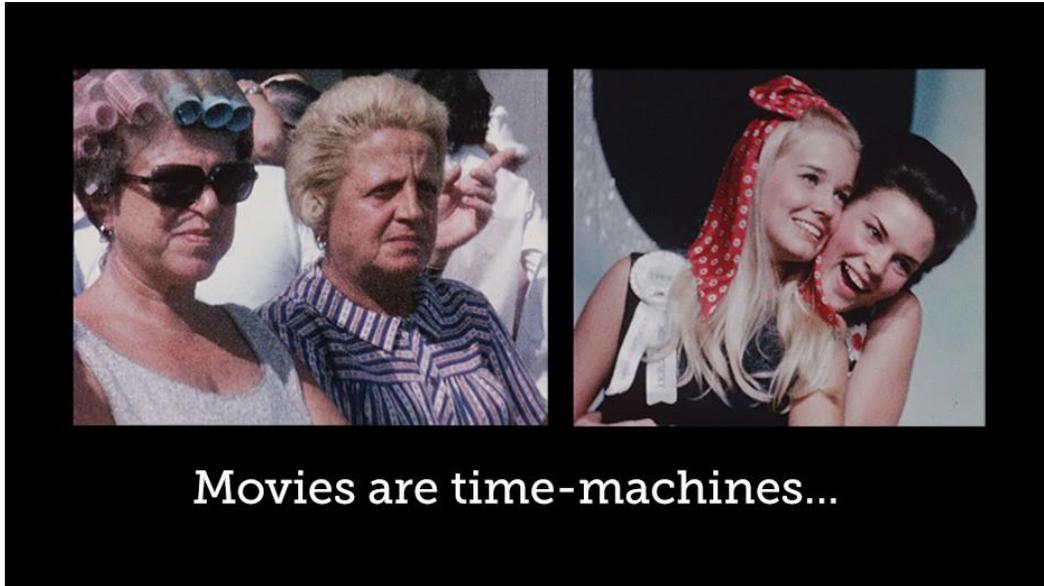


***Play the game and win a prize! For rules of play, [CONTACT THE FILM-MAKER.](#)***

## DISCUSSION POINTS, LINKS TO VIDEO CLIPS, AND SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

**(1) Movies are time-machines, primary documents for the study of history**

**Point for discussion: the value of film as historical document, why “old movies” matter.**

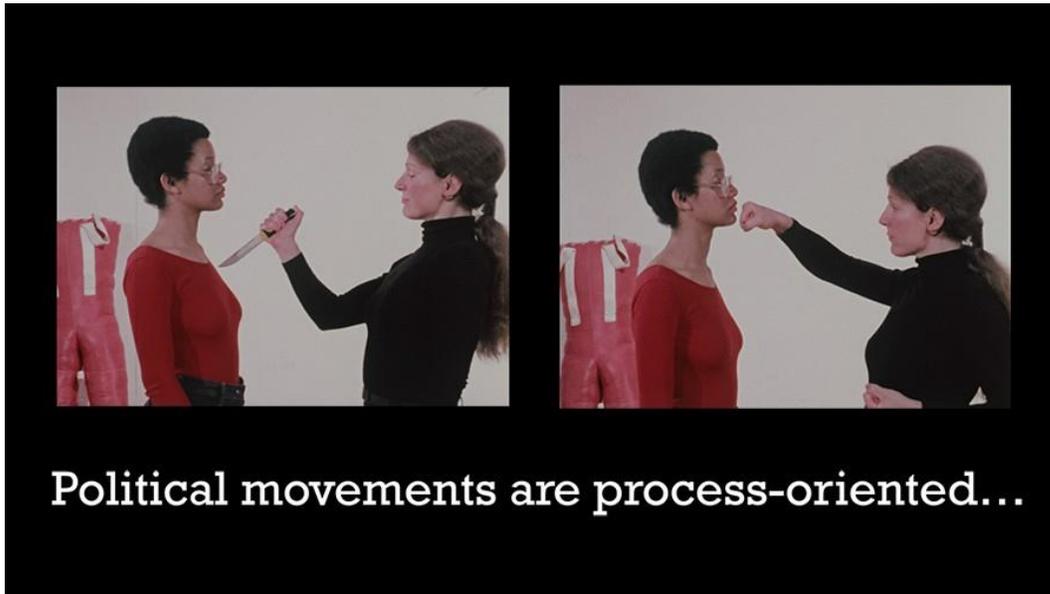


**Questions or jumping offpoints for discussion:**

- **What is the value of studying films from the past?**
- **Do *WHTC*, *Street Harassment*, and *testing, testing* help you envision the past in new ways?**
- **How does watching the films differ from reading about the feminist movement of the 1970s?**

**(2) Political movements are process-oriented and evolve over time**

**Point for discussion:** Conversations and ideas expressed in these films offer a bridge between past and present. Ideas explored in these films built and expanded upon conversations from first-wave feminists and established a foundational language for future activists.



