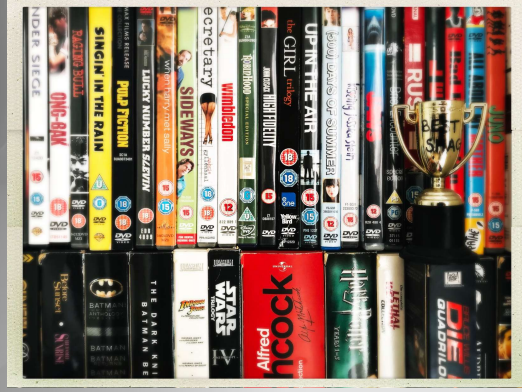


THE HISTORY OF SEX IN MAINSTREAM HOLLYWOOD MOVIES: the battle between erotic expression, conservative values and the rating system

LIVVY
she/her

@sexlovevideo @theotherlivvy



DANGEROUS WOMEN

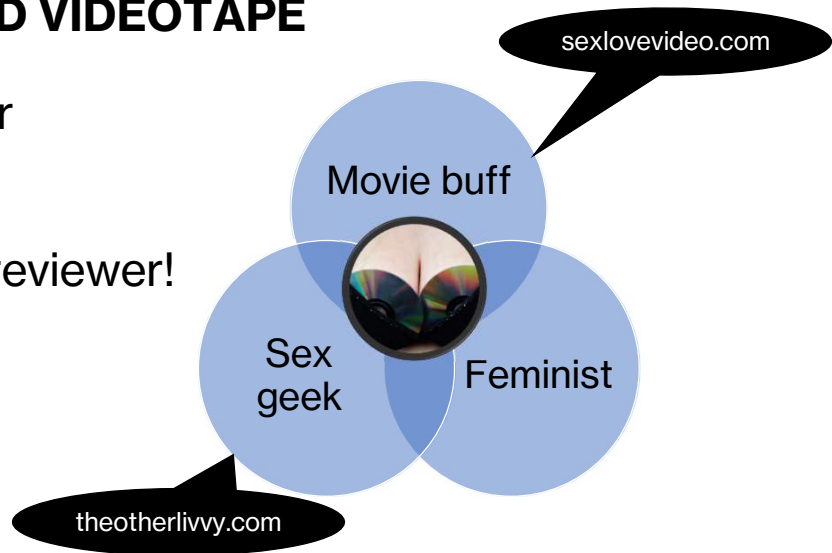


WHEN I REALISED WHAT A RICH TOPIC SEX IN THE MOVIES COULD BE, even with a focus on the ratings system, I knew I had to narrow the focus further so this will mainly be about DANGEROUS WOMEN on screen!

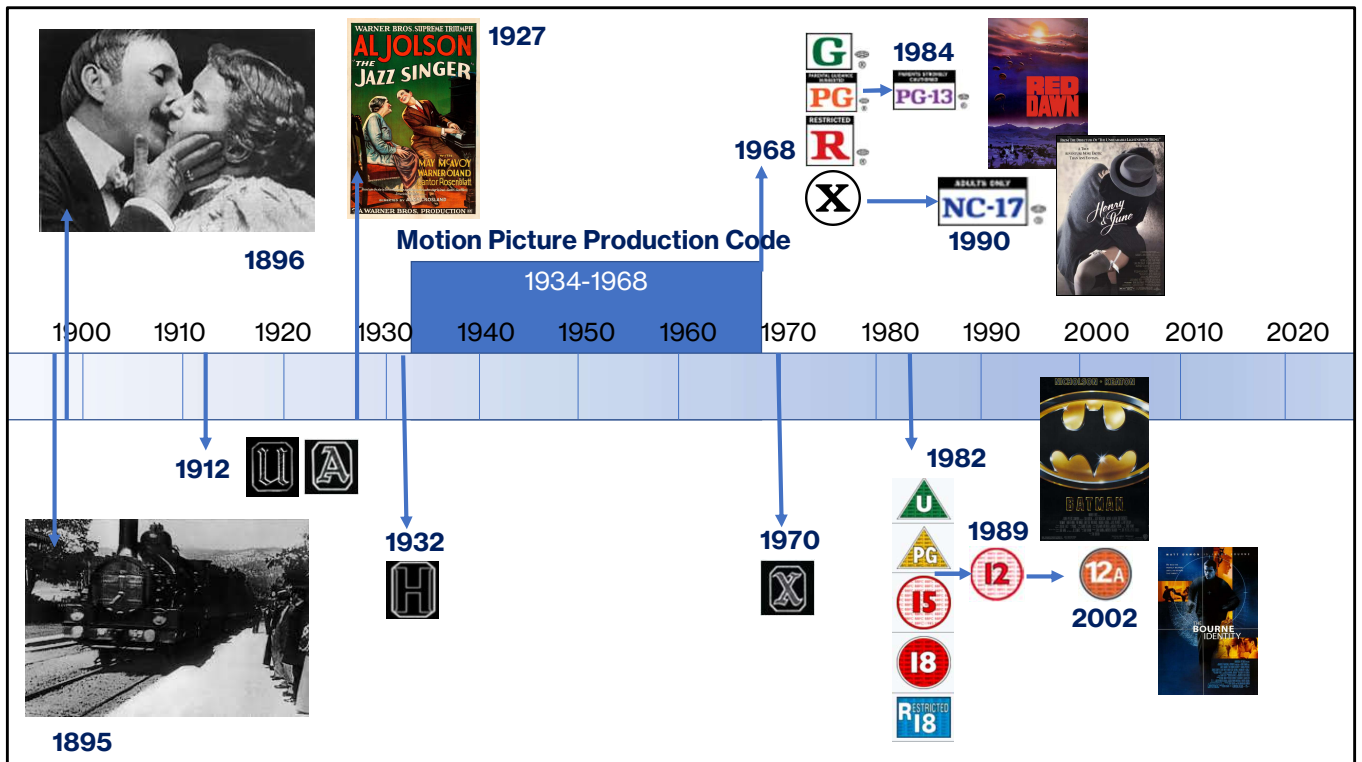
Because it is impossible to separate the history of sex in movies from the role of women, and therefore from feminism and the response of a patriarchal society to the changing rights and expectations of women.

SEX, LOVE AND VIDEOTAPE

- Medical doctor
- Sex blogger
- Hobby movie reviewer!







And I want to focus specially on the American ratings system because they had such control over what was made in Hollywood

CAVEATS and CONTENT WARNINGS

- Movie industry is BIG and DIVERSE, but Hollywood is NOT!
- History of mainstream Hollywood is extremely straight, white, cis and male!
- Significant effort expended to maintain heteronormality and patriarchal family values

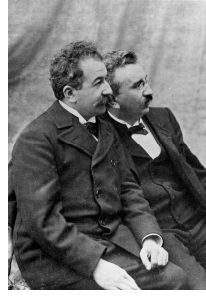
- **CW:** some discussion of non-consensual sex and abuse

CENSORSHIP EFFORTS AND RATING SYSTEMS DESIGNED TO MAINTAIN HETERONORMATIVITY AND THE PATRIARCHY

Greater queer representation within independent cinema but this is CONSPICUOUSLY ABSENT from mainstream cinema and so I'm afraid it will be conspicuously absent from much of this talk.

Obviously, when I say men and women. I mean all men and all women, which is shorthand for those who benefit from the patriarchy and those who suffer under it

EARLY CINEMA



When exactly 'cinema' began is a debated topic

Photography and moving images had been developing over several decades before there was any defined cinema experience

- Eadweard Muybridge's ZOOPRAXISCOPE in 1880 that could project chronophotographic images, typically of animals in motion
- Thomas Edison's Kinetoscope allowed individual viewing of short moving pictures, invented in 1888

But it is the first commercial, public screening of ten of the [Lumière brothers'](#) short films in Paris on 28 December 1895 is regarded as the beginning of 'modern' cinema

- Famous screening of The Arrival of the Train at La Ciotat Station where the urban myth states that viewers leapt up in fright at the train barrelling towards them

Mary Irwin Kiss

1896



8

Within a year of the first cinema experience, 'The Kiss' AKA the Mary Irwin Kiss was screened and became the first public kiss and essentially the first sex scene!

This kiss between Mary Irwin and John Rice

Publicised with the statement: 'The mysteries of the kiss revealed'

Clip of the two actors in a play, *The Widow Jones*, and while the play is not really remembered or put on anymore but this kiss, now mostly known out of context, remains

The Kiss: <https://youtu.be/Q690-lexNB4>

The Chap Book

Volume 5 (5) 15th July 1896

In a recent play called *The Widow Jones* you may remember a famous kiss which Miss May Irwin bestowed on a certain John C. Rice, and *vice versa*. Neither participant is physically attractive, and the spectacle of their prolonged pasturing on each other's lips was hard to bear. When only life-size it was pronouncedly beastly. But that was nothing to the present sight. Magnified to Gargantuan proportions and repeated three times over it is absolutely disgusting. All delicacy or remnant of charm seems gone from Miss Irwin, and the performance comes very near being indecent in its emphasized vulgarity.

Such things call for police interference. Our cities from time to time have spasms of morality, when they arrest people for displaying lithographs of ballet-girls; yet they permit night after night a performance which is infinitely more degrading. The immorality of living pictures and bronze statues is nothing to this. The Irwin kiss is no more than a lyric of the Stock Yards. While we tolerate such things, what avails all the talk of American Puritanism and of the filthiness of imported English and French stage shows?

9

And this first foray into sex on screen was controversial immediately!

This contemporary review, published in CHAP BOOK, a twice monthly American literary magazine from 1894-1898, describes it as...

