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"White Slavery" Versus the Ethnography of "Sexworkers":
Women in Stag Films at the Kinsey Archive

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“WHITE SLAVERY” VERSUS THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF “SEXWORKERS”

L I N D A W I L L I A M S

Women in Stag Films

at the Kinsey Archive



In February 2003 I was invited to give a talk on women in stag films at the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction at Indiana University. This talk was part of the fiftieth anniversary celebration of Alfred C. Kinsey's book, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, the controversial 1953 sequel to his groundbreaking 1948 volume *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. Organizers invited a number of lectures on topics of female sexual behavior and representation. My talk was appended to a screening of four stag films from the Kinsey Institute Film Archive. This "historical stag collection," which now includes 1,697 8mm and 16mm black-and-white titles, is the heart of the Kinsey film archive.¹ To my knowledge this was the first time the Kinsey Institute had engaged in a public screening of any part of its stag collection.

Stag films are anonymously made, short, undated silent films displaying one or more hard-core sex acts.² These uncredited, or bogusly credited, films flourished in an underground circuit in the United States and internationally during that extended period between the teens and the early 1970s before moving image pornography became quasi-licit. From the teens through the early fifties, they were shot and distributed on 16mm and presented by traveling road-show men to lodges, fraternities, and smokers. The showmen set up the projector and brought the films. However, Eric Schaefer has recently argued that, in the post–World War II period, as smaller 8mm gauge films and projectors came into use, the traveling road show slowly died. It became possible for individuals to purchase 8mm films for home or party viewing through bars, gas stations, photography shops, barber shops, and even through the mail.³ The Kinsey stag collection is composed of both types of films, many of poor quality, either because they are dupes of dupes or because, to begin with, they were never of good quality. In the past decade they have been transferred to video for screening on the Kinsey Institute premises at Indiana University.

It may seem a little odd for the Kinsey Institute to have celebrated “Women and Their Sexualities,” as this lecture series was called, with a lecture-screening of hard-core stag films made by and for men.

However, Kinsey film archivist Rachael Stoeltje chose four films from the collection that were unusually marked by what she called “women-in-charge” themes and that thus seemed appropriate to the celebration of Kinsey’s famous book on women’s sexual behavior. I was especially eager to offer the talk for the opportunity to revisit the Kinsey archives. Frankly, I was also eager to see how the Kinsey Institute would handle this public campus screening. For while the Institute has been instrumental in preserving this excoriated and neglected heritage of cinematic and sexual history, they had never, to my knowledge, organized a public exhibition of these once entirely clandestine materials. Indeed, they had more than once refused to reproduce copies for teaching purposes, let alone public lectures. How would they choose, and frame, this screening?

The Kinsey Institute Archive is unique in the world. In addition to his interview-based research that relied upon the taking of sexual histories, Kinsey collected anything pertaining to sex: books (scholarly and popular), photos (art, ethnography, dirty pictures), art (drawings, paintings, and the proverbial etchings), films (hard-core stag films, art films, and the films of sexual acts that Kinsey himself had made in his famous attic), and ephemera (phalluses,⁴ decorative condoms, sadomasochistic paraphernalia, and so

on).⁵ One of the great delights of doing research in the Kinsey Archive is its spirit of inclusion. No item is too obscene, too ridiculous, too rare to be excluded.

Filmed sexual activity was valued by Kinsey first and foremost as a record of sexual behavior. This, rather than an interest in the art of film or even the genre of pornography, was Kinsey's main reason for collecting preexisting sex films.⁶ Gathered primarily in the heyday of the institute's collecting frenzy (between 1948 and 1956, when funds from the sale of the two volumes on sexual behavior generated large revenues), the stag films were purchased, or rented and copied, from illicit exhibitors.⁷ They were also donated by private collectors as well as police departments. One of the most interesting features of the stag collection is the handwritten coded description of the sexual acts contained in each film, only about half of which make any sense to the uninitiated.

Rachael Stoeltje kindly sent me video copies of the four films she had chosen for screening. They are: *Modern Pirates* (ca. 1930s), about the captain of a yacht and the five female pirates he services sexually until he becomes exhausted and jumps ship; *A Free Ride* (ca. 1923)⁸ about a man who picks up two women in his Model T and then has a sexual party with them in the woods; *Getting His Goat* (aka *On the Beach*; ca. 1925), about a man who steals the clothes of three women skinny dipping at the beach and bargains for sex through a knot in a fence in return for their clothes. The tables are turned, however, when a goat is substituted for a woman. Finally, *Bring 'em Back Nude* is a 1930s-era film depicting the erotic jungle-inspired daydreams of a woman who dreams about a gorilla who guards two naked white females. Just as the action heats up and the natives get restless, the woman is awakened from her dream (there is no hard-core action in this film).

After a brief introduction and warning that all persons under 18 should leave the room, the films described above were shown and my talk on them followed. Though geared to the films in the program, I made a point of discussing and showing clips from a number of other, more misogynist films in order to counterbalance the rather rosy and relatively soft-core representation of women in stag films that were offered up in the program.⁹ The excerpts that I screened were not obtained from the Kinsey Institute Archive, although all of them were contained in it. The screening and talk occurred without incident and I was happy to have played my role in helping the Kinsey Institute present, via a scholarly talk, the exhibition of this small portion of its stag collection to a public audience.¹⁰ The following is a revised version of my talk. I use the occasion of this publication in *The Moving Image* to reflect upon the question of which films to show from the stag film archive, the problem of representation of women in them, and the larger question of this ambivalent and fascinating film heritage, the most "orphaned" of orphan films.

WOMEN IN STAG FILMS

Stag films offer something of the excitement and potential of all early cinema—the excitement and potential of a time before cinema became streamlined and efficient. In recording what happens in front of the camera when human bodies have sex, some spark of the friction—some spontaneous, unrehearsed movement—can sometimes be captured. Compared to the perfect bodies and highly professional, but often rote, performances of today’s pornography distributed on video, DVD, and the Internet, whether gay or straight, stag films can occasionally offer what Tom Waugh has called “chance flickers of documentary ‘truth’ in this paradoxical, primitive, and innocent art form” (Waugh 1996, 278). These illicit “orphans” certainly warrant repeated viewings as we try to evaluate their heritage and place in contemporary culture. But how shall we approach this archive of film for men from the point of view of the female performers in them?

In 1976 Al Di Lauro and Gerald Rabkin published a book called *Dirty Movies: An Illustrated History of the Stag Film*. Written soon after pornography had emerged from the shadows into the public arena of legitimate theaters, it was a rather nostalgic celebration of the ritual role stag screenings had played in the initiation into manhood of several generations of American men. It was an important book for its illustrated assertion that a body of stag films existed and needed attention. It was a sexist book for its attempts to defend pornography by arguing that women were not unduly objectified in stag films, that they were, in fact, the films’ true subjects. Confusing the scrutiny of the female, whose body is the important “subject” of the films, with subjectivity itself, Di Lauro and Rabkin were vulnerable to feminist attack. And that is exactly what they got from me in a 1989 chapter on stag films in my book on hard-core pornography, which argued that

any discussion of the pleasure of stag films needs to be factored into the question of the power of women to represent themselves and their sexualities in this entirely male-dominated form

(Williams 1989). The simple fact that women’s bodies were present or that they themselves often initiated the sex acts depicted in the filmic scenario was not an argument for the portrayal of female subjectivity.

