

Welcome to
**THE WOMEN'S HAPPY TIME
COMMUNE COLLECTION**

"The WOMEN'S HAPPY TIME COMMUNE Collection is, at once, a time capsule of the 1970's women's movement and painfully relevant, as the issues it highlights -- sexuality, gender fluidity and performance, socialization, street harassment, and anti-capitalism -- are among those that still define the work of contemporary feminism." (Shelby Knox)

**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 (1975)

16mm, color, sound, 11.5min

&

a 21st c. outlier—death; rebirth, 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 is 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.

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 is 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 nurtures it.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT/BACKGROUND

by Shilyh Warren

“... the origin and development of feminist film work are largely unexamined.” (B. Ruby Rich)ⁱ

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. This was an audience deeply invested in the new women’s movement. Women’s liberation had exploded in Chicago, evidenced by the numerous consciousness-raising groups throughout the area; Rich writes that this was “radical feminism, early seventies style”.ⁱⁱ 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.

The tension in the auditorium was palpable. Rich describes the tumult that 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.”ⁱⁱⁱ 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 1970’s, my proposed project met with 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, resistance to misogynist judges and media personalities, 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 1970s, 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.^{viii} 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.^{ix}

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.

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?^{xiv} 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. Such independent movies might shape history and mold art, culture, and social change, but without resources dedicated to preservation, voices from the independent margins vanish, leaving an incomplete and falsely narrowed slice of history and stylistic evolution.

Often financed on a shoestring, few of these independent works gain sufficient funding to ensure sustainable availability. And so, without availability, the legacy of women's film is impoverished and threatened by exclusion by historians.

Although women filmmakers began carving their cinematic path at the dawn of the industry, there were important shifts in the 1970s that spurred a resurgence in women led work. The growth of feminism unleashed creative energies of all kinds. Women artists 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, revealing both original and alternative narratives to mainstream cinema.

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 riches. The survival of this heritage, however, isn't guaranteed. To take it for granted is to allow for its rapid demise, leaving a few grains to represent a 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.

Like our now beloved silent era, which was shortsightedly considered of little value, only a fraction of what was created survives. Lois Weber (1879-1939) made over a hundred films (some would say "hundreds"). Weber was an auteur, creatively 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. A comparatively small number of titles are actually preserved and available to viewers through contemporary formats and platforms. Many are forever lost, destroyed, damaged beyond repair, or just exist in fragments—lost to us is the opportunity for more complete understanding of this important artist's development, growth, and impact due to the inability to see everything she made.

Fast forward to the 1970s, when much of the creative fervor behind work by women was coming out of independent filmmakers who, like Weber and others, explored the issues that affected them. 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 negatives and prints 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.

Today, our digital age's requirements for preservation and access entail an ever more active ongoing and expensive process. Films that are digitally produced have a high mortality rate; all formats come with an expiration date, and hard drives die in a heartbeat. There are countless stories of loss in every medium. As we all know well, reading about a film is important--- but to experience it is essential.

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 proteges look to as their guides? It's our responsibility to prevent further degradation of our cinematic document, and it's equally as 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.

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 as creators struggle to realize their stories, much less preserve them. Filmmakers should be able to monetize their entire portfolio throughout their lives because their work remains germane to contemporary viewers. How can filmmakers continue to create new work, continue to distribute and preserve previous work and make a living wage? 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; her work represents both Hollywood influence and flagrant resistance toward storytelling norms. It's for all these reasons and more that her films are important.

There are many motion pictures yet to rescue, and finding safe harbor demands tremendous resources. Retaining the scope and diversity in 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. 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.

FILM-MAKER'S STATEMENT

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

"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 to do next? —a western! I always liked westerns, and senior year in college, when I discovered daytime movie-going, I saw as many John Ford movies as possible. All at the same time, 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. Then they would help with 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." [Flo Kennedy].

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 1970's 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".

MENU

Of possible themes. Where do they take you?

Femininity, Feminism, Feminist
Beauty ideals
Body image

* Harassment *

Procreation → Masculinity
Gender roles

↳ Sexuality → Sexual identity
Social expectations

* Religious indoctrinations *

Anguish

Safety ↓ Liberté

activism - protest

Ageing ↓

Mortality

Play the game and win a prize! For rules of play [CONTACT THE FILMMAKER](#)

DISCUSSION POINTS

Video links and Questions

1) Movies are time-machines— magic carpets transporting us to earlier times and a different world. Movies are living primary historical documents.