Sounds like an extreme reaction but THE KISS showed something that had literally never been seen before – a close up on a moment between two people that was usually relegated to behind closed doors. Moving picture; realistic portrayal. THE PRIVATE HAD BECOME PUBLIC

Clip was also seen out of context – a sex act for sex's sake with no narrative purpose, WHICH WAS REVOLUTATIONARY

The Chap Book review of The Kiss:

https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=xq5FAQAAMA AJ&pg=PA239&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false

SILENT MOVIE ERA: 1910s-1920s

- Beginning of CLASSICAL HOLLYWOOD CINEMA
- 1912: film industry moved to Hollywood



From these beginnings, cinema quickly became a hot!
Hollywood became the centre of the American movie industry in 1912 and film stars as we now know them began to become prominent figures

SUCH AS...Charlie Chaplin, The Tramp 1915

Douglas Fairbank – swashbuckling star in early 1920s (Thief of Bagdad, Robin Hood)

Rudolph Valentino as one of the first sex symbols

Clara Bow – Wine (1924)

And behind the scenes...

Cecil B DeMille, DW Griffiths and Lois Weber (cinema's first genuine auteur at a time when women had equal, if not superior, standing in Hollywood! Sadly that equality wouldn't last beyond the silent era when costs increased and women were no longer trusted with big budgets...



Just as it didn't take long for moving pictures to start showing sex, it didn't take long for the industry to realise that SEX SELLS

Era when producers were unsure if people would sit through a full-length movie about *anything*, they realised that they would watch one with a sexy or salacious plot While successful, movies were increasingly violent and morally questionable Now often seen as staggeringly racist and misogynistic...

Traffic in Souls (1913)

- First full length 'sex film and beginning of **sexploitation movies** with immigrant women forced into brothels

Cecil B De Mille

The Cheat (1915)

- Melodrama with scenes of sadomasochist sensationalism and has the dubious honour of being first film to show sexual violence when woman is branded after refusing to be taken as a loan repayment

Ten commandments 1923

Cecil B. DeMille claimed that his films condemned sex and sins of the flesh but

they allowed him to show all the debauchery on screen in a massive orgy

SCANDALS OF 1920s



Alleged rape and manslaughter of Virginia Rappe

- Model and actor
- Died in 1921, 4 days after attending a party with Roscoe 'Fatty' Arbuckle



Murder of William Desmond Taylor

- Film director and actor
- Murdered Feb 1922



Unfortunately, Hollywood in this period was as scandalous and immoral in reality as it was on screen, which led to increased calls from conservative factions for censorship.

There were two cases that became tabloid sensations that particularly sparked outrage -

Alleged rape of Virginia Rappe by Roscoe 'Fatty' Arbuckle most famous and handsomely paid silent film stars of the era, second only to Charlie Chaplin.

Arbuckle acquitted after 3 manslaughter trials; Rappe's medical history (including previous alleged abortions and STIs) used to discredit her

Led to feminist uprising, similar to #MeToo – woman showing up to express solidarity for Rappe

Murder of actor and director William Desmond Taylor

Well known around Hollywood.

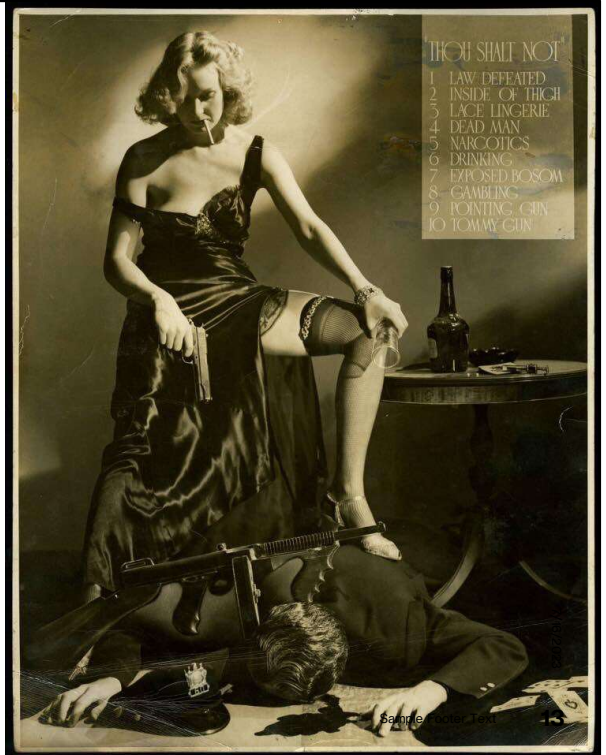
Case remains unsolved

<https://www.thecut.com/2017/11/before-harvey-weinstein-virginia-rappe-roscoe-fatty-arbuckle.html>

MOTION PICTURE PRODUCTION CODE

- Industry guidelines
- Self-censorship
- Aim to rehabilitate Hollywood's reputation

- Adopted 1930
- Rigidly enforced 1934



THESE SCANDALS LED TO INCREASED CALLS FOR CENSORSHIP

Hollywood chose self-censorship in preference to individual states enacting individual censorship bills – created a “DONTs” and “BE CAREFULs” list created by the studios in 1927

- Supreme court ruling in 1915 '*Mutual Film Corporation v. Industrial Commission of Ohio*' that free speech did not extend to movies! Which meant censorship was LEGAL!

Named after WILL H. HAYS, the president of MPAA from 1922-1945

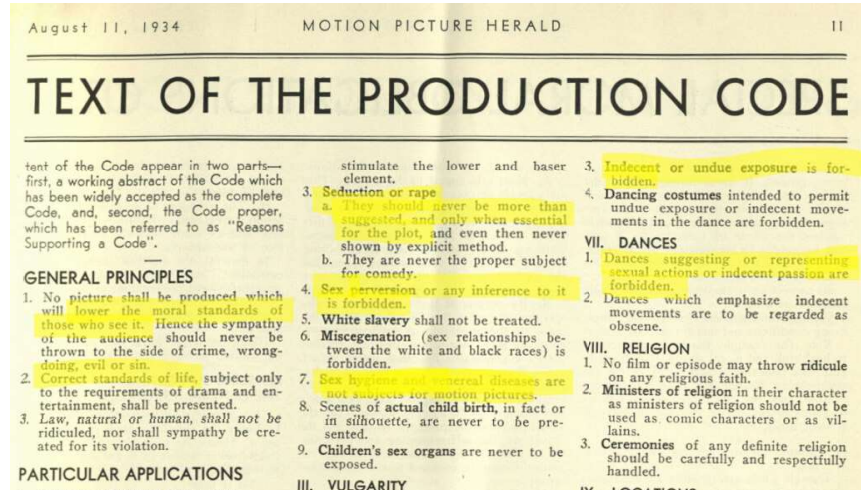
drafted in 1930 by Martin Quigley, a magazine magnate, and Father Daniel A. Lord, a Jesuit priest

Photo: '*Thou Shalt Not*' published in 1940, taken by Whitney Schafer to deliberately subvert the code's limitations

HAYS CODE

Prohibited a picture from **lowering the moral standards of those who see it**

Aimed to **promote traditional values**



7/16/2023

Sample Footer Text

14

Set of general principles which prohibited a picture from "lowering the moral standards of those who see it", particularly those with "susceptible minds", such as women, children and the lower-class
Meant to show "correct standards of life"; A recurring theme was "that throughout, the audience feels sure that evil is wrong, and good is right".

Strong CATHOLIC UNDERTONES present in the code as the Catholic Church in American tried to regain control of an industry that believed was being corrupted by the mostly Jewish studio heads who were obsessed with profit and overlooking their duties as moral guardians.

Specifically banned:

'Sexual perversion,' including homosexuality although never stated

Relationships between black and white races

Sex outside marriage could not be seen as attractive or arousing

Criminal action had to be punished and criminals could not elicit sympathy from audience

Authority figures and clergy treated with respect

PRE-CODE ERA (1927 – 1934)

- High cost of conversion to sound
- Salacious material to encourage audience numbers
- Freedom of creativity
- Sex, drugs, violence...



Period between arrival of talkies in 1927 and rigid enforcement of code in 1934
Some censorship but still indulged in topics that would soon be banned outright

Studios doubling down while still able to and so it turned to the subject areas that made the most money to cover the costs of the newer, more expensive productions!

So they turned to VIOLENCE in gangster movies like *LITTLE CAESAR* (1931), dramatic horror with the origins of now classic *Dracula*, *Frankenstein* and *Dr JEKYLL AND MR HYDE* (1931) iconography, plus, of course, daring sexual content such as the borderline racist *BIRD OF PARADISE* (1932) where a woman is shipwrecked on an exotic island and discovers her sexuality, the actually racist *CALL HER SAVAGE* (1932) where Clara Bow's wild nature turns out to be due to her mixed race background but also contained one of the earliest on-screen depictions of gay culture with these openly queer waiters, and the terrifying *THE STORY OF TEMPLE DRAKE* (1933), which is a story of sexual assault, emotional abuse and how powerless women can be in a society that thinks so little of them.