Heterosexual pornography is conventionally considered to be the place for the display of the female body. Much writing by feminists about this pornography (both from pro- and anticensorship perspectives) has been about the uses and abuses of the female body in serving the power and pleasure of men. Recently, however, the gay critic and historian Thomas Waugh (1996) has pointed out that heterosexual pornography, including

that of stag films, is also about the display of male bodies to men. Straight pornography, then, has a homosocial, and even homoerotic, component. These films rather insistently seek to explore what the title of a stag film from the twenties calls the "wonders of the unseen world"—the hidden secrets of female anatomy that proper heterosexual males were at least supposed to be obsessed with in a prepornographic era. However, what these films actually end up featuring, either to their viewers' great interest or to their embarrassment, is the penis.¹¹ Waugh thus describes a viewing situation that comprises "men getting hard pretending not to watch men getting hard watching images of men getting hard watching or fucking women" (Waugh 2001, 280). For him, the really significant impact of stag films was the degree to which they may actually have undermined the "monolithically uniform masculinity" they ostensibly wanted to enforce. He cites, for example, the "traumatized silence" he experienced on seeing the famous fifties-era stag *Smart Aleck* with his "dormitory peers in 1968 and the queer difference I and others must have felt" (ibid., 281).

It makes good sense, then, to discuss, as Waugh does, the homosocial element of these films, made by men for men, that enact ritual exchanges of, and pleasures taken in, women. But homoerotic and homosocial pleasures are not the whole story of stag films, and if we focus only on them, we may too willfully ignore the female body that functions as the ostensible attraction of such films. So with the caveat that women were never the intended audience for these films, but with the urge nevertheless to think about their subjectivity and performativity as circumscribed within a larger system of male power, let us consider the possibilities, and limits, of female agency in stag films from the Kinsey Archive.

From the perspective of female agency, it is important to realize that the four films chosen to be screened by the Kinsey Institute to reveal strong, "women-in-charge" themes are about as good as it gets in stag films. The narratives of these films pointedly do not depict the relatively common scenario in this era of hard-core films in which women are coerced to please men.¹² Rather, they depict the camaraderie of women having a good time with one another, sometimes along with a man or, as in *Getting His Goat* and *Modern Pirates*, at the expense of a man. In other words, these are stag films even a feminist might be able to enjoy and it is not accidental that, in this instance, they were chosen to please a contemporary mixed-gender audience.

Indeed, two of the stag films in this program—*A Free Ride* and *Getting His Goat*—have earned a sort of pride of place in the poorly duped stag film anthologies that circulate on video today.¹³ The popularity of these two films may have a lot to do with the fact that they place their displays of female nudity and sex acts in "nature" as opposed



The “modern pirates” romp on the beach. *Modern Pirates* (ca. 1930s).

to the often depressing and stifling furnished rooms and hotel rooms so common in many stag films. The third film, *Modern Pirates*, is notable for some nice outdoor photography when its five women who have pirated the captain’s yacht romp on the beach of an island. (This film’s hard-core footage is cinematically distinct from the rest and has most likely been inserted from an entirely different film.) *Bring ‘em Back Nude* also stresses the great outdoors of the African jungle and is an exceptionally well-shot and well-produced film that, despite its interest as a female racial-sexual fantasy, does not seem to belong to the stag genre at all since it has no hard-core footage.¹⁴ The “wild” outdoor settings of all of these films simply look better than those set in ill-lit and depressingly similar hotel rooms. The bodies of the women romping on the beach in both beach films, or prancing about the depleted man in *A Free Ride*, are enhanced by a play of light and shadow that seems a gratuitous boon, not necessary to the genre’s mission of bodily and genital display, but all the more wonderful for that very reason.

These open-air settings, these “wide open spaces where men are men,” as an intertitle from *A Free Ride* puts it, posit the existence of places of momentary sexual “freedom,” where it is “natural” to strip. This is precisely what each of the five female sailors who boards the captain’s yacht in *Modern Pirates* does once they are beyond the “three mile limit.” And it is what the three women who go skinny-dipping at Idyllwilde beach also do in *Getting His Goat*, before the man spying on them takes their clothes and insists on sex. In a much more circumscribed way, it is also what the man in *A Free Ride*

does after picking the women up in his Model T. Spying on the man peeing in the bushes, the two women are interested and, as another intertitle puts it, "the party is on." It is also the "natural" freedom of the jungle where women, white and black, are naked that feeds the titillated imagination of the dreaming woman in *Bring 'em Back Nude*. In short, these films, among the most idyllic in the entire Kinsey stag collection, all depict places in nature where sex might take place with abandon.

Of course when the women strip in these films, they are stripping for the view of men. The simple fact that absolutely none of the male bodies strip as completely or frolic in nature with the same abandon as the female bodies suggests the erotic limits of such films: if the penis is crucial and must be shown to confirm that actual penetration in the "meat" shot does take place, the rest of the male body is under no such similar compulsion to be put on display. Indeed, not only do the men not strip, but, common to all stag films, many wear false mustaches, masks, and false noses to disguise their identities.¹⁵ Although a few women wear disguises too, men seem to cover up all the more as the women become naked.

In keeping with his thesis, Waugh argues that such covering up is a defense against homoerotic temptation. If the penis must be there to confirm hard-core action, to delight in the display of the rest of the male body poses a danger to the heterosexual identity of the male viewer and so, except for some rare moments, little delight is taken. But I think there is more to it than this. Stag films so consistently fail to care about the physical beauty of their male performers that it often seems that part of the pleasure proffered by the film is the spectacle of women having sex with such frankly unlovely men.

The scrawny, short man with a patently fake mustache who picks up the two women in *A Free Ride* and has sex with each of them, the overweight captain who pursues the naked female sailors in *Modern Pirates* and brings them back, the daydreamer with glasses on the beach in *Getting His Goat*, all suggest that the pleasures of stag films may have been originally founded on a different sort of spectacle than that of the unrealistically endowed male bodies of contemporary porn performers. In these earlier pornographic films, the pleasure of watching seems to lie at least partly in the revelation of randiness in the balding, fat, scrawny, short men with (often) very ordinary penises.

Although the men in these films reveal unexpected appetites, they remain quite human. They are not at all the perfect sex machines found in contemporary incarnations, and they almost never display their bodies the way the women do.



A typical plot terminates sex by showing a man who simply wears out: the plump captain in charge of the bevy of beauties on the boat in *Modern Pirates*, leaves

the boat because he is expected to be a stud for the pleasure of the women: his exit line is "I'm a captain and not a stud horse." Where a more contemporary porn film would celebrate the male prowess that meets demand in John Holmesian fashion, here such a demand is presented as reason to abandon ship.