Point for discussion: Why study “old movies”? And, what might be the value of studying other movies that introduce you to worlds different from your own—that feature people unlike yourself and with different goals? Conversely, in a world mostly dominated by the mainstream, what might a non-mainstream person experience in suddenly discovering the rare movie set in a world that mirrors her/his own and features characters like themselves?



Movies are time-machines...

Questions:

Do WHTC, Street Harassment, and testing, testing help you envision the past in new ways?

What do you see that you wouldn't see in Hollywood classics?

How does your experience watching the movies mesh with your experiences reading about the “2nd wave” women's movement of the 1960's and '70's?

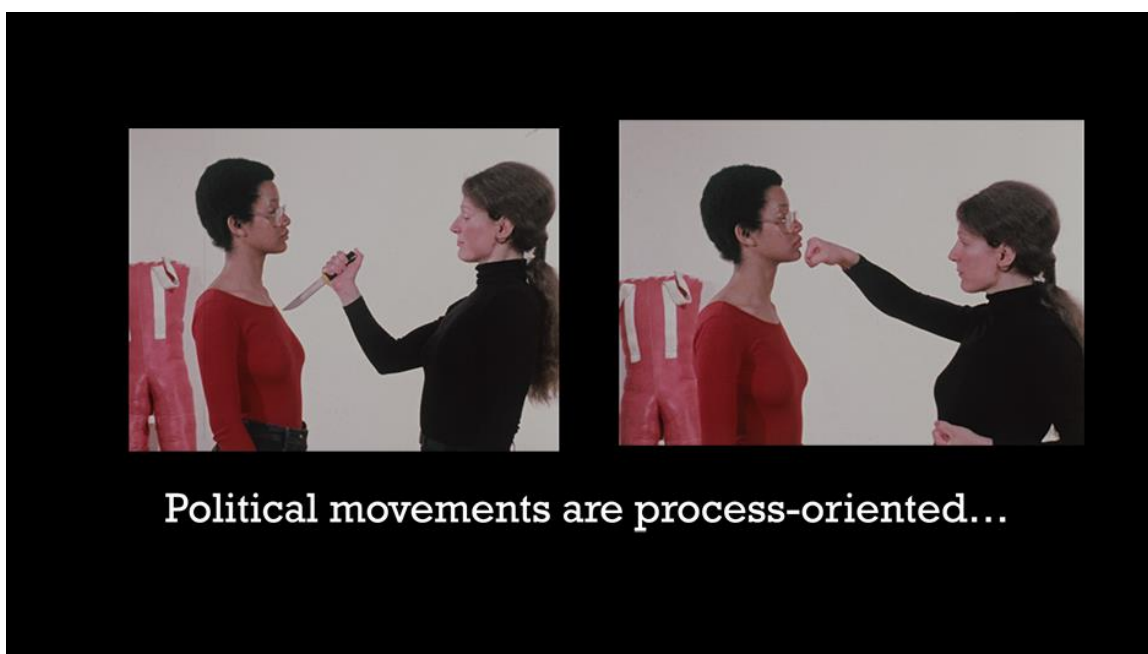
Do you relate to any of the subjects/characters in these films and/or what they discuss? Give examples.

Do you find value in being able to identify with characters in films? Describe those values. And do you find value in identifying with characters or subject matters in older movies? (*think “cultural foundation” and “cultural history” for those who historically fall outside of societal norms*)

Conversely, do you find any subjects/characters challenging to relate to? And if you don't relate, do you find compassion for any of the characters, even though their perspectives might differ from yours?

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

Point for discussion: Conversations and ideas explored in these films offer a bridge between past and present. They expand upon conversations built by first-wave feminists and establish a foundational language for future activists.



Questions:

What are some of the key ideas that the films' characters express in their discussions?

Be specific (i.e., specific dialogue, events depicted the films, etc.)

What are some specific examples of language used in these films that have evolved into contemporary parlance?

What topics explored within the films —feminism, sexuality, personal and/or political ideas — are relevant to you and/or your peers?

Can you name some ideas conveyed in the films that resonate with current socio-political conversations that we see in the news, on social media platforms, and in discussion among peers?