Baby Face

1933

16

All of these qualities are best exemplified than in the brilliant *BABY FACE*, a Barbara Stanwyck movie about a girl who is literally encouraged to ‘use men to get what you want’ and sleep her way to the top, hilariously demonstrated in the movie as the camera pans up the office building to higher and more prestigious offices,

This film was the final straw according to the conservative factions and finally prompted a strict enforcement of the code. They also insisted on changing the ending from one where she keeps all the money to one where she does give up all the money and wealth to be with the man she loves, changing her success from something material – and dangerous to the patriarchy – to something more wholesome and ‘acceptable’

ENFORCEMENT OF HAYS CODE

- 1933: formation of Catholic Legion of Decency
- MPAA appointed Joseph Breen to enforce code
 - films had to receive the Motion Picture Production Code Seal of Approval before they could be released
 - suffer protests and fines.
- Mandatory censorship after July 1st 1934



CLD classified and condemned movies; lobbied government

JB – Catholic, close to CLD

Rigidly enforced code until retirement in 1954



ONCE THE CODE WAS ENFORCED, MOVIES CHANGED IMMEDIATELY, which can be seen most obviously in the series of TARZAN movies from the period

For MGM studios, Johnny Weissmuller and Maureen O’Sullivan made 6 Tarzan movies between 1932 and 1942

TARZAN THE APE MAN (1932), arrives in jungle in full costume of repressed colonial woman

Sheds clothes as she becomes more naturalistic and less bound by society – perhaps not a dangerous woman but definitely a WILD one that also terrified the patriarchy
 TARZAN AND HIS MATE (1934) was made before the code was enforced but released afterwards – Tarzan and Jane had undeniable sexual chemistry and wore the skimpiest outfits of the series in this version and included a nude swimming scene by O’Sullivan that was removed to comply with the code

TARZAN ESCAPES (1936), Jane is fully clothed again wearing much more modest clothing and the promo shots have become more romantic than lustful

By 1939’s TARZAN FINDS A SON, the franchise becomes much more wholesome and family orientated with the addition of a son. But, of course, unlike in the original Edgar Rice Burroughs novels when Tarzan and Jane had a child, the ‘son’ of this movie is found in the jungle and adopted to make sure no one thought Tarzan and Jane had had sex outside of marriage...

This family group would star in the next two movies, TARZAN'S SECRET TREASURE (1941) and TARZAN'S NEW YORK ADVENTURE (1942), and although they do end up back in the jungle at the end, moving the final movie to New York meant that even Tarzan had to spend much of the film fully clothed. Very different from the raw, animalistic tone of the first film only 10 years before!

Films made during the Production Code era weren't completely without sex. It just became less explicit and more suggested – in screwball comedies, sex became verbal sparring. In Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers musicals, sex became dance. An oddly patronising article in the New Yorker

(<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/05/02/what-the-hays-code-did-for-women>) recently claimed that this was good for women – rather than the tawdry sex of pre-code movies, women were charming and witty and attractive because of their intelligence and their words rather than their bodies. It's a shame that he didn't realise that it's good to have the opportunities to be both – smart AND sexy – and it's not good for women when we don't have a choice.

But anyway...another way that production code era movies showed sex was in kisses.

KISSES, ENDLESS KISSES...



Because KISSES HAD TO BECOME THE SUBSTITUTE FOR ALL SEXUAL CONTENT ON SCREEN

Led of the persisting belief that movies from this period are the most romantic because the passion between characters had to be demonstrated in the kiss alone – and a kiss that was a maximum of 3 seconds long - so the kisses had to be pretty damn fantastic!

In fact, a 1992 Gallup poll of sexiest movie kisses of all time had three movies from this period as the top 3

- 1939's *Gone with the Wind*
- 1953's *From Here To Eternity*, a kiss that is just sex that meets the code limits! It is SO overt in suggestion of further sex acts that the wave washing over them has been linked to ejaculation and orgasm
- And 1942's *Casablanca* – a kiss that was actually adulterous (gasp) but was OK according to the censors as Ilsa went back to her husband at the end of the movie...

An interesting feature of all these kisses is that they are all dangerous in some way – all three movies are set during war time (America Civil War for *GWTW* and WW2 for the others) and all involve some sort of conflict. The *GWTW* kiss was a show of Rhett Butler's dominance (as all the kisses between them seem to be, with Scarlett almost

bending over backwards to accommodate him) and definitely non-consensual, as the reaction afterwards shows. This all adds evidence to the theory that kisses are sexier when they are dangerous or exist around conflict, whether internal or external, or against an existing taboo. Passion is great but conflict is hot! Apparently...!! It's a message that is embedded in movies that I don't really like as it has contributed significantly to rape culture – kiss her even if she doesn't want it and don't worry if she struggles as she'll soon be enjoying it.



Notorious

1946

20

This kiss from Alfred Hitchcock's 1946 movie NOTORIOUS is famous for being the longest on-screen kiss during the Production Code period and the efforts that Hitchcock had to go to for the kiss to be allowed demonstrate a lot of the restrictions, and how they didn't completely remove the passion!

Each kiss is only 3 seconds long with no open mouths and a distinct break between each kiss

Hitchcock makes them seem like one kiss because their faces stay close together but they are definitely separate kisses because they talk between each kiss!

There's also a lot of cheek rubbing, another famous trope of Production Code movies that makes no sense in reality, and walking with their faces very close together – it can't be the same kiss if it's in a different location!!



Double Indemnity

1944

21

But if it wasn't suggested in kisses, sex during the Production Code era had to be demonstrated in words.

Again, excuse the spoilers for a very old movie, but *Double Indemnity* has such a classic plot structure that it doesn't really feel like a spoiler to say that it involves a beautiful temptress who convinces a weak greedy man to commit a crime and they both die in the end!

This clip occurs when they first meet and is as close as Production Code movies really got to showing seduction. The verbal sparring, the power exchange, the suggestion of eroticism with the discussions of her anklet...although he doesn't know it, Frank is already under Phyliss's power and will soon agree to help kill her husband for the life insurance payout that he will arrange.

1930-1940s: FEMME FATALE

- 'She was a projection of misogynistic inadequacy: the dangerous woman who lures a good man to his doom or moral compromise for her own gain.'



22

All these elements of danger and transgression are seen in their purest form in the FEMME FATALE

Because the other way to show sex on screen during the Production Code was to make it villainous!

As we've discussed, the Hays Code aimed to maintain or improve the moral standards of those watching the films, and this meant that immoral acts had to be punished. Crime should not appear attractive or like a reasonable option; and anyone having too much fun or who seemed to enjoying sex too much HAD TO BE PUNISHED. This meant jail or moral ruin or, most often, death.

Mary Astor in 1941's *The Maltese Falcon* is largely credited as being the first femme fatale of the film noir period – Brigid O'Shaunnesay murders and lies, using Sam Spade, Humphrey Bogart's character, to try and get the mysterious Maltese Falcon. In the end, Spade turns her in to the police.

Film noir movies were filled with hard smoking, hard drinking detectives, trench coats, murders, thieves, and hot women. I absolutely loved this quote from a blog on [THE EVOLUTION OF THE FEMME FATALE](#), and it is particularly important from the

perspective of a Production Code movie that a DANGEROUS woman lured a GOOD man to his doom. A femme fatale would be irresistible and accomplished, which in an era where women were expected to marry and stay home with the children, was intimidating enough to men, and they were often overtly sensual with red lipstick, perfectly set hair and silk cocktail dresses. But more terrifyingly for the weak men they approached, femme fatales were AMBITIOUS.

<https://crimereads.com/the-evolution-of-the-femme-fatale-in-film-noir/>

<https://daily.jstor.org/how-film-noir-tried-to-scare-women-out-of-working/>



But despite all of these work-arounds, Hollywood was increasingly under pressure to relax these strict censorship rules.

This pressure came from the success of foreign films not bound by the code, including the introduction of 'sex kittens' like Brigitte Bardot and from television (and the associated privacy of viewing).

Social liberation in US led to desire for and production of increasingly explicit and adult movies

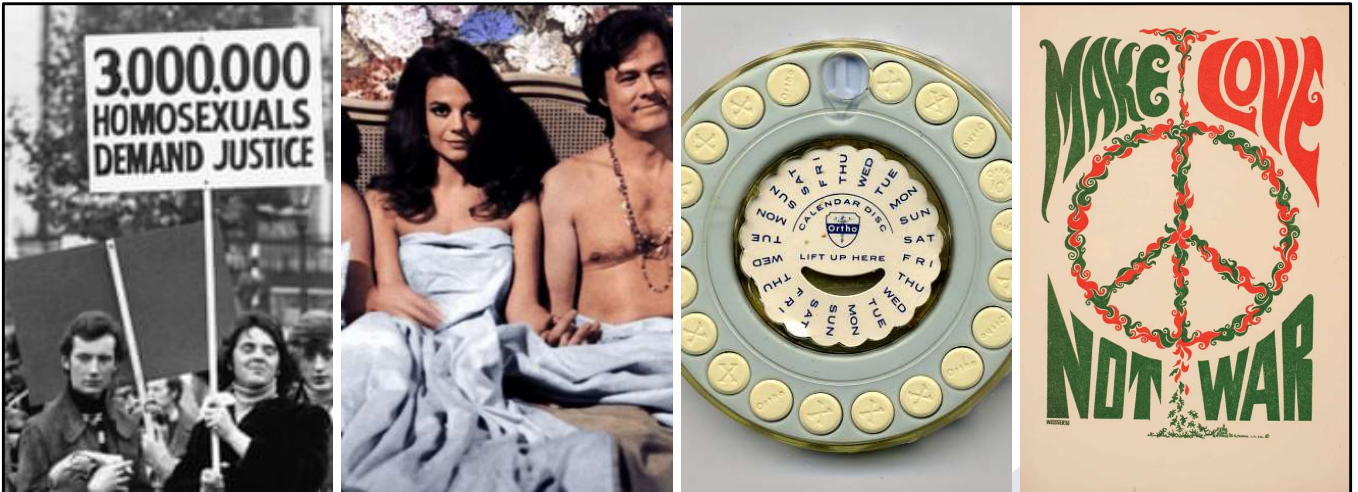
From as early as 1953, movies were being released WITHOUT a certificate of approval with [Otto Preminger's](#) film [The Moon Is Blue](#), about a young woman who tries to play two suitors off against each other by claiming that she plans to keep her virginity until marriage being the first.