The scrawny, clothed man with the fake mustache that almost falls off is on the right. The woman is on the left.
A Free Ride (ca. 1923).

Waugh's argument would interpret the frequent unloveliness of these "stag" men as a defense against homoerotic pleasure. I wonder, however, if this unloveliness does not also represent a kind of punishment on the women for having sex in the first place? Some stag films seem to insist on rubbing the woman's face in the presumed dirt of sex as if it was funny. Consider another film in the Kinsey stag collection, *The Passionate Farmhand* (ca. 1920s), not shown in this public screening but also in the Kinsey archive. In it a woman named Lena visits her farmhand boyfriend, Rufus, who invites her to a "Speak Easy." While there he slips her a mickey and shows her what a title card calls "the old candle trick but in a modernized way called flaming youth." He then inserts a candle in her vagina and another in her anus and lights both. Later she wipes his anus before rimming him, remarking in another title card: "You must have had spinach for dinner." The film ends with Rufus peeing on Lina in the bathtub. Such a film offers the reverse of the idyllic, women-in-charge frolics screened by the Kinsey Institute at my lecture. Or consider any number of films that delight in deploying the derogatory slang that



goes along with sex: *Loaded Dice* is full of it: A fully-clothed man strokes a woman's naked behind. When he enters her, a title informs us that he is "drilling for oil," then that he has "struck a gusher." Vaseline is used after he hits a "dry hole."

The Captain brings the "modern pirates" back to his yacht. *Modern Pirates* (ca. 1930s).

I mention these decidedly less pastoral, more misogynist films because I think that

if we want to understand the humor of stags, it is important not to assume that they are necessarily subversive of male power.

A number of recent scholars have suggested that the study of pornography in general and stag films in particular would benefit from a greater appreciation of their humor. Film critic Peter Lehman (1995), for example, has argued that my own discussion of pornography overlooks the "fleeting moments of humor in porn" (8), which is entirely true. Feminist film and culture critic Constance Penley goes further. She writes:

To me and to the students in a course I teach on pornography as a popular American film genre, the most striking feature of the films we survey, beginning in 1896, is the ubiquitous use of humor, and not just any kind of humor, but bawdiness, humorously lewd and obscene language and situation. (Penley 1997, 94)

Penley adds that stag films especially are “often structured like a joke. And here we are talking about really bad jokes, ranging from terrible puns to every form of dirty joke—farmer’s daughter, traveling salesman, and aggie jokes” (95). Penley excludes the short peepshow loops, which consisted of earnestly direct views of sexual action with little setup and no story, but she insists that “the majority of the few hundred American stag films made for collective male viewing depended on this popular brand of humor”—especially, she notes, in the pre–World War II era.

Both Penley and Lehman are right, I think, to point to the uses of humor in pornography. However, I am not sure that we do a service to the modest field of porn studies by characterizing the whole of pornography or even the “pre–World War II films that were made on the edges of the entertainment world and thus shared the qualities of both burlesque and silent film comedy” (Penley 95) as humorous, even bad-joke humor, especially if we assume, along with this assessment, that the joke is often on the man. Penley importantly argues for the need to establish a new terrain for valuing pornography as a form of folk humor and for understanding the class resentments embedded in that humor. However, her re-evaluation is based on highly selective examples at which women viewers today can comfortably laugh and ignores the less comfortable examples in which the joke is on the woman.

For example, Penley argues that part of the humor in stag films comes from the fact that it is the women who both initiate and, as Penley says, “set the terms” for sex. Thus *Getting His Goat* illustrates “both the kind of humor and the level of commen-



The daydreamer on the beach holds hostage the clothes of three naked women. *Getting His Goat* (ca. 1925).

tary on masculinity found in the typical stag film of the era" (95). The women, she maintains, offer a "charming mischievousness" while the man deserves what he gets because "of his sexual and social ignorance," and the final moral, "There's one born every minute," is a "cautionary address to the male audience not to be fools to their own desires" (96).

Penley invites us to connect the tradition of humorous stag films to an older tradition of dirty songs and limericks and to a low-class tradition of mocking the mores of professional and bourgeois classes in which female agency is often strong. I think it is important to open up this discussion of the class dimensions of pornography (and Penley does so, appropriately, in the context of a volume entitled *White Trash: Race and Class in America*). However, if the very fact that women perform sex, or cleverly negotiate the ways in which they give it, is itself the source of the humor, then we must remember that it is only so in a world that normally thinks women's pleasure in sex, or savvy about it, is either strange or wrong.

If we want to cast stag films as part of the lost history of American folk humor we do well to realize that technically all stag films qualify as humorous to the degree that they put in play a Rabelaisian reversal of the usual norms of decorum. It is considered funny that women want and initiate sex in a world where, as the men in the era of illicit stag screenings probably believed, sex is scarce and the women who initiate it often do so for money. But on whom is the joke in this case? Penley wants us to see that it is on the man, which is literally true in *Getting His Goat*, her primary example. In this film, not only does the man have sex with a goat through the knothole of a fence, thinking he has coerced a woman to have sex in exchange for the return of her stolen clothes, but later, when he encounters the group of women on the beach again, the women "get his goat" again by faking pregnancy and extorting money.

However, it would be a mistake to take the joke of this particular film as typical of all stag films or even of those low forms of bawdiness typical of folk humor. At least as typical, I would argue, is the joke about Lena and the farmhand, or the joke I will describe below about the Klansman and the black woman. Jokes, especially tendentious ones, often have very precise gender, class, and race targets. In stag films, as well as most later hard-core moving-image pornography, sexual urges trump the prohibitions that govern polite society. To the extent that sexual urges in pornography tend to overcome the usual divisions that separate classes, races, and even species, they may seem subversive. As in musicals, primitive urges and rhythms override the taboos of civilization. But this does not mean that the obstacles that separate genders, classes, races (and even species) are not also reasserted, often in insidious ways.

If *Getting His Goat* offers a piece of Rabelaisian bawdy humor in which women literally and figuratively get the man's goat, extorting money from him to boot, we should not then reassess the whole of stag cinema as subversive folk humor on the basis of this one film that deftly manages to make bestiality funny even to a female audience. The recent popularity of this film in college classrooms and at public screenings—it also figured prominently in Di Lauro and Rabkin's illustrated history—attests to the fact that it is perhaps the only one of quite a few films with bestial themes that is palatable to today's audiences.¹⁶ One is also quite relieved to discover, for example, despite the implication in the plot that the man on the beach has sex with a goat as a kind of punishment for his extortion, that we never actually see the sort of insertion shots or sexual acts in the same frame that are the *sine qua non* of hard-core, at least not with the goat.