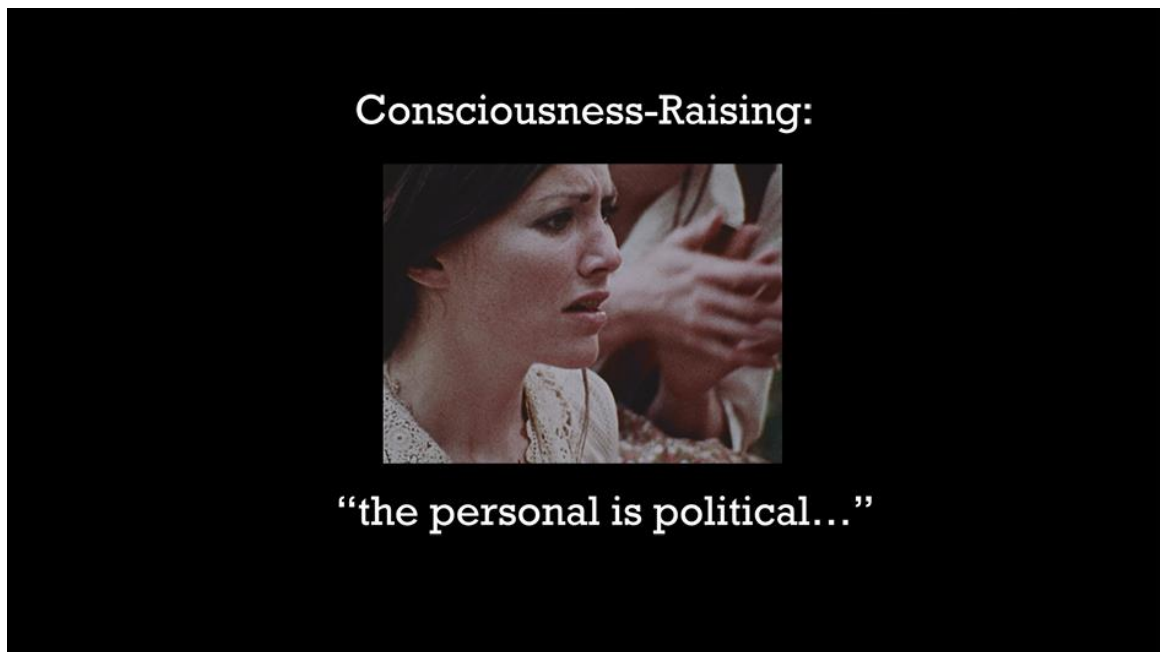
Are there ideas that feel outdated? Describe them and discuss how and why they feel antiquated.

Has digital activism changed the discourse around political movements in regard to tactics and strategies?

Can you name some examples of contemporary movies that address issues discussed in *WHTC* and *Street Harassment*?

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

Point for discussion: Open conversations amongst peers was and continues to be empowering. Women convening in groups and sharing experiences builds political consciousness and critical thinking.



Questions:

Can you identify moments of consciousness-raising in *WHTC* and *Street Harassment*?

What types of shared experiences emerge?

Do the conversations within the films advance beyond “the personal” to address broader structural inequalities?

How has consciousness raising evolved in the wake of the internet and social media? Is there benefit from the internet’s global reach—women all over the world sharing stories? Are there downsides and/or risks to digital consciousness raising?

Can you give contemporary examples of women centric, non-binary, and queer gatherings and safe spaces that nurture feminist conversations? Do you think these gatherings and spaces are necessary? And, do online spaces convey the same benefits as physical ones?

In discussions amongst contemporary women, are there topics that remain taboo or presumed prohibitive?

4) Feminism is fluid: it changes, and it's different amongst itself. There's not one feminism and there are many different feminist movements.

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:

What are some definitions of feminism as offered or discussed in *WHTC*?

How would you describe a feminist?

Do you identify as a "feminist"? What fits or doesn't fit? Are there other words, like womanist or Chicana feminist, that feel more appropriate to you and /or your peers??

What are some examples of ways to practice feminism?

Do you have to practice feminism to be a feminist?

Are there activities or political stances that you consider to be "anti-feminist"?

How have perceptions of feminism changed since *WHTC* was made?

5) Gendered expectations, and inclusion/exclusion

Point for Discussion: Women are not alone in experiencing the pressures of societal expectations and confinement based upon their gender. Men fall victim to certain norms around what it is to be "masculine" and other myths around their gender. Transgender and nonbinary people are also caught between a host conflicting societal pressures, and many face bigotry and violence for expressing their identity. Moreover, gender identities cannot be considered in isolation as they intersect with race, class, sexuality, immigration status, and more.



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

Questions:

What are some examples of societal expectations imposed upon men?

Can you name some stereotypes about men and masculinity?

How might such stereotypes impact the lives of non-binary and trans people?

Consider another social minefield—race: How does race impact your relationship to feminism and fellow feminists?

Does racial privilege have the potential to warp feminist goals and actions?

Are certain voices marginalized within or excluded from the current feminist movement?

Were particular voices excluded from the 2nd wave feminist movement?
...and what about the films in this collection?

Should inclusivity be a feminist goal? Or, how might it be a necessary component for success in achieving goals?