With this possibility of success without approval looming over them, MPAA began to reluctantly approve movies with only minor cuts and lose control

- SLIH was released without approval despite the cross-dressing plot!
- Psycho (1960) showed not only the first flushing toilet that AH refused to cut but it also started with two unmarried lovers...sat on a bed...with Marion wearing just a bra! There was no way to spin the story to claim they hadn't had sex!! And it was still approved.

- And then In 1964, The Pawnbroker showed actual naked breasts twice and an 'unacceptably sex suggestive and lusty' sex scene...and yet was still approved.

The code was done!



1960s: SEXUAL REVOLUTION

24

As I mentioned at the beginning, it is IMPOSSIBLE TO SEPARATE CHANGE IN CULTURAL ACCEPTANCE OF SEX FROM THE SOCIAL CHANGES OF THIS PERIOD – RISE OF SECOND WAVE FEMINISM, INCREASING SEXUAL FREEDOMS AND INCREASING ACCESS TO REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Decade saw birth control, Roe v Wade around the corner in 1973

1968 was the end of the sexual revolution of 1960s
Image from 1969's Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice

MPAA RATING SCHEME

- Jack Valenti:
 - ‘free the filmmaker, to loosen the artistic fetters around his ankles’
 - accommodate ‘the irresistible force of creators determined to make “their films”’
 - avoid ‘the possible intrusion of government into the movie arena’
- MPAA rating system went live 1st November 1968










And so in 1968, MPAA released their new rating system

Valenti – advisor and lobbyist to Lyndon B Johnson and president of MPAA

Aimed to satisfy everyone – film makers could include any sex, violence or bad language that they wanted, and the puritans could prevent impressionable children from seeing them!

WAS IT REALLY JUST ABOUT CAPITALISM THOUGH?!

- Sex sells!
- Allowed Hollywood to make sexy – and profitable - movies

1968	1972	1984	1990
			
			
			
			
			

G – GENERAL, general audiences;

M – MATURE, parental discretion advised – changed to PG as no one knew that ‘mature’ meant;

R – RESTRICTED, over 16 only unless accompanied by an adult, later increased to over 17 in 1970

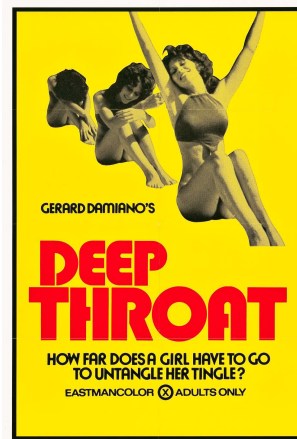
X – not for under 16.

1984 – complaints about gore and violence in PG movies Gremlins and Indiana Jones led to Steven Spielberg pressuring MPPA to create PG13, a mid ground between PG and R

Porn studios co-opted X rating in 1970s, using it as a boast about the explicit content (XX, XXX etc)

1990 changed name to NC17 to differentiate from pornographic X ratings ‘no children under 17’. Increased to 17 or under in 1996

1970s: “PORN CHIC”



27

AND SO THEY DID MAKE WHATEVER THEY WANTED!

- Relaxation of regulations led to very sexual and transgressive content as filmmakers jump in with both feet

Brief detour from specifically dangerous woman to talk about 1972

1972 – two X-rated films that, according to Linda Williams, ‘confronted public, gender-mixed audiences with narratives that were unapologetically about sex from beginning to end’

DEEP THROAT: full length porno; 7th highest grossing movie of the year. Became a must see event, dubbed PORNO CHIC

Ultimate male fantasy – woman cannot orgasm, finds she has clitoris in her throat so gets off on gagging on cock...

LAST TANGO IN PARIS

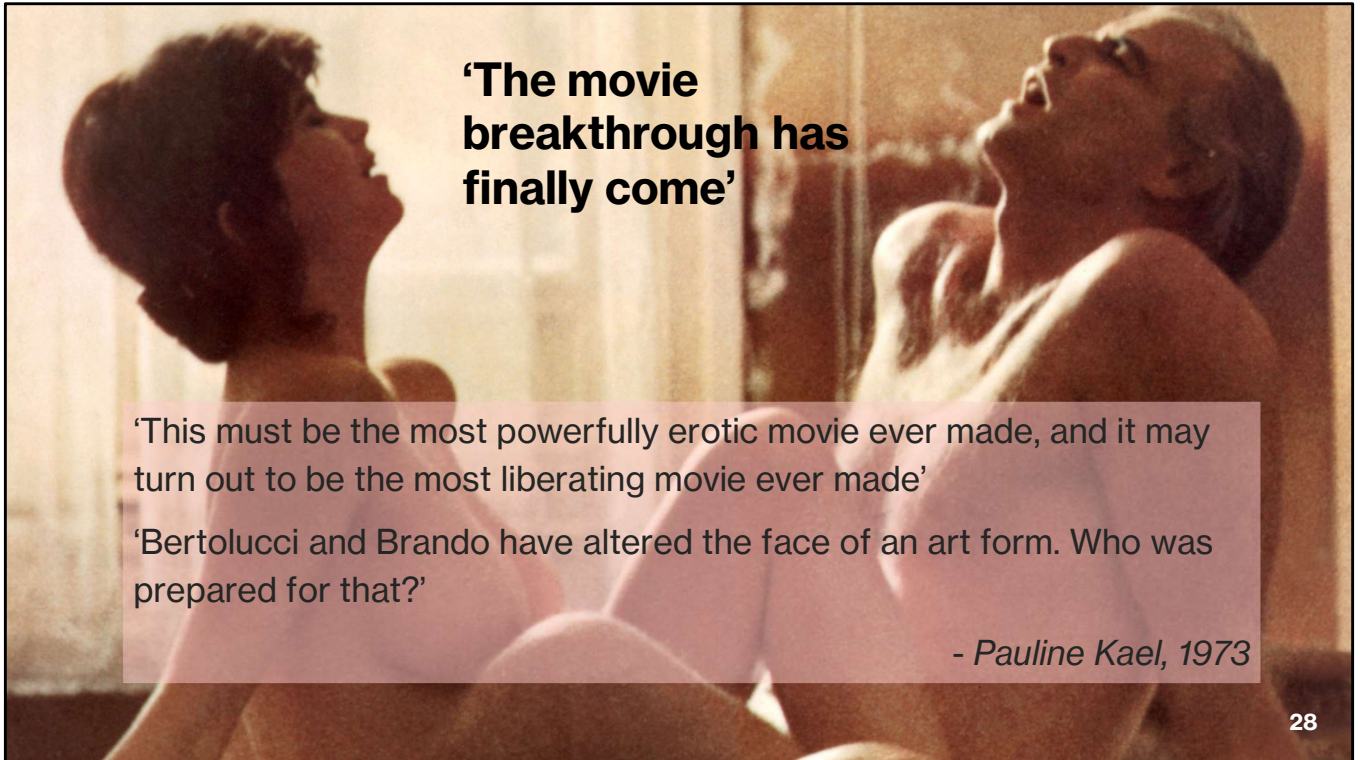
Brando as icon of old Hollywood

Italian director Bernardo Bertolucci

Brando plays American in Paris whose wife has taken her own life, trying to get away from life

Meets young woman when viewing an empty flat; have anonymous sex in this empty space for three days including famous ‘butter’ anal sex scene before she tries to

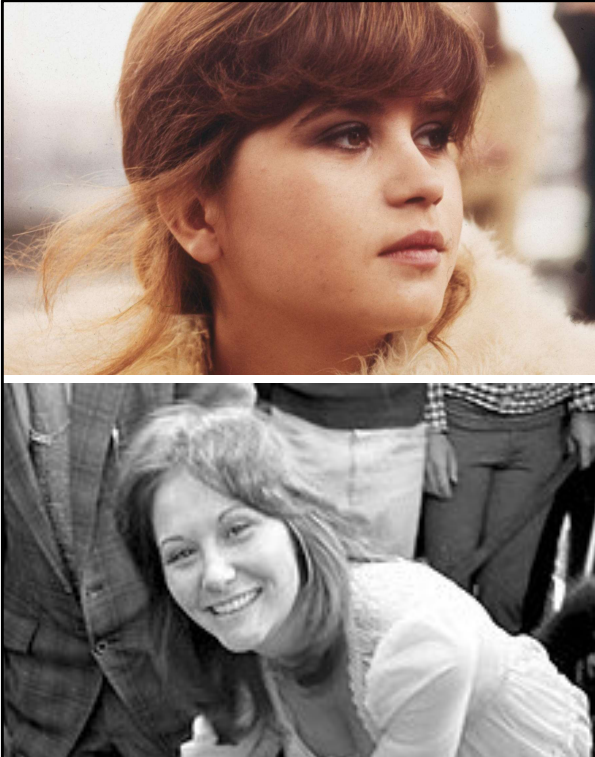
leave, he stalks her so she shoots him dead



PEOPLE, HOWEVER, DID SEE LTIP AS IT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE AROUSING, thanks in part to this gushing review from renowned critic PK

Both movies showed that films about sex could be successful
Sexual taboos were broken!
No longer needed to hint to titillate

<https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/834-last-tango-in-paris>



BUT ALL WAS NOT AS SEX POSITIVE AND WONDERFUL AS IT SEEMED

Both Linda Lovelace from Deep Throat and Maria Schneider from LTIP describe experiences filming as sexually abusive

LL reports being forced to film porn by then husband Chuck Traynor
Details her sexual and physical abuse in book called Ordeal
Living in poverty by end of 1970s. Never paid or received share of profits
Lead LL to 'find feminism' and she became figurehead of anti-porn feminists

MS has also revealed that famous butter scene wasn't scripted and her struggles at the 'surprise anal' were real

'I felt humiliated and to be honest, I felt a little raped...thankfully there was just one take'

Bertalucci quoted as saying he wanted her to react 'as a girl, not as an actress' – one of many examples of male directors actually abusing their female stars because they didn't believe that they were capable of ACTING and giving the response they wanted; something that is never said about male actors. It happened to Meryl fucking Streep in Kramer vs Kramer, where Dustin Hoffman would taunt her with the name of her recently deceased lover to make her cry, and it happened in 9 ½ Weeks when Kim

Bassinger was actually humiliated by Mickey Rourke and Adrian Lyne while making that kinky movie.