Penley argues that stag films and, by extension, similarly low-class forms of pornography in the later era of video porn in the eighties, after the heyday of "porno chic" in the early and mid-seventies, have an element of subversion because they depict female agency.¹⁷ Yet the agency she points to is always part of the joke: "proper" women do not seek or lustfully engage in sex with strangers; the women who do so are always compromised. The very fact that women, presumed to be more chaste than men, are lustfully having sex with these strangers—the plumber who comes to fix the pipes, the dentist who pulls the tooth, the perennial doctor who must look at private parts, or, as in our examples, the idle man on the beach, the random man with the car, or the captain of the ship—does, indeed, seem to be half the joke.

We should consider that the women depicted in this particular film exhibit something more than what Penley calls "charming mischievousness"—they exhibit, rather, a kind of calculation, and blasé manipulation. For example, the woman who orchestrates the goat substitution first collects the man's money and then efficiently warms up his penis manually through the knothole in the fence while her friends bring the goat. In other words, as Tom Waugh has astutely noted, the women who so brazenly jiggle their breasts, wiggle their hips, and manipulate penises are often, in real life as well as on the screen, professionals, while the men who are so awkwardly hidden under those mustaches, masks, and so many more clothes are often, in real life as well as on the screen, amateurs. Waugh writes: "The 'hooker' presides over the entire corpus of stags . . . inflected by the familiar hypocritical class-centric contempt for the working girl" (2001, 285).¹⁸

So there certainly is Rabelaisian humor in stag cinema. However, if it is raunchy and bawdy, if it has aspects of the systematically pointed class antagonism and resentment that Laura Kipnis (1996), for example, attributes to the more recent phenomenon of *Hustler* magazine, it does not then automatically place itself on the side of the women,



Through the knothole of the fence the woman efficiently warms up the penis for the awaiting goat. *Getting His Goat* (ca. 1925).

the lower classes, and the racially marked. Rather, as Tom Waugh has suggested, following Kinsey and Gagnon and Simon's earlier work, audiences (at the Elks Club or American Legion) tended to be class homogenous themselves and to consist of "upper-lower and lower-middle" classes who take out their class antagonism on women lower down on the social scale than themselves, especially prostitutes (Waugh 2001, 286).

THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF "SEXWORKERS"

The women in stag films know how to perform for the man as well as for the camera. The men, comparatively, do not. This does not mean, however, that the women therefore have more power. As Tom Waugh notes, "the female performers were undoubtedly assumed by the audience to be sexworkers—and most clearly often were as much, just as their inept male partners were assumed to be and were visibly amateurs" (285). This is why, I believe, the men are more often seen hiding themselves.

In the context of the stag film, then, the woman is in control but only in the way the prostitute is in control in order to better serve the john who hires her.

Thus the “charming mischievousness” we observe in *Getting His Goat* may well come from the fact that these particular women did not have to “work” in the usual way; the goat does it for them.

Although in most films the prostitute-john relation is implicit, a few films depict, and even name, this interaction between whore and client for what it is. In *A Country Stud Horse* (ca. 1920s), another Kinsey film that I have discussed at length elsewhere, an early title states, “Mary picks up some business.” We then see Mary pick up a john (Williams 1989; 1995). In *Easy Money* a punning title informs us that a girl having sex in a college dorm room is “working her way through college.” In a more contemporary porno we might think that the girl is the college student and the men with whom she has sex help fund her education. In this case, however, the then all-male Ivy League institution whose sign is on the wall (Yale) could only mean that the intertitle is a pun.

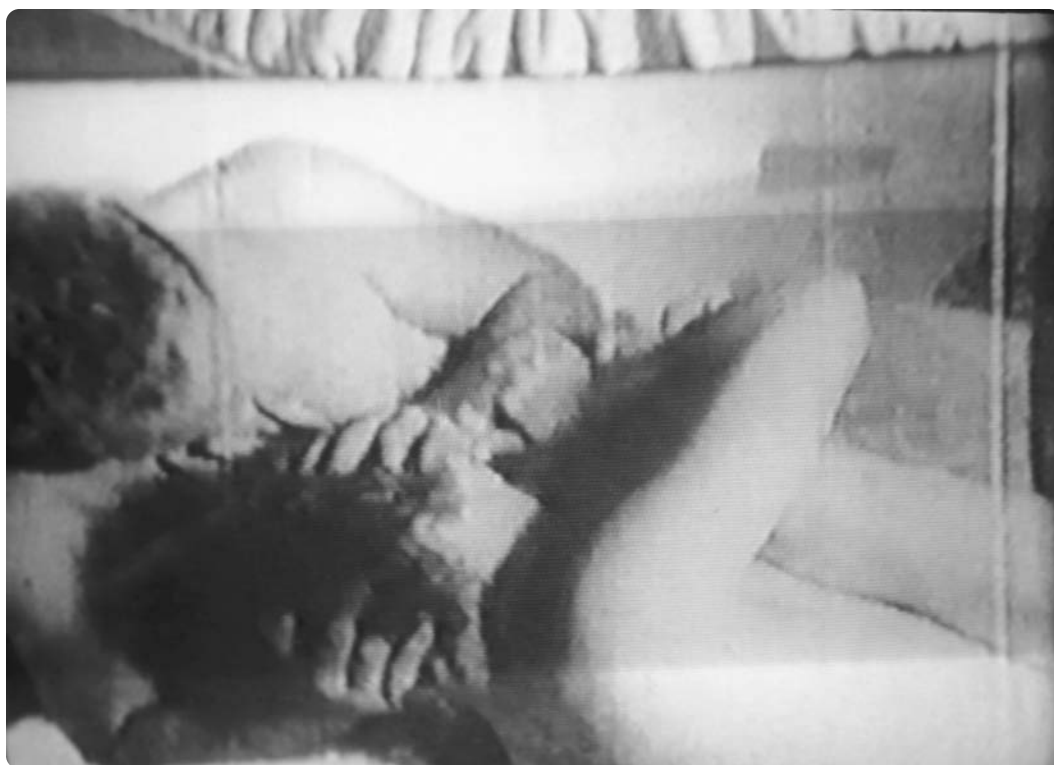
Another Kinsey Archive film, *The Pay Off* (ca. 1950s), is dramatically structured around the tension over money between a man who may be a pimp and a woman who may be a whore. In an opening scene a well-dressed man asks a woman, “Did you bring the money?” and grows angry when it appears not to be enough. The man then grabs the woman’s purse and an intertitle says, “I ought to take it out on you.” “You’re afraid to!” she retorts. In a sex scene that is extraordinarily arty in its play of shadows, at least for a stag film, we then see how this situation is resolved—with sex of course, but with sex acts that are aggressively negotiated over money. This film would thus indeed seem to be an example of Penley’s female agency. The woman not only prevails in the argument, she quite boldly takes a break between sex acts to take money from the man’s coat and put it in her pocketbook before returning to the bed. Once again, however, this agency is that of the professional who knows what she is worth on the market and insists on her price, just as the women in *Getting His Goat* do.