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

Point for discussion: “Form and content in filmmaking becomes political (or “radical”?) when made by and about people outside of the landscape of mainstream cinema.” Stories told from a women’s point-of-view constitute acts of dissidence.



Women as film-makers: a political act?

Questions:

In *WHTC* 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/or 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 we commonly see in advertisements, in commercial films or on 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?

Could these works be made today?

Where is humor employed in *TWHTC* and *Street Harassment*? Is it effective? Why or why not?

Was being a woman filmmaker considered a political act at the time these films were made? How about now?

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.



Genre: forms for story-telling

Questions:

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 this, or other, genre expectations? Why, or why not? Be specific. What other genres or cinematic disciplines might *WHTC* fit into?

Would the film be better if it had included a man? If so, what kind of role would he play?

What did the idea of traveling west suggest at the time the film was made? What, in the context of your culture, evokes the same feelings?

How do you define “documentary” filmmaking? Is *WHTC* a documentary?

Describe a scene within one of these films that employs comedy. Does this approach advance the story and its themes? If so, how? Does the use of comedy here engage the audience in valuable ways beyond entertainment?

If the movie seems a hybrid of different genres, how might you write the recipe?

As the characters circle about a future only imagined, does the movie deliver a sense of truth about the future of feminism? If so, what truths?

SUGGESTED ASSIGNMENTS/ACTIVITIES

Activity #1– Remaking WHTC Today

Individually or as a group, come up with a concept for a contemporary version of *Women's Happy Time Commune*. Below are some questions to get you started.

- 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?

Activity # 2 – Remaking Street Harassment Today

Street harassment & other forms of sexual violence are issues society is still reckoning with today. Individually or as a group, remake *Street Harassment* in the #MeToo era by combining documentary and fiction elements.

- Could you create a remake of *Street Harassment* 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?

BIOS & SPEAKER CONTACTS

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: <https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/learning-youtube>); 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 of 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), and feminist pedagogy and community (feministonlinespaces.com and ev-ent-anglement.com). With Anne Balsamo, she was founding co-facilitator of the network, FemTechNet: [femtech.net.org](http://femtech.net). Her most recent work is the podcast: We Need Gentle Truths for Now: [https://shows.acast.com/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, preservationist and film-maker, 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. Kirsten is the Founder and Executive Director of the Al Larvick Fund. 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 filmmakers to preserve, archive, revitalize and exhibit their body of work.

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 19th 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.

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-20th 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)

Shelby Knox is nationally known as the subject of the Sundance award-winning film, *THE EDUCATION OF SHELBY KNOX*, a 2005 documentary chronicling her teenage activism for comprehensive sex education and gay rights in her Southern Baptist community. She emerged from her experience as a documentary subject with a strong commitment to harnessing the power of personal stories to demonstrate the macro and micro impact of injustice and then guiding people to engage in the fight for equality in a way that makes most sense for them. She is formerly the Director of Women’s Rights at [change.org](#), and designed the partnerships program for MoveOn’s *Real Voter Voices* during the 2018 midterms. She ran the first ever outreach campaign for a Netflix original film, *AUDRIE & DAISY*, and served as impact producer on *YOUNG LAKOTA, THE DILEMMA OF DESIRE*, and the forthcoming *BEI BEI*.

For speaker availability please contact Sheila Paige via www.sheilapaigefilms.com/contact

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- i B. Ruby Rich. *Chick Flicks: Theories and Memories of the Feminist Film Movement*. Durham: Duke UP, 1998. 63.
- ii *Ibid.* 21.
- iii Alexandra Juhasz. *Women of Vision: Histories in Feminist Film and Video*. Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 2001.
- viii 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.
- ix Jan Rosenberg. "Women's Reflections: The Feminist Film Movement." *Studies in Cinema* 22. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983, 17.
- xiv See also: Alexandra Juhasz, "They Said We Were Trying to Show Reality—All I Want to Show Is My Video: The Politics of the Realist Feminist Documentary." *Collecting Visible Evidence*. 190-215; Janet Walker and Diane Waldman, *Feminism and Documentary*. Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 1999; E. Ann Kaplan, "Interview with British Cine-Feminists" in *Women and the Cinema: A Critical Anthology*. Eds. Karyn Kay and Gerald Peary. New York: Dutton, 1977; Rich, "In the Name of Feminist Film Criticism," *Multiple Voices in Feminist Film Criticism*. Eds. Diane Carson, Linda Dittmar and Janice R. Welsch. Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 1991; Christine Gledhill, "Recent Developments in Feminist Film Theory." *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 3.4 (1978): 457-493.