And while these revelations weren't made public until later, the rise of pornography and perceived acceptance of this graphic form of eroticism played a significant part in the regression that followed.

1980s: REAGANISM

- Reagan led a 'conservative revolution'
- Push back against previously perceived sexual freedoms



BECAUSE AFTER SEXUAL REVOLUTION OF 60S AND PORN CHIC OF 70S CAME...

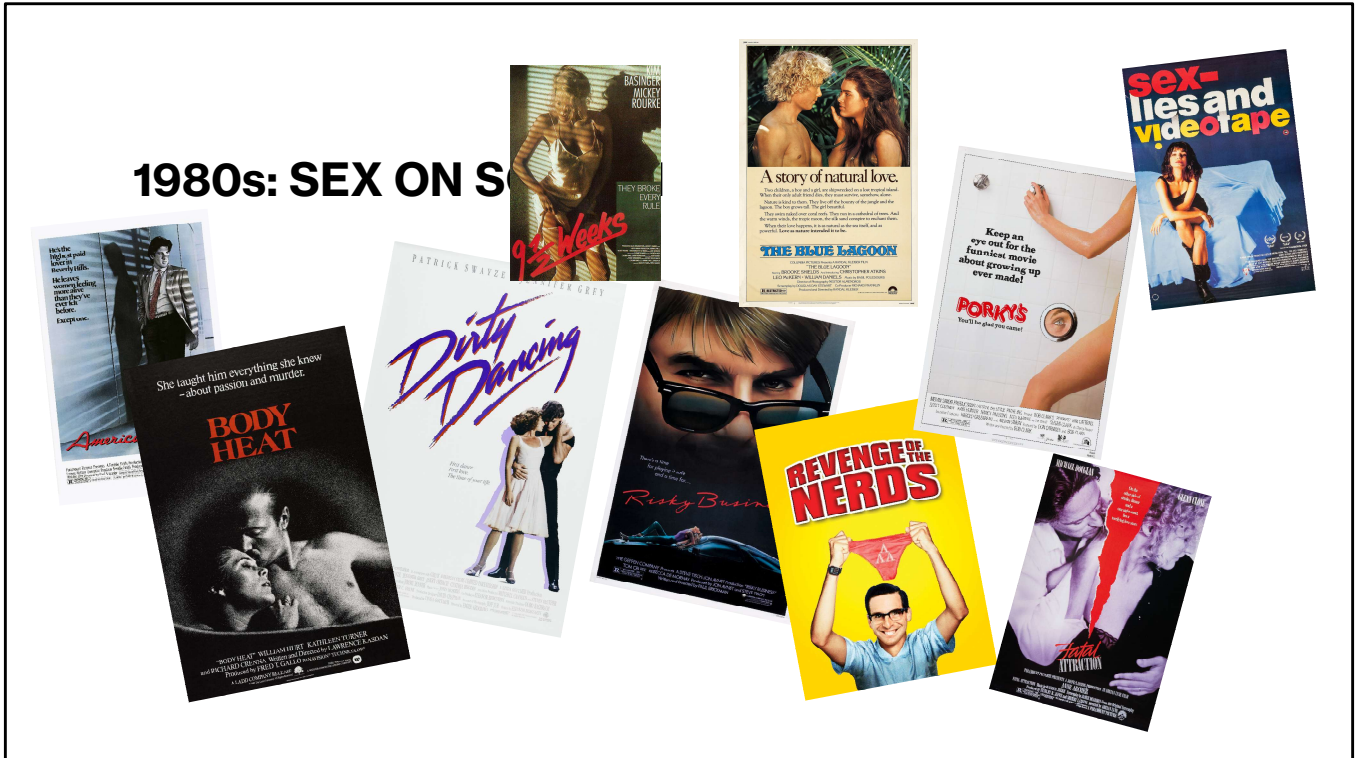
Because Reagan era politics in 1980s were socially incredibly conservative

- Although ultimately unsuccessfully, he had aimed to pass a federal ban on abortion
- His administration did succeed in preventing any civil rights legislation to protect the rights of gay people for passing at all during his 8-year term
- And his shame and abstinence response to the HIV/AIDS crisis has been blamed for the death of 60,000 Americans.

(Photo from 1954's Cattle Queen of Montana with none other than Barbara Stanwyck!)

The difference between the social regressions on 1980s and 1940s, however, was that with the ratings systems ALLOWED an outlet for the sexual repression; it allowed a push back against the taboo and against this socially conservative political environment

1980s: SEX ON S



Films about sex workers - American Gigolo 1981, Risky Business 1983

Teen comedies – Porkys 1981, Revenge of the Nerds 1984

Movies with sex as an inescapable part of the plot – Blue Lagoon 1980, Dirty Dancing 1987, sex lies and videotape 1989

Erotic thrillers – Body Heat 1981, 9 ½ weeks 1986, Fatal Attraction 1987

1980s: EROTIC THRILLERS and NEO-NOIR



The 1940s film noir movies were about dangerous women and what they could make men do but in the post-feminist world of 1980s – after the Feminist Mystique had told the world that being the perfect housewife was not satisfying for women and second wave feminism had told women to expect equality at work and in their sexual relationships – these neo noirs were much more about what the world had driven women to do, and how dangerous this was for men.

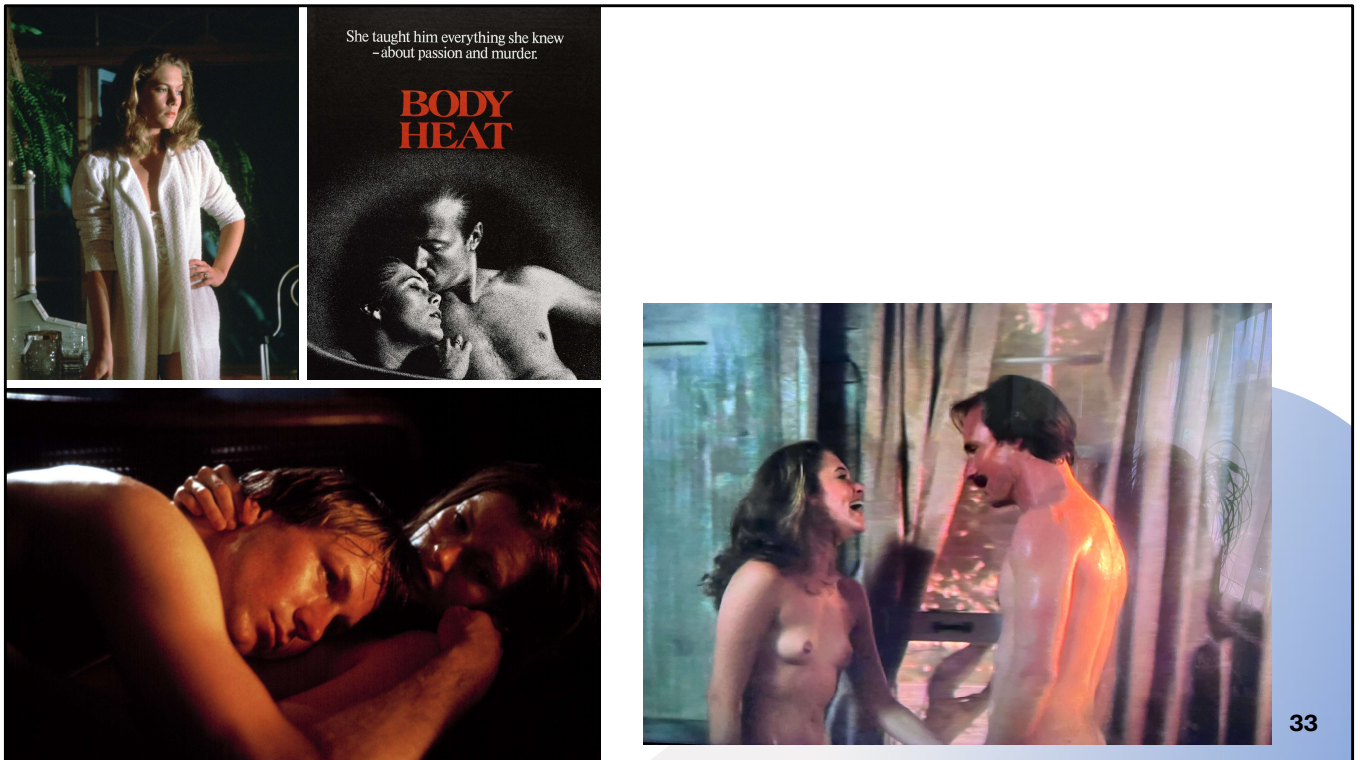
And, of course, the movies made in the 80s were much more focused on sex– they actually could DO what the Production Code movies only hinted at!