**Questions or jumping off points for discussion:**

- What are some of the key ideas the films' characters are expressing in their discussions? Be specific (i.e., specific dialogue, events as depicted the films, etc.)
- Do the themes and ideas explored within the film reflect contemporary language about feminism, gender, sexuality, or other personal and political ideas?
- Are there ideas expressed within the film that feel outdated? Why?
- Do the ideas in *WHTC* and *Street Harassment* resonate with current socio-political conversations that we see in the news, on social media platforms, and in discussion among peers?

### **(3) Consciousness-Raising: “the personal is political”**

**Point for Discussion:** Open conversations about experience amongst peers was and continues to be radical. Convening and sharing experiences is empowering and builds political consciousness and critical thinking among groups of women.



#### **Questions or jumping off points for discussion:**

- What types of shared experiences arise within *WTHC* and *Street Harassment*?
- Can you identify moments of consciousness-raising in *WTHC* and *Street Harassment*?
- Do the conversations within the film advance beyond “the personal” to address broader structural inequalities?
- How have conversations among women evolved since the seventies?
- Can you give contemporary examples of women’s gatherings and safe spaces that nurture feminist conversations?
- Are there still topics that are considered too taboo for women to talk about?

**(4) Feminism is fluid: it changes, and it's different amongst itself. There's not one feminism.**

**Point for Discussion:** Feminism isn't frozen in time or monolithic. It is a fluctuating and living form of being, continuously evolving.



**Feminism is fluid; it changes,  
and it's different amongst itself.  
There's not one feminism.**

**Questions or jumping off points for discussion:**

- Can each of you respond to the question: "What is a feminist?"
- Regardless of your gender identity and/or sexuality, do you identify as a "feminist"?
- If yes, how are you a feminist?
- Are there ways to be a "good feminist"?
- Are there activities that you consider being "anti-feminist"?
- What are some definitions of feminism as offered or discussed in *WHTC*?

## **(5) Gendered expectations, intersectionality, and inclusion/exclusion**

**Point for Discussion:** Women are not alone in experiencing the pressures of societal expectations and confinement bestowed on them by others based upon their gender and sexual identities. Men fall victim to certain norms around what it is to be “masculine” and other myths around their gender. Transgender and nonbinary individuals are also caught between a host of conflicting societal pressures. Moreover, these identities cannot be considered in isolation as they intersect with race, class, immigration status, and more.



feminism...and men—  
the elephant in the room

### **Questions or jumping off points for discussion:**

- Name some stereotypes about men and masculinity. How are men “supposed to” perform their gender?
- How does race impact one’s relationship to feminism?
- Are certain voices marginalized within or excluded from the feminist movement?
- Can feminism be inclusive?
- Does the premise of inviting men, transgender, or nonbinary individuals into the conversation diminish the work that women have done for equality and acknowledgement?

## (6) Women as film-makers: a political act?

**Point for discussion:** When form and content in filmmaking becomes political. Stories told from a women's point-of-view was and continues to be an act of dissidence itself.



Women as film-makers: a political act?

### Questions or jumping off points for discussion:

- In *WTHC* or *Street Harassment*, cite examples where a creative choice by the filmmaker might be considered “political.” Consider artistic expression that doesn’t conform to Hollywood narrative and stylistic norms.
- How might a shoestring budget inspire unique vision (think ‘invention is the mother of necessity’)?
- How do the women portrayed in these films fall outside of stereotypes of women we commonly see on commercial film or television screens?
- What formal techniques does the filmmaker use in *Street Harassment* to convey the physical threats women might feel in public spaces?
- Could these works have been made without a woman at the helm?
- Is the act of being a woman filmmaker a political one?

**(7). Genre, Hybridity, and Feminist Revisions: A Western? Documentary? Comedy?**

**Point for Discussion:** Audiences come to films with expectations. Filmmakers have the opportunity to reinvent old genres, combine disparate elements, and create new stories and formal systems. Feminist filmmakers often subvert familiar tropes to critique norms.