Whatever female agency we witness in stag films is very often circumscribed by the fact that in them the woman is selling herself in a way that the men are not

and that, as Waugh points out, there is always a greater contempt for the seller than for the buyer (2001, 286). This is true even in films that do not directly, as in *Getting His Goat*, *Easy Money*, or *The Pay Off*, show an exchange of money. Thus, in *The Casting Couch* (ca. 1920s), the actress who wants a role but refuses the advances of the casting director, reads in a book, *How to Become a Star*, that she should comply with the casting director. She does and the film’s final title puns, “the only way to become a star is to get under a good director and work your way up.” Sex, like money, is clearly a medium of exchange. Penley

argues that this film mocks the professional classes, and while this is certainly the case, Waugh's argument that the woman is portrayed as a professional herself, but one who is despised by a "gynephobic and erotophobic culture," is also relevant (Waugh 2001, 286). The logic of the dirty joke is thus often quite punitive to the woman.

Penley also argues that one of the best-known stag films of all time, *Smart Aleck* (ca. 1951–1953), demonstrates female agency when its then sixteen-year-old star, Candy Barr, refuses to perform fellatio on a man who had picked her up at the motel pool. Penley writes, "she gets up in disgust and calls a female friend who does want to have oral sex with the man. While that's going on, Candy gets back into the scene to get the man to go down on her" (97). Because it is "the woman who orchestrates the sexual activity," because she induces the man to "go down on her," she argues, the film illustrates "female agency" (97). While I suppose I could be pleased that *Smart Aleck* stopped short of showing Barr being forced to perform fellatio, I would emphasize that what we actually see is a prolonged tussle in which the man repeatedly tries to hold her mouth over his penis and she wriggles out. It is the man who then gets up in disgust, and then Candy phones her friend. Once again the agency demonstrated is one circumscribed by the situation of prostitution. Indeed, the negotiation over fellatio shown in this motel room



Candy Barr resists performing fellatio on the man in the hotel. *The Smart Aleck!* (ca. 1951–53).

seems very much to be over what Barr will and will not do for money, and the “friend” she calls in to perform fellatio would certainly seem to be yet another working girl.

I cannot say the extent to which the narrative of this film depicts what actually happened to Barr in the motel room—that is, whether as a sexual performer in a stag film she was asked to perform an act she found distasteful and resisted, or whether the tension over fellatio was part of the script.¹⁹ It is interesting, however, to listen to Barr’s own description of this period of her life in a brief interview in the recent Playboy-produced documentary, *The Story of X* (Workman, 1998). As the first “porn star” whose *nom de porn*²⁰ was known to her public, Barr’s description of her situation at the time she made the film is of interest for its revelation of the gray area between working girl and prostitute:

I ended up, eventually, from being a working girl in a restaurant as a waitress into a white slavery involvement that involved itself over a period of time into motel people and this is how it all started. If I had not been under duress, I certainly would not have gone and willingly done it. I had other things to do in my life than go run out in a motel room and let people take pictures of me.

I’m not absolutely certain to what the “it” in her first sentence (“this is how it all started”) refers—her unprecedented fame as a porn star or her involvement in prostitution—but

I think we can see in the tortured syntax of this statement that Barr is grappling with the fact that to be a low-class working girl in a restaurant slides rather easily into the other kind of working girl in a motel room.

Barr is of course also claiming that she performed these acts “under duress” and the phrase “white slavery involvement” raises all sorts of flags, managing to be both sensational and vague.

The term “white slavery” first became current in the United States in the Progressive Era to describe the buying and selling of young girls into prostitution. As is well known today, the burgeoning social scientific and reformist discourses defining it were deeply racist. They were racist both in the sense of worrying only about the sexual slavery of white women, never that of women of color, and in the frequent allegations that the sexual traffic of white women was an organized conspiracy run by Jews and foreigners. They were also dubious as examples of overt coercion. It is likely that social factors such as poverty, low wages, and other deprivations were more responsible than evil foreigners coercing young girls to sell themselves.²¹ “White slavery,” used to describe evil exploiters of the virginal sexuality of young white women, was certainly an anachronistic term by

the time Candy Barr used it in this documentary (even allowing for the possibility that the interview may have been shot sometime before it was used in this 1998 film). Yet Barr does not go on to claim, as her more famous early seventies successor Linda Lovelace would do, that she was corrupted or damaged by her involvement in pornography itself. Indeed, she is quick to clarify that what bothers her today is not the outrage to her innocence, or the trauma of the event, but something else entirely: "I know one thing: that was a tacky guy they got for me and that's an insult." The interview then concludes with Barr's remarkably benign observation about pornography: "Let's face it: it's here its slapping us in the face. Let's make it . . . respectable."

It would seem, despite the inflammatory reference to "white slavery," invoked as a way to suggest that forces beyond her control led her, at the age of sixteen, to a career in stag films, that Barr's fundamental identification is as a working girl who seeks respect as such. She does not go on to blame pornography or the traffic in women as the source of her "ruin"—that would be to play into the logic of the police and the johns who condemn the sellers not the buyers of female "goods." Rather, she goes on to wish for better, more "respectable," working conditions and status. The fact that the narrative of the film then shows her negotiating for one aspect of these conditions in her refusal to perform fellatio is thus quite apt. In this interview Barr's intonation as she gropes for the word "respectable" is both tentative and poignant. In an earlier era, when the kind of illicit, underground stag films in which she performed were made, when pornography was precisely not "slapping" anyone but the men at the stag parties "in the face," a plea for respect would have been out of the question. Women in porn were whores whether they played them as characters or not.

Tom Waugh's insight that "the stag corpus may well be the best visual ethnography of sexworkers in America during this period" is worth taking seriously as a consequence of his reading of the "chance flickers" of documentary truth occasionally found in these films. The value of a term like "sexworker" is its emphasis on the field of sexuality as a place where women, and of course some men, do, indeed, work. I would not want to assume that every film depicts the relations between a prostitute and a john—the men in the films were doubtless paid for their work as well, though the consequences of their actions were never as stigmatizing to them as the actions of women performers; their performances did not make them "sluts" but "studs." Nor is the work performed in stag films by men or women "simply" the work of prostitution, since the requirement of this work is not only to please the customer but to please the viewer.

"Sexworker" can be a useful term that allows us to focus on the *work* of giving pleasure in sex. Invented by San Francisco-based prostitute and activist Carol Leigh (aka

Scarlot Harlot) in the late seventies, it offers an umbrella term to apply to all persons who sell sex—whether strippers, lap dancers, male, female, or transgendered prostitutes, phone-sex providers, or porn performers—without distinctions of class. It connotes a freely chosen profession. It was precisely the sort of term Candy Barr might have been looking for in the interview cited above as she sought to redefine her earlier stigmatized work in an increasingly “on/scene” sexuality—a term that would help accomplish the greater “respectability” she seeks. The exact opposite of “white slavery”—with its lurid connotations of racialized exploitation and spoiled innocence—“sexworker” has served as an effective counter to the notion that women who perform sex for money are enslaved and then hopelessly fallen.