A good example of this is 1981's THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE

- Both based on a James M. Cain novel, PART tells the story of a chance encounter between Frank, a drifter, and Cora, the young and bored wife of a diner owner. They are immediately attracted to each other and plot to kill Cora's husband so that she can escape from her marriage. Once done, their relationship turns sour and they end up double-crossing each other, and Cora is killed.
- Obviously in the 1946 version, Lana Turner's Cora was a temptress that led Garfield's Frank astray but in 1981, Jessica Lange's Cora isn't a femme fatale at all and is more a trapped and downtrodden housewife whose frustrations with her situation in life lead her to illicit sex and to want to leave her marriage. To me, it

makes sense that Cora falls for a violent man like Nicholson's Frank because she can't see another way out.

- And unlike in 1940s, when the plot had to fit the idea that crime doesn't pay, the sex and violence in the 1981 version WAS the plot. PART becomes a story of how passion can literally destroy you and the couple are mutually driven wild by their sexual desire. In this version, the sex is almost more violent than the murder. It's violent and worryingly non-consensual initially, until she is persuaded around as happens too often in Hollywood movies – as with the 'passionate' kisses, the woman's struggles against her stronger attacker are just foreplay before she relents and they have great sex. And PART is considered one of the most graphic sex scenes since Last Tango! With a prolonged close-up of Lange's knickers as Nicholson gropes her, it is famous for showing pubic hair (shock horror) and was the source of much back-and-forth between the censors and producers to reach an agreement on what can be included.



Another famous neo-noir from 1981 is **BODY HEAT**, a remake of **DOUBLE INDEMNITY** starring Kathleen Turner and William Hurt.

This is a much more enjoyable film to watch – more knowing take on what was loved about film noir – and it is a lot of fun. The sex is hot and sweaty and passionate, but it looks like they're actually having a good time! In this scene in particular, Turner's Matty leads Hurt's Ned on by his cock (itself off screen but we do see HIS pubic hair, less of an issue than Lange's apparently), joking about she doesn't believe he needs more time before they go again.

Turner was a much more traditional femme fatale – insanely glamorous, sexually aggressive and totally in charge at all times – and Hurt was a more traditional **TARGET** literally led astray by his dick.

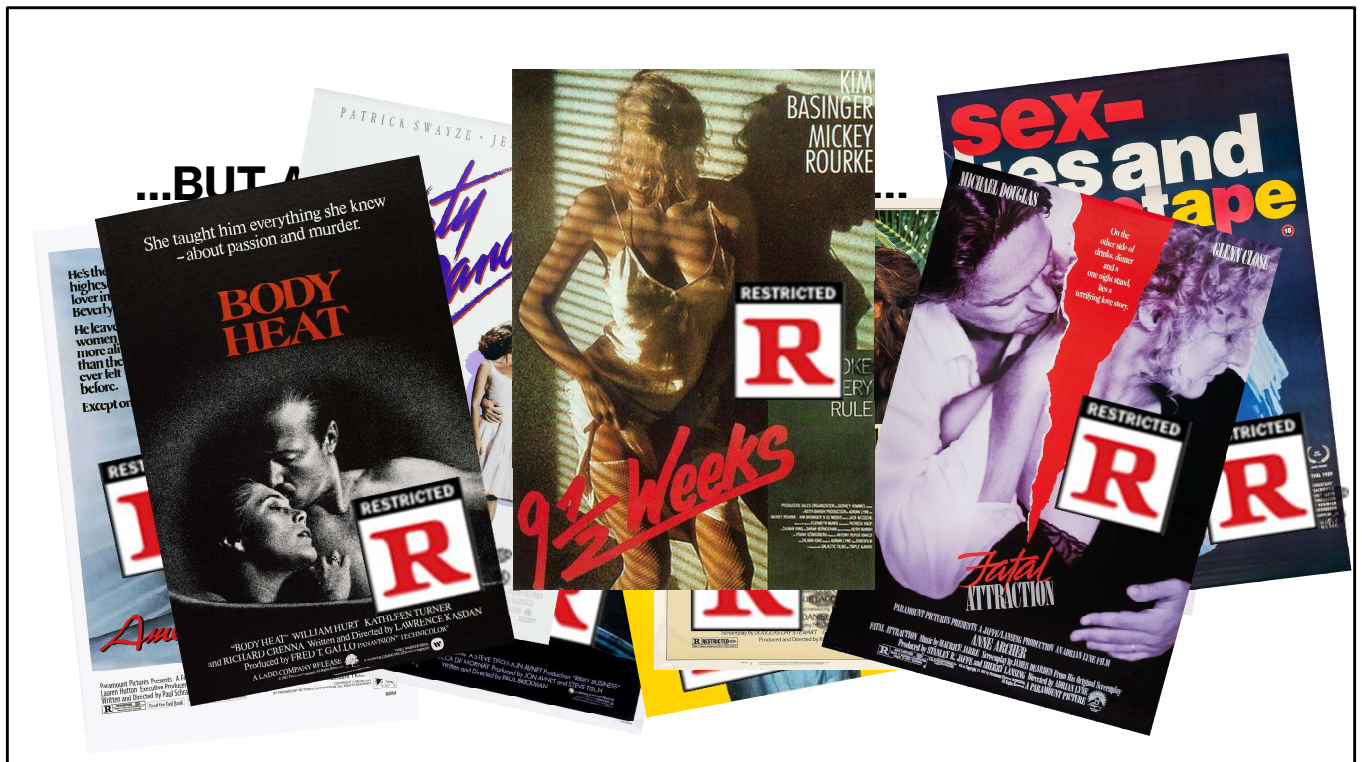
But this is different from *Double Indemnity* in the 40s because, in the 80s, Turner gets away with it! She has incredible sex with Hurt, convinces him to murder her husband, and concocts a convoluted plan that means she inherits her husband's entire fortune and Ned is convicted of the murder. She **CAN** have it all!

Instead, it is the response to this movie is perhaps more telling than the sexual

content itself about attitudes towards these dangerous and sexually assertive women. *Body Heat* was Kathleen Turner's first major role and she struggled to ever shake the belief that she really was that sexually voracious. During filming, she was accused of dating both William Hurt and Lawrence Kazdan, the director, at the same time. 'I just think you should know what people are saying' her agent and ex-boyfriend told her. It was assumed that, because she had been naked once, she would again and was considered unreasonable to insist on being asked every time. She has also said that she was aware that actors Michael Douglas, Warren Beatty and Jack Nicholson had had competitions to see who could 'get' her, because she must have been up for it.

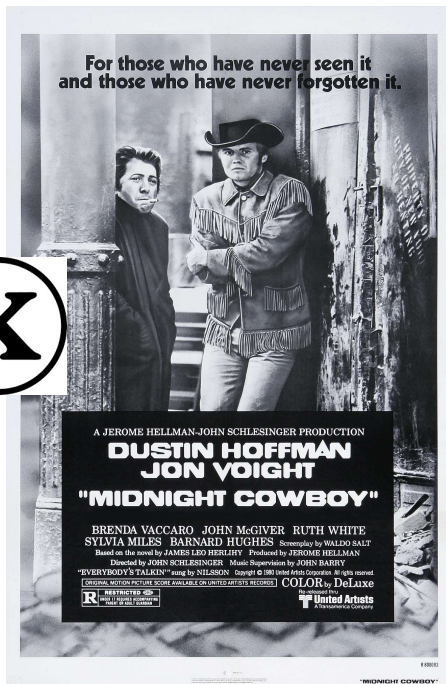
Again, why do so many men not understand than women can ACT?

It seemed that Hollywood and society did still punish sexually aggressive women...



But despite all of this sexual content – including that sex scene that was as graphic as anything in the x-rated Last Tango in Paris – all of these erotic movies in 1980s were rated R – so could be seen by anyone if they were accompanied by a parent.

And this was because x-rated movies were notoriously unsuccessful – both financially and critically.



X-RATING

- **MIDNIGHT COWBOY ACADEMY AWARD WINS:**
 - Best Picture
 - Best Director
 - Best Screenplay
- Other Academy Awards nominations for X/NC17 movies:
 - **A Clockwork Orange** (Best Picture, Director, Film Editing, and Adapted Screenplay)
 - **Last Tango in Paris** (Best Actor, Best Director)
 - **Henry and June** (Best Cinematography)
 - **Blonde** (Best Actress)

7/16/2023

Sample Footer Text

35

After its introduction in 1968, the X-rating started very well! In fact, the 2nd ever x-rated release was 1969's MIDNIGHT COWBOY, a story of a naïve sex worker who moves to NY and becomes involved with a con man, won 3 Oscars at the 1970 Academy Awards

BUT...those wins were the only ones that an X or NC-17 film would receive, and only 4 other films would ever be nominated.

And even Midnight Cowboy's infamous Oscar success is perhaps undeserved. It's distributor, United Artists, never applied for a rating and voluntarily assigned x-rating. 2 years later, it was given an official rating – R

<https://bestlifeonline.com/nc-17-movies-oscar-news/>

FINANCIAL IMPLICATION: US DOMESTIC

NC-17	
Last Tango in Paris (X)	\$36,144,000
Showgirls	\$20,350,754
Henry and June	\$11,567,449
The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and His Lover	\$7,724,701
Kids	\$7,412,216



R	
The Passion of the Christ	\$370,782,930
Deadpool	\$363,070,709
American Sniper	\$350,159,020
Joker	\$335,477,657
It	\$328,874,981

OVERALL	
Star Wars: Force Awakens	\$936,662,225
Avengers: Endgame	\$858,373,00
Spider-Man: No Way Home	\$814,115,070
Avatar	\$785,221,649
Top Gun: Maverick	\$718,732,821

And while SEX MAY SELL, it didn't sell as much as more restrained movies...