**Questions or jumping offpoints for discussion:**



**Genre: forms for story-telling**

- *WHTC* was called “the first all-women cast and crew western.” What are your genre expectations when you hear a film described as a “western”? Be specific.
- Did the film meet these genre expectations? Why or why not? Be specific.
- What do you make of the film’s absence of men?
- What does the idea of traveling west suggest?
- How do you define “documentary” filmmaking?
- Do you consider *WHTC* a documentary?
- Are there moments of humor within the film?
- What effect does the conjunction of generic elements create? Is this a real world? A fantasy world?

## **SUGGESTED ASSIGNMENTS/ACTIVITIES**

### ***Activity #1 – Individual writing activity***

- How do you define “feminism”?
- Are you a feminist?

### ***Activity #2 – Remaking WHTC Today***

- Could you create a remake of WHTC that would resonate with contemporary feminist discussions?
- What elements of the remake would remain the same?
- What would change?
- What characters and roles would be needed in the film?
- How would you costume it?
- What types of tropes and twists would you include?

## CONTRIBUTOR BIOS AND SPEAKER INFO

**Dr. Alexandra Juhasz** is Distinguished Professor of Film at Brooklyn College, CUNY. She makes and studies committed media practices that contribute to political change and individual and community growth. She is the author of *AIDS TV: Identity, Community and Alternative Video* (Duke University Press, 1995); *Women of Vision: Histories in Feminist Film and Video* (University of Minnesota Press, 2001); *F is for Phony: Fake Documentary and Truth's Undoing*, co-edited with Jesse Lerner (Minnesota, 2005); *Learning from YouTube* (MIT Press, 2011: co-edited with Alisa Lebow, *The Blackwell Companion on Contemporary Documentary* (2015); with Yvonne Welbon, *Sisters in the Life: 25 Years of African-American Lesbian Filmmaking* (Duke University Press, 2018); with Jih-Fei Cheng and Nishant Shahani, *AIDS and the Distribution of Crises* (Duke 2020); with Nishant Shah, *Really Fake!* (University on MN and Melos Presses, 2020); and *My Phone Lies to Me: Fake News Poetry Workshops as Radical Digital Media Literacy* (currently seeking a press). Dr. Juhasz is the producer of educational videotapes on feminist issues from AIDS to teen pregnancy as well as the feature fake documentaries *The Watermelon Woman* (Cheryl Dunye, 1997) and *The Owls* (Dunye, 2010). Her current work is on and about feminist Internet culture including fake news (<http://scalar.me/100hardtruths>) and Fake News Poetry Workshops ([fakenews-poetry.org](http://fakenews-poetry.org)), YouTube ([aljean.wordpress.com](http://aljean.wordpress.com)), and feminist pedagogy and community ([feministonlinespaces.com](http://feministonlinespaces.com) and [eventanglement.com](http://eventanglement.com)). With Anne Balsamo, she was founding co-facilitator of the network, FemTechNet: [femtechnet.org](http://femtechnet.org). Her most recent work is the podcast: We Need Gentle Truths for Now: <https://shows.acast.com/we-need-gentle-truths-for-now>.

**Dr. Shilyh Warren** is Associate Professor of Film Studies at the University of Texas at Dallas. Her research takes up debates in film history, feminist theory, documentary studies, and film theory. Her first book, *Subject to Reality: Women and Documentary* (University of Illinois Press, 2019) examines two key periods in the history of women's documentary filmmaking: the 20s-40s and the 1970s. The book makes the argument that women's nonfictional filmmaking has long struggled with the problems of realism and the politics of race. Her writing has also appeared in *Signs*, *Camera Obscura*, and *South Atlantic Quarterly*. Warren previously earned a PhD in Literature and a Certificate in Feminist Studies from Duke University as well as an MA in Comparative Literature from Dartmouth College. She's also curated feminist film programs in Durham, Dallas, and New York City.

**Kirsten Larvick** is a preservationist, archivist and filmmaker. She is Co-Chair of the Women's Film Preservation Fund of New York Women in Film & Television and serves on its Grants Selection Committee. WFPF is the only program in the world that works to preserve the cultural legacy of women in the motion picture industry through film preservation. In 2014, Kirsten founded the Al Larvick Fund and is its Executive Director. The organization's mission is to conserve, digitally capture and make accessible American analog home movies, amateur films and their related histories. As a consultant, she collaborates and strategizes with independent filmmakers to preserve, archive and revitalize individual titles and collected works.