Nevertheless, the word “sexworker” is also anachronistic for the period in which stag films were the dominant form of explicit sex films. It has a euphemistic tinge of political correctness that does not quite fit the historical attitudes toward the women who performed sex for hire from the teens through the late sixties and toward the women who can be seen to repeat those sex acts in the stag film archives. Although the racial baggage of a term like “white slavery” rings equally anachronistic (and worse) from the other direction to our ears today, it has the advantage of expressing what seems to have been Candy Barr’s own ambivalence about the sequence of events that got her to that hotel room where she performed in *Smart Aleck*. Clearly she did not feel she had freely chosen her line of work, although the coercion she experienced may have been more economic than physical. If we gravitate to this film today for its glimpse of a moment’s struggle around the performance of fellatio, it may also be because this act has become so generically commonplace—almost *de rigueur*—in today’s pornography. Indeed, for a variety of reasons, most prostitutes and most female porn performers would rather perform fellatio than intercourse.

Contemporary feminists rightly resist the notion that women in pornography are sex slaves of any sort. Constance Penley’s efforts to see the humor and female agency in stag films is, I think, part of this resistance. But

we need a more historically nuanced way of reading female agency in stag films, something that can be located *between* white slavery and the ethnography of sexworkers,

something that can also include the different situation of American women of color in stag films, and something that can avoid melodramatic scenarios of extreme victimization while acknowledging the gray areas between lurid coercion and honest work. In order to qualify just what sort of agency we can imagine for the various women of stag

films, let us consider one more such film — one that I was only able to see during my most recent visit to the Kinsey Institute, and which was therefore not included in my talk.

Entitled *KKK Night Riders*, it looks to be from the thirties, although it is hard to tell given the poor quality of the print and the fact that the only real clothes worn are a Klansman's robe and hood. It portrays a corpulent white Klansman in full dress, including hood, who invades the cabin of a black woman and forces her to have sex at knife point. As in all stag films depicting rape, the woman is portrayed as succumbing to the pleasures of coerced sex. Also as in all such films, one can never be sure if the woman's pleasure is faked or real. After the crudely handwritten title, we see a hand knock on a door. A man in full Klan regalia enters a knotty-pine cabin. A hand holds aloft a short sword. A black woman reading a newspaper in bed slowly recognizes the Klansman's presence. The man's hand pulls down the sheet covering her to reveal her naked (and also plump) body. A title card reads: "Oh Lordy don't hurt me I'll give you my all," after which the knife is held to her belly: "Here I am Mr. Klansman I'm all yours." When they begin to have sex, another card speaks the misogynist and racist ethic of the film: "All night riders must have their fun."

The "fun" portrayed is about ten minutes of sex in a wide variety of positions (coitus, fellatio, cunnilingus, anal) in which the Klansman removes his robes but keeps on his hood. Eventually, however, he removes his hood ("your [sic] sure hot, I'll remove my white mask"), though his face still remains obscured in what appears to be a dark stocking. At one point the woman asks in another intertitle, "Does you all feel good now



A Klansman in full regalia enters the black woman's cabin. *KKK Night Riders* (ca. 1930s).



The Klansman penetrates the black woman while keeping on his hood. *KKK Night Riders* (ca. 1930s).

Mr. Klansman (sic).” At another point, during an interlude, their portly black and white bodies form a surprising picture of intimacy—as if the Klansman’s assault

had actually formed the kind of intimate interracial couple that the Klan itself abhorred—as they stroke one another. The film concludes with more sex, an odd moment in which the man holds the newspaper to his face as if to cover it, and a final exterior ejaculation that shows the woman tasting the ejaculate.

What interests me in *KKK Night Riders* are its similarities and differences to the coercive scenarios of stag films that involve class, not racial, differences. The working girls in *Getting His Goat* are coerced by a dreamer in glasses, who looks to be a college kid. The class differences between them are part of the reason for our contemporary feminist satisfaction at the revenge of the girls. The Klansman, who so carefully guards his face from view, is also of a different class from the woman whose cabin he invades, as indicated by the rough cabin as well as the grammatical lapses in the representation of her dialogue, which are not present in his.²² But this man is of a different race as well, and he is cloaked in the very costume of white supremacy. His coercion of the black woman evokes a long history of racial and sexual servitude in which the ethic of “honest” work for pay does not exist.

One reason I think this film is an important historical document of the limits of female agency in stag films is that it reminds us of a history of actual sexual slavery that the term “sexworker” cannot encompass. Here, indeed, is a situation that grows so



During an interlude in the sex the Klansman removes his hood but has on a dark stocking cap underneath. *KKK Night Riders* (ca. 1930s).

directly out of slavery—though not the “white slavery” of Candy Barr’s formulation—that it might be wishful thinking to consider the woman who performs in this film as a sexworker. The term is too progressive; it says too little about the historically determined, coercive context of black female and white male sexual interactions depicted here under the very sign of a white supremacy designed to reassert the race- and gender-based prerogatives of white men. This woman has historically less agency than her white sister performers and less chance of asserting herself as a worker; the man with whom she performs hides himself even more than his white brothers in stag films; and the film itself, if it can be seen as an ethnography, speaks its particular “chance flickers of documentary truth” about a tradition of black servitude to white desires.

Only if one buys into white-supremacist beliefs can we think that the joke in this film is on the man. It could only be on him if we believe that he degrades himself by having sex with the black woman, just as the dreamer in *Getting His Goat* degrades himself, albeit without knowing it, when he has sex with a goat. Although it would be comforting, from where we sit today, to read this Klansman without a horse, whose only ride is on the black woman he rapes, as giving the lie to the myth of the Klan as the rescuers of white womanhood, I fear that for most of the white men who saw it in its circulation at stag parties and fraternal organizations during the Depression the only possible way to see the film as a joke on its night rider would have been to buy into the white supremacy that views sex with a black woman as degrading.

EPILOGUE

My talk at the Kinsey Institute, and its subsequent rewriting for this article, has left me with some lingering questions that might best be posed to the readers of this journal. Obviously, an archive of stag films is not like just any film archive. It was not acquired to preserve film history but as a record of sexual practices; all of its films were illicitly made and distributed and no one properly “owns” their copyright. It is something of a miracle—and a tribute to Alfred Kinsey’s voracious, nonjudgmental interest in everything having to do with sex—that this archive exists at all. I do not claim to know how an archive of hard-core films should present its contents to scholars and to the public, but I do believe that any archive, even a sex film archive, exists in order to be preserved and for its contents to be made available to those interested in its materials. Today, we are interested in the details of sexual history that were once hidden away in “secret museums.”²³ In my work on pornography, it has become increasingly clear to me that sexual representations that were once considered obscene, in the quite literal sense of being hidden away from public view, have increasingly come “on/scene” in all sorts of ways.²⁴ Stag films are no exception.

The lecture-screening in which I participated was a new public display of a kind of film that had once only been for private consumption by prurient men.