These figures are from BOX OFFICE MOJO and were correct as per May 23rd 2023

One other data source reported Deep Throat domestic box office of \$45 million but, as you can see, even the best selling X-rated film earned 10 x less than the best R rated movie.

<https://www.boxofficemojo.com/>

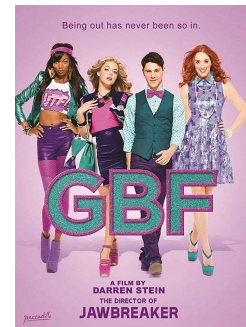
NC-17 RATING BECAME BOX OFFICE SUICIDE...

- Limited marketing budgets; limited TV advertisements
- Cinemas refused screenings; Blockbuster and Walmart refused to stock them
- ‘The difference between an NC-17 and an R can be millions of dollars.’



...ESPECIALLY FOR SEXUAL CONTENT

- ‘The open secret was that Hollywood counted on under-17 dollars for its R-rated special effects and horror movies’ *Roger Ebert 2000*
- Tougher MPAA standards for homosexuality



It’s a chicken and egg situation – do NC-17 movies not make money because they’re not marketed properly or are they not marketed properly so they don’t make money?

Do they not reach a bigger audiences as fewer people actually want to see sexually explicit content, or are the movies not given a big enough platform to reach the whole audience?

Major criticism of MPAA ratings is their focus on sexual content and leniency on violence.

Reknowned film critic, Roger Ebert, wrote a blazing article in 2000 titled ‘The Ugly Reality in Movie Ratings’ where he criticised the inconsistencies of ratings when it came to sex, citing ‘hard R’ films that should have been an NC-17 but are deemed fit for minors after a few cuts, and equally criticised inappropriate PG-13 movies, where complex and adult content was felt suitable for children simply because there was no nudity or swear words:’ citing the perceived differences between COYOTE UGLY AND ALMOST FAMOUS

This inconsistency is even more obvious with homosexual content. Any movie with gay sex has to really fight to avoid an NC17 rating and even in 2013, GBF, a high school comedy about prom queens in search of gay best friends was given an R rating

“For Sexual References” despite, to quote director Darren Stein, ‘not having a single F-bomb, hint of nudity or violence in the film.’ The only explanation can be that simply being gay as a teenager was considered both sexual and inappropriate for children.

<https://www.rogerebert.com/roger-ebert/ugly-reality-in-movie-ratings>

<https://www.gawker.com/g-b-f-was-rated-r-for-being-gay-1485807841>

MPAA CRITICISED FOR LACK OF CLARITY

15

BBFC

Nudity

There are no constraints on nudity in a non-sexual or educational context. Sexual nudity may be permitted but strong detail is likely to be brief or presented in a comic context.

Sex

Sexual activity may be portrayed, but usually without strong detail. There may be strong verbal references to sexual behaviour. Repeated very strong references, particularly those using pornographic language, are unlikely to be acceptable. Works whose primary purpose is sexual arousal are unacceptable.

Sexual Violence and sexual threat

There may be strong verbal references to sexual violence but any depiction of the stronger forms of sexual violence, including rape, must not be detailed or prolonged. A strong and sustained focus on sexual threat is unacceptable.

MPAA

- A board of parents assign a rating they believe most American parents would give a movie...

Unfortunately, it's difficult to be certain exactly what causes films to get a particular rating because the MPAA is notoriously vague and secretive about its process.

The MPAA, however, have a board of anonymous parents who consider factors such as violence, sex, language and drug use, and rate the movie after one sitting—initially without speaking to each other and then agree a final rating after a full discussion. No one knows who these parents are – 2018 report stated the rating board is composed of eight to 13 raters who are parents. With the exception of senior raters, members must have children ages 5 to 15 when they join, and must leave when their children reach 21. They can serve as long as seven years.

But we don't know anything else about them – their sexuality, their religion, their disability status or any of the demographic diversity measures that would ensure a fair assessment.

Which is why the system is a bit of a joke...

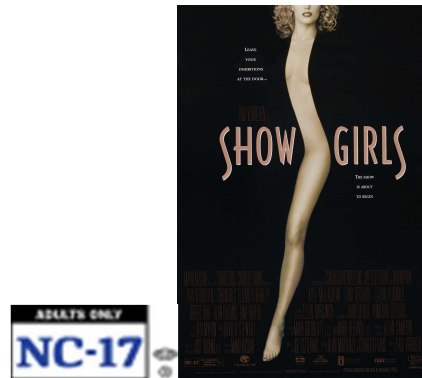
<https://www.latimes.com/business/hollywood/la-fi-ct-mpaa-ratings-20181029-story.html>