**Sheila Paige** is a filmmaker, writer, and (sometime) illustrator. In partnership with Ariel Dougherty, she co-founded and co-directed the non-profit Women Make Movies, Inc. (1972-75)

At some point in the 1980's, a friend said, "Sheila, you have to have a way to earn your living." She became a script supervisor and member of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Moving Picture Technicians and Artists and Allied Crafts union (IATSE). A career began. She worked on features such as *King of Comedy*, *Good Fellas*, *Awakenings*, and *Quiz Show*, on TV movies, and on series such as *Orange is the New Black* and *Gossip Girl*.

Her independent projects include the movies in this guide and "Having your Cake" (four young women tell how they recovered from bulimia), and "Motherly Memoirs of the Bandit Queen" (NEA Bicentennial film grant project about Belle Starr, the 19<sup>th</sup> century Arkansas outlaw). For the Coalition of Labor Union Women, she teamed with the film-maker Susan Zeig on a film documenting woman moving into union leadership. Two years running, she was privileged to collaborate with Kristin Carlson, cyber maven and choreographer/artist/college teacher, in creating online, real-time digital theater productions for the yearly Upstage Festival, a 24-hour marathon of live online shows. She was, for a short, rewarding, but insufficiently remunerative time, a dog portrait photographer.

Retired from script supervising, she returns to her independent film-maker roots— creating videos, pursuing children's picture book writing, and writing/illustrating custom books for individual clients.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

**Ariel Dougherty**, co-founder of Women Make Movies, Inc., is an independent film-maker, feminist media strategist and activist. The authors of this guide heartily recommend her as a speaker to accompany any screenings of the movies in this collection. She has vivid recall of Women Make Movies in its early days when the organization's central operation was a community-based media workshop. She has mentored many fledgling women filmmakers and produced dozens of movies, amongst them *Healthcaring* (32m, 1976) and the award winning, *Women Art Revolution!* (83 mins, 2010) by Lynn Hershman. Films she's directed include *Sweet Bananas* (30 mins, 1973), a fanumentary about women of different classes and, most recently, *Running Dogs* (27 mins, 2020). She writes extensively about the intersection of women's media, media rights and funding, most recently for [Philanthropy Women](#). Her current book project centers upon 25 contemporary U.S. girl community film-making workshops, with a look back at parallel activities in the 1970s. <https://www.arieldougherty.com/>

**Tanya Goldman**, our notably effective consultant for the Guide's discussion section, is a PhD Candidate in Cinema Studies at New York University. Her research focuses on mid-20<sup>th</sup> century American filmmaking and distribution as a political practice. Her essays have appeared in publications such as *Cineaste* and *Film History*, and is forthcoming in the edited volume *InsUrgent Media from the Front: A Media Activism Reader* (Indiana University Press, 2020)

To enquire about speaker bookings [contact the filmmaker](#).

## REFERENCES

from Shilyh Warren's essay

- <sup>1</sup> B. Ruby Rich. *Chick Flicks: Theories and Memories of the Feminist Film Movement*. Durham: Duke UP, 1998. 63.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid, 21.
- <sup>3</sup> As quoted in Alexandra Juhasz, *Women of Vision: Histories in Feminist Film and Video*. Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 2001.
- <sup>4</sup> Allison Butler, in *Women's Cinema: The Contested Screen* (London: Wallflower, 2000) thus begins with a disclaimer about the unmanageable category she takes on: " 'Women's cinema' is a complex critical, theoretical, and institutional construction, brought into existence by audiences, film-makers, journalists, curators, and academics and maintained only by their continuing interest: a hybrid concept, arising from a number of overlapping practices and discourses, and subject to a baffling variety of definitions," 2.
- <sup>5</sup> Jan Rosenberg. "Women's Reflections: The Feminist Film Movement." *Studies in Cinema* 22. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983, 17.
- <sup>6</sup> Among the first full-length books published on the subject of women and the cinema were: *Women in Focus* (1974), Jeanne Betancourt's examination of films made by "filmmakers with a feminist consciousness" (xx), which includes details about how to rent and exhibit 16mm prints; and *Women's Films in Print* (1975) a directory of over 800 16mm films made by women, similarly intended to provide programmers and educators with details necessary for film exhibitions and discussions. These early texts stand out today for two reasons. First, because they do not assume a shared knowledge about feminist and women-made films, but rather estimate the need to generate interest in the new media and provide information about accessing the new materials. Secondly, these two texts in particular share the assumption that educators and film programmers will take steps to acquire and screen the newly available films. This focus on exhibition and shared viewing practices, without assumptions about shared knowledges, speaks to the activism and consciousness-raising enterprises of the Feminist Film Movement in the early seventies.