The purpose of my scholarly and feminist talk—rather like the man in the white coat who legitimized the taboo and prurient contents of the old exploitation films—was at least partly to inoculate against the prurient interest of the films. There is no law, however, saying that prurient interest cannot coexist with scholarly interest.

Alfred Kinsey himself is the most striking example of this fact. The student who was quoted in the Institute’s house organ, *Kinsey Today*, was, I think, expressing that possibility when he or she stated: “Historic silent stag films, in a room packed with hundreds, with Linda Williams’s thought-provoking analysis. What an experience!” The quote was followed by a photo of an expectant, and fairly young, crowd of spectators. The experience, I would venture, is never only “thought provoking,” but neither is the excitement *only* sexual.

The Kinsey Institute’s choice to screen outdoor, “humorous” films with “women-in-charge” themes is quite understandable, especially in the context of the Kinsey celebration of *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*. My choice to bring in other examples of

less humorous films in which women are not in charge is also understandable, lest the institute encourage a perhaps unwarranted nostalgia for an earlier era of hard-core cinema. The real issue is how to best present the heritage of stag films without either overly nostalgizing or totally defanging their content. Stag film compilations that offer tinkling piano accompaniment, as if the films were the equivalent of Harold Lloyd or Charlie Chaplin comedies, run the risk of a bogus nostalgia associated with mainstream silent films. Nor did American stag films, as far as I have been able to tell, even have musical accompaniment. Much more likely all male audiences sat in an embarrassment of silence punctuated by laughter and crude jokes. We should not seek to reproduce the atmosphere of a smoker for screenings of stag films but neither should we seek to produce a bogus nostalgia for the "good old days."

A 2002 French compilation of stag films has recently attempted to generate such nostalgia. Entitled *Polissons et galipettes* (Michel Reilhac, 2002), it was shown at Cannes and released in French theaters in 2002. In 2003 the English version of this film was released on DVD under the terminally cute title, *The Good Old Naughty Days*. The audiences for this film were seemingly invited to witness the charming frolics of their grand- and great-grandparents' generations to the anachronistic accompaniment of a tinkling piano. Most critics reviewing this film celebrated the dirty movies of yesteryear in contrast to presumably more "brutish" contemporary hard-core practices, as if the plumper, more varied bodies of the stag film era also represented a happier, more polymorphous era of sexual play.²⁵ Part of the fun of such compilations is the mere spectacle of people from the twenties and thirties, photographed in black and white—and in increasingly anachronistic silence after the late twenties—having sex at all.

Neither the Kinsey program, chosen for its humor and examples of female control, nor the Reilhac collection, chosen, as French cultural historian Jann Matlock suggests, to portray "a delightful romp of prelapsarian sex that you can practically take home to Mom" (2004, 30), may fairly represent the archives from which they are chosen. Though I have not seen enough French stag films to know if the excellent print quality of the Reilhac compilation is representative, I have seen enough French, American, and international stag films in the Kinsey archive to be dubious about whether this selection was representative. I also share Jann Matlock's skepticism about the historical claims offered up in the brief intertitled commentary of *The Good Old Naughty Days*. Although it might comfort us to think that family togetherness was fostered when "teenage boys were brought to the screenings by their uncles" (as one intertitle informs us) and that these state-operated interwar brothels afforded a relatively healthy form of state-sanctioned prostitution, sex education, and bourgeois sociability, Matlock argues that the compilation

may pass on a number of dubious myths about the “jovial homosociality of the brothel salon” (30), the most fundamental of which is the assumption that brothels in Europe actually were the primary venue for screening these films.²⁶ Matlock also suggests that even French stag films, with their distinctive French characteristics—including abundant culinary metaphors and, believe it or not, an actual preference for what English speakers like to call “French kissing,” not to mention the relative nonchalance exhibited toward male-male sex acts presented within a larger heterosexual context—must have offered a wider range of hard-core action than the rather cute, pretty, and extremely well-made examples served up in this particular compilation.²⁷

What we really need are better ways to examine the entire history of the stag era of illicit films, most of which have remained terra incognita compared to what we know about other silent cinema. We certainly need the kind of detailed historical inquiry that Tom Waugh has been carrying out with respect to homoerotic films and photos in the article cited above and in his beautiful and richly researched book, *Hard to Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from Their Beginnings to Stonewall*. As the history of stag films effectively comes on/scene, we need restorations, public screenings of representative samples of actual films—not just video copies such as were screened at Indiana University. We also need DVD compilations that make available the best available prints. We need, for example, an American version of *The Good Old Naughty Days*—only we need one that is more historically probing and actually representative of the archive from which it is taken and that does not strain to exhibit only the cute examples, without that tinkling piano. Such a selection, placed on DVD would be a real improvement over the bad dupes of dupes currently in circulation.

During the course of my stay at the Kinsey Institute, Rachael Stoeltje brought up the idea of producing just such a compilation—a two-disc DVD of about thirty stag films to be restored and produced by Kino. The compilation would be accompanied by interviews with scholars, introductory text, and historical notes modeled on the excellent *Treasures of the American Film Archives* DVD set, produced by the National Film Preservation Foundation in 2000—in other words, a sort of hard-core “Treasures of the Kinsey Archive.” I wrote an enthusiastic letter of support for the plan to the Kinsey Board of Trustees arguing that a collection of stag films from the Kinsey would be an invaluable resource to many scholars and teachers like myself who believe that the heritage of hard-core cinema is crucial to understanding the impact of moving images on American life and culture and that such a collection would easily replace the existing cheaply produced anthologies of stag films with poor prints and random music, which either strive to make

the films seem cute or which offer heavy-handed, defensive commentaries. Nor would it, I hoped, represent the cute nostalgia of the Reilhac film.

Unfortunately, Indiana University lawyers threw up obstacles. They wanted Kino to accept all liability for the project and were fearful that if they did not, the university and the institute could be sued by a grandchild of one of the film's performers. To date, no progress has been made on the Kinsey DVD and the institute itself no longer even has an archivist for the stag collection. Nor, I have been told by a potential donor of films, do they take good enough care of the films they do have to be considered a place one would feel good about donating more films. I may be dreaming to hope that the great American archive with the most stag films will rehire its archivist and produce a representative, restored, scholarly edition that will one-up the French and include the lyrical and the humorous alongside the misogynist, the racist, and the ugly in its compilation, but I firmly believe that scholars and students should be able to screen and study the ethnography of sexworkers in addition to the myriad other possible approaches to the history of stag films through the greater access to the Kinsey collection. It is no longer enough to be able to view stag films on Kinsey Institute premises at Indiana University in private screenings. The stag film heritage needs the collaboration of scholars and archivists to preserve and study a body of work that has been far too long neglected.

NOTES

1. Other film collections—sex education films of the 1970s and '80s, animal sex behavior, four thousand Swedish eroticas of the 1960s and '70s, as well as art films (Kenneth Anger has donated his complete works), exploitation and other pornographic features—are interesting but not as rare as the stag films.
2. The American term, "stag," is derived from the all-male parties, or "smokers," where such films were shown, often by itinerant projectionists, to an exclusively male audience.
3. Eric Schaefer, "Plain Brown Wrapper," forthcoming in *In the Absence of Films*, Jon Lewis and Eric Smoodin, eds.
4. At my first visit to the Kinsey Institute, before I had been introduced to the collection, I met one of the librarians carrying a statue of a monkey. In his shirt pocket was a large detachable phallus belonging to the monkey.
5. For descriptions of the institute's library and the growth of the collections, see the three major biographies of Alfred Kinsey by Wardell Pomeroy (1972), James Jones (1997), and Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy (1998).
6. Anyone who has read the recent biographies of Kinsey cited above, seen Bill Condon's recent film, *Kinsey* (2004), or read T. C. Boyle's fictionalized account of Kinsey's research group, *The Inner Circle* (2004) will know that Alfred Kinsey also made his own films of sexual activities after World War II,

hiring his own photographer to capture the details of all manner of sex acts. At first he observed prostitutes with clients, but this was unsatisfying since prostitutes faked orgasm and he turned to a range of people, called "friends of the research," who were willing to be observed and filmed. As biographer Gathorne-Hardy puts it, "science meant observation and observation here required film" (242). By 1949 the Sex Institute photographer Bill Dellenback was filming masturbation and a wide range of kinds of couplings in the attic of Kinsey's home.

7. All hard-core films before the early 1970s were illicit. Fascinating audio-tapes at the Kinsey Institute made in 1966 by institute staffers Eugene Slabough and George Huntington detail the history of the collection, including descriptions of the biographical and business practices of the dealers from whom copies of films were obtained.

8. Kevin Brownlow (1990, 28) dates this film to circa 1923, on the basis of cars and clothes, in contrast to the much earlier date, 1915, assigned it by Di Lauro and Rabkin (1976, 27) which would make it the earliest "known" American stag film. Although I followed their authority in my chapter on stag films (Williams 1989), I think Brownlow is closer to the truth given the Jazz Age intertitles. One reason for the confusion, and assuming Brownlow to be the greater authority on silent-film dating, could be his assertion that the women are wearing Mary Pickford-style wigs disguising their more Jazz Age hairdos. Thanks to Jann Matlock for pointing out this discrepancy about the date of the film.

9. One of the films, *Bring 'em Back Nude*, has no hard-core action; another, *Getting His Goat*, implies bestiality but, because all sexual transactions are shot on one side or the other of the fence, no literal sex, with woman or goat, actually transpires.

10. Although the Kinsey Institute holds the largest collection of stag films in the world, they have not had much public exhibition. The fact of this particular exhibition on the Indiana University campus was celebrated in the house organ, *Kinsey Today* (7, no. 1 [Spring/Summer 2003]), which presented photos of speakers on the cover while quoting enthusiastic student reactions to the events, which included Gloria Steinem's keynote, a panel on women's sexuality, and my own talk. In the case of my talk, the emphasis was placed on the fact of the public exhibition. The student quote read: "Historic silent stag films, in a room packed with hundreds, with Linda Williams's thought-provoking analysis. What an experience!" The quote was followed by a photo of an expectant, and fairly young, crowd of spectators.

11. Scott McDonald (1983) notes the awkwardness of this view of the penis from an ostensibly heterosexual viewpoint as well.

12. See my discussion of this in *Hard Core* (Williams 1989, 164–65).

13. Movies Unlimited offers a useful basic collection of both hard-core and soft-core materials under such titles as Stag Reels: 1920s–1930s, Flaming Flappers, Nudie Classics, et cetera (<http://www.moviesunlimited.com>). Something Weird also carries a multivolume series entitled *Grandpa Bucky's Naughty Peeps and Stags*, which contain a treasure trove of materials, unfortunately anthologized without titles (<http://picpal.com>).

14. The film constantly flirts with interracial sexual possibilities that are never realized as the sort of hard-core action of typical stag films. Because this film, interesting as it was, did not seem to belong to the true stag-film genre, I did not address it then and do not now.
15. Consider the mustache that threatens to fall off the male performer in *A Free Ride* or a similar mustache that does fall off a very slender man in *Agenor fait un levage*, from the Reilhac compilation of French pornography from between the wars, *The Good Old Naughty Days*, discussed below.
16. Unlike, for example, *Mexican Dog* (ca. 1930s) and *Beauty and the Boxer*, which is not about a woman and a prizefighter.
17. Lorena Bobbitt's revenge on her husband, depicted briefly in *John Wayne Bobbitt: Uncut* (1995), is her favorite example from the more recent era (Penley 1997, 19).
18. Waugh adds that few "literally drawn prostitute characters appear in the stag stories as such, but the recurring exchange of money and services implies that most female characters are candidates" (2001, 285).
19. Even stag films improvised on the spot acted out someone's idea of sexual "script."
20. I borrow this term from the masterful director of hard- and soft-core films of the 1970s and '80s, Radley Metzger.
21. See Eric Schaeffer (1999, 18) and Janet Staiger (1995, 49–51, 120–25).
22. There are, however, spelling lapses throughout the intertitles.
23. See Walter Kendrick's (1987) study of the emergence of pornographic works from these secret museums.
24. If *obscenity* is the term used to mark the unspeakability of explicit sex acts, the truly underground, illicit status of stag films, for example, during their heyday, *on/scenity* is the term I have coined to mark the greater speakability and visibility of explicit sex acts in our own day. See Williams (2004, 1–21) and (1999, 280–314).
25. For example, Maitland McDonagh (nd) refers to its "agreeably prelapsarian landscape of desire" and contrasts the "absence of the narrow focus and distasteful sheen of meanness that oozes off much 21st-century pornography"; Linda Ruth Williams (2004) describes the "charmingly anachronistic" qualities of the film and the way "Everyone seems to be having a jolly good time."
26. Writing about German hard-core film, feminist critic Gertrud Koch (1993) has cited some very interesting evidence that at least some German pornographic films were shown in brothels, though a good deal of her argument about the pleasures of pornography is devoted to pointing out that the pleasures of pornographic looking are not necessarily the same as sexual doing. Koch describes eyewitness accounts of several "porn houses," some of which had women in the wings, some of which had no women, and one of which ordered call girls. While it does seem likely that brothels played a much bigger role in the screening of pornography in Europe than in the United States, one should not simply assume that brothels were the normal venue for screening hard-core films in Europe without more evidence. In the United States, where state-sanctioned brothels did not exist, the more frequent

venues were fraternal organizations, ad hoc stag parties, private homes, and some brothels (Williams 1999, 58–92, 295).

27. Matlock suggests, for example, that the anthology includes examples that tend to range from the flirtations to bawdy, but to exclude the kind of woman-threatened-by-rape scenarios, or examples of bestiality (here, I would not really count the fluffy white dog who cutely licks both women and men as bestiality).

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