PAUL VERHOEVEN CASE STUDY

BASIC INSTINCT, 1992

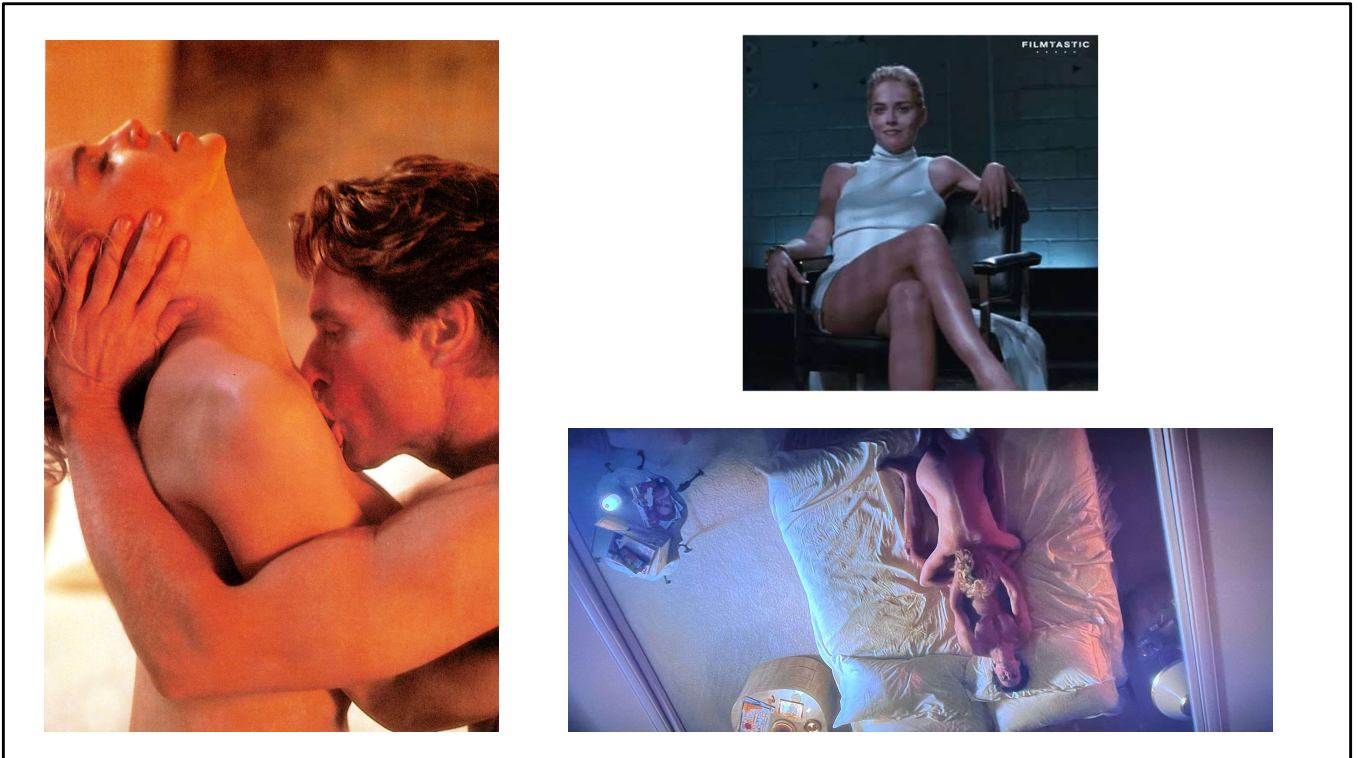


SHOWGIRLS, 1995



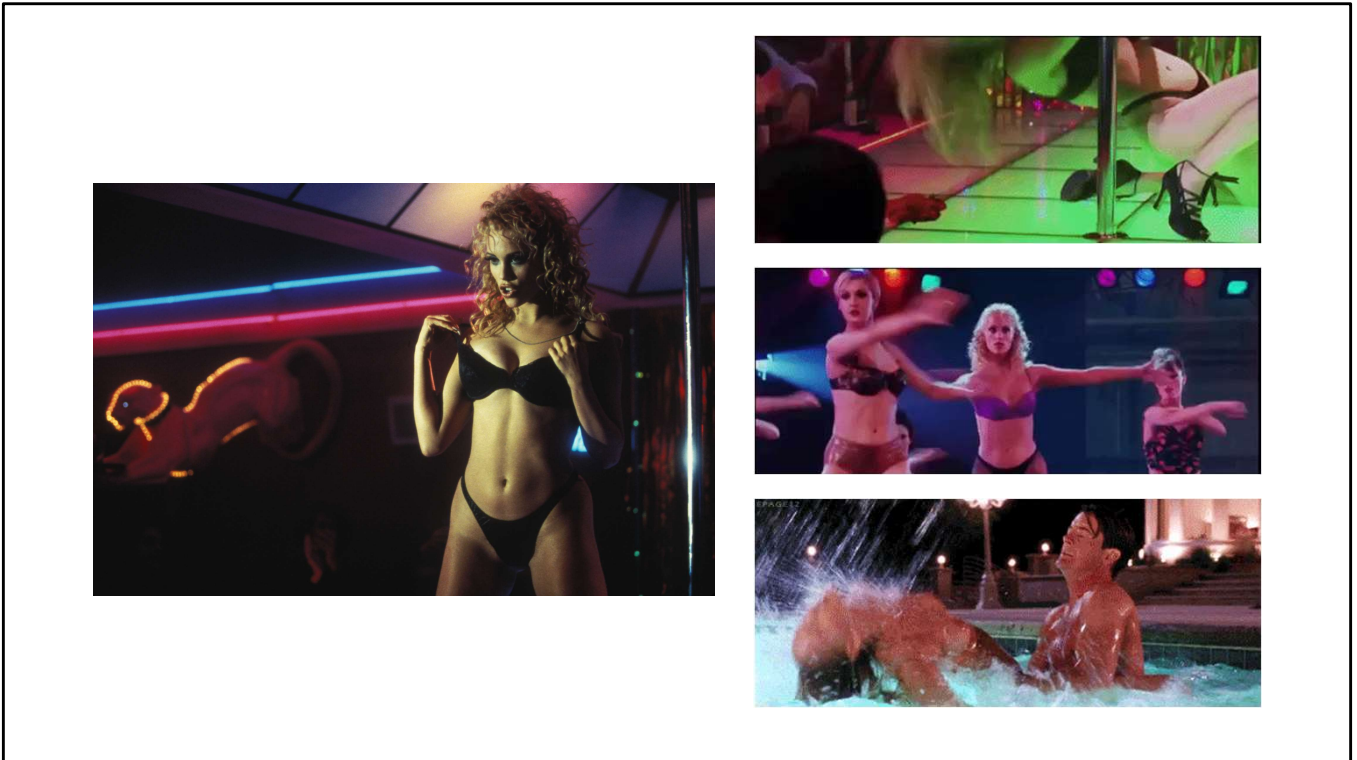
And it's a joke that I am pretty sure Paul Verhoeven is laughing at the MPAA about with two films that he made in the early 90s.

But I am fascinated by the difference between these movies – the R rated Basic Instinct and NC-17 Show Girls.



Basic Instinct is a powerful, dramatic drama that has such overt Hitchcockian overtones that it almost feels too much – the sweeping vistas and ever-present dramatic music – but the cast are so incredible that they carry it off. Michael Douglas plays a scum-bag cop investigating a beautiful author, Sharon Stone, who is the main suspect in the murder of a rockstar, murdered with an ice pick during sex, exactly as she had written in a novel a few years ago. Douglas's Nick is seduced by Stone's Catherine and absolutely led astray so that she can literally get away with murder. And this movie is sexy. Its full of sex and the sex is really hot!

It's not perfect. There's a sex scene early in the movie that is so aggressive that it feels non-consensual, plus there are persisting rumours that Stone didn't know how much of her body was going to be visible in the famous upskirt scene, and the movie was boycotted by LGBT+ groups on its release as it definitely plays into a 'bisexuals are evil' trope that was surprisingly common, but there is no denying that Douglas and Stone are electric together and the sex is believable and HOT.



After the mega success of Basic Instinct, making \$300 million at the box office, Verhoeven was given carte blanche to make whatever movie he wanted and the studio was particularly keen to see what he could make at an NC17 rating. If BI was that hot with an R, anything more would be incandescent!

And so he made SHOW GIRLS. Which is an absolute joke of a movie. It's a re-telling of ALL ABOUT EVE when an exotic dancer, Nomi played by Elizabeth Berkley, moves to Las Vegas to try and become a real dancer, pushing aside her mentor, Gina Gershon, to become the star. On first viewing, it seems badly made, badly acted and the sex is absolutely ridiculous. And it ruined the careers of star Elizabeth Berkley and Verhoeven himself for a long long time.

It's not all bad – it's the first movie I saw that mentions period sex and there's a interracial sexual relationship, which was still scandalous and rare even in the mid 90s. But I realised when researching it for my review a few years ago that Verhoeven had intended it to look so awful. He was making a statement about how extreme nudity and aggressive sex isn't what makes Hollywood sex hot. How being explicit isn't always erotic. And, more importantly, the only sex in the whole movie that looks real is a rape scene at the end. Despite it's bad reputation, SHOW GIRLS is actually a pretty astute demonstration of objectification; of how strippers and exotic dancers

are treated like sexual objects that are too beautiful to be real and so don't need to be treated like human beings. We're not supposed to find it sexy; it's supposed to make us uncomfortable.

1990s: BACKLASH

- 'You may be free and equal now, it says to women, but you have never been so miserable'
- 'In Hollywood films, of which Fatal Attraction is only the most famous, emancipated women with condominiums of their own slink wild-eyed between bare walls, paying for their liberty with an empty bed, barren womb'

**SUSAN
FALUDI**
BACKLASH
THE UNDECLARED
WAR AGAINST
WOMEN



42

A lot of the movies with high sexual content in the 90s promoted significant debate about whether or not they were 'good' for women.

The early 90s were the beginnings of the 'feminism has gone too far' movements, described in 1991 by Susan Faludi's famous book 'Backlash: The undeclared war against women' a book that makes for depressingly relevant reading now. This was a time when second wave feminism had proved to be inadequate and unable to give women true equality but had done enough to cause significant male fragility, and create fear in men at the dangers posed by power hungry but unsatisfied women. According to the backlash, women have careers but no men; women have rights to abortion but no children to love them. In short, feminism has made women miserable.

Faludi's book directly attacked FA, a movie released in 1987, directed by Adrian Lyne And Faludi was right to highlight FA as is a particularly UNfeminist movie – Alex, Glenn Close's character, has clearly been RUINED BY FEMINISM. She is portrayed as totally unreasonable for not accepting an abortion as if having the right to choose NOT to have an abortion was a step too far. She is clearly so desperate for a family and a love that her highflying career has not given her that she is willing to kill for it.

Which is why it was so interesting that Adrian Lyne prominently placed Faludi's book in his next erotic thriller, 1993's INDECENT PROPOSAL

A movie that asks the question 'would you let a stranger spend a night with your wife for \$1,000,000?' but manages to ruin an incredibly hot potential for a cuckold thriller by making it, surprise surprise, too misogynistic.

But this movie became the fulcrum for a huge debate in 1993 about WHAT WOMEN ACTUALLY WANT with sex-worker exclusionary feminists claiming Demi Moore's character was a victim because she is paid for sex and Faludi claiming Robert Redford's character 'raped her for money' whereas others congratulated Moore for embracing her sexuality.

The problem was movies were being blamed for not portraying women the way that they would want...but Hollywood was still not really allowing women to make movies.

So far, none of the movies we have discussed were directed by women. None a single one that I have mentioned in this entire presentation.

And I haven't done that on purpose. It's simply that there are not enough women working in the movie industry – a Forbes article in January this year states that only 11% of the top 100 grossing movies in 2022 had female directors and representation hasn't really changed over the past 25 years

(<https://www.forbes.com/sites/kimelsesser/2023/01/04/percent-of-women-behind-the-scenes-of-top-films-declined-in-2022-according-to-new-study/?sh=4a0d8c7958f4>)



Which is why I am so fascinated by 1996's *BOUND*. This was a classic neo noir in structure but had a significant difference – the heroes are both women. *BOUND* is about beautiful gangster's moll Violet played by Jennifer Tilly, who seduces her neighbour tough ex-con Corky, played by Gina Gershon, and persuades her to help rob her husband, who works for the mob and is looking after \$2 million in cash for them. As a crime thriller, it's amazing - tense, dramatic and violent. As specifically an *EROTIC* thriller, it's just so hot.

BOUND is also different because it was directed by women - the Wachowski twins, Lily and Lana, who are trans women but they did not come out until later in the decade – after the monumental success of *The Matrix*. This means that the Hollywood establishment didn't know that they were women in 1996 so they were not limited by the misogynistic structures within the industry that might have otherwise affected them.

And I love how this movie exaggerated the tropes of genre with the vampy and feminine Violet teaming up with the edgy and raw Corky - One retrospective review from the 25th anniversary described Corky as a feminine James Dean and they're completely right - a loner but romantic, tough and capable but still vulnerable. It's an incredible performance and it's sexy as hell!- but does so in a

way that is so affectionate and romantic that it doesn't feel like mockery. As you can see in this clip, it is almost a comedy with the suggestive hand action on the pipes and overflowing water imagery, but it feels playful and sweet. And the chemistry between Gershon and Tilly is absolutely incredible!

The Wachowski sisters also brought in noted feminist lesbian writer Susan Bright to consult on the sex scenes, giving them an authenticity that is rarely seen in Hollywood sex scenes full stop, let alone lesbian sex scenes. You only need think of the marathon and much criticised sex scenes in 2013's *Blue is the Warmest Colour* to see what happens when heterosexual men try to create lesbian eroticism, but that doesn't happen here.

Bound broke the mould because it was a gay film that wasn't really about being gay, and its characters both had a happy ending, if you'll excuse the innuendo. They get away with their crime and get to live happily ever after! At a time when the 'Bury Your Gays' trope was in full force, this was truly revolutionary! Not only that, it's more feminist than any of its counterparts as there is no subconscious misogyny, no objectification.

So we may have only reached 1996 but I am jumping ahead to the present day...

AND NOW...?

- Intimacy coordinators
 - Pioneered by **Ita O'Brien**



INTIMACY ON SET GUIDELINES

BEST PRACTICE WHEN WORKING WITH INTIMACY, SIMULATED SEX SCENES, AND NUDITY

- Acknowledgement and avoidance of the male gaze
 - Term coined by **Laura Mulvey** in 1973
 - Women as passive objects to be looked at; men as active subjects to look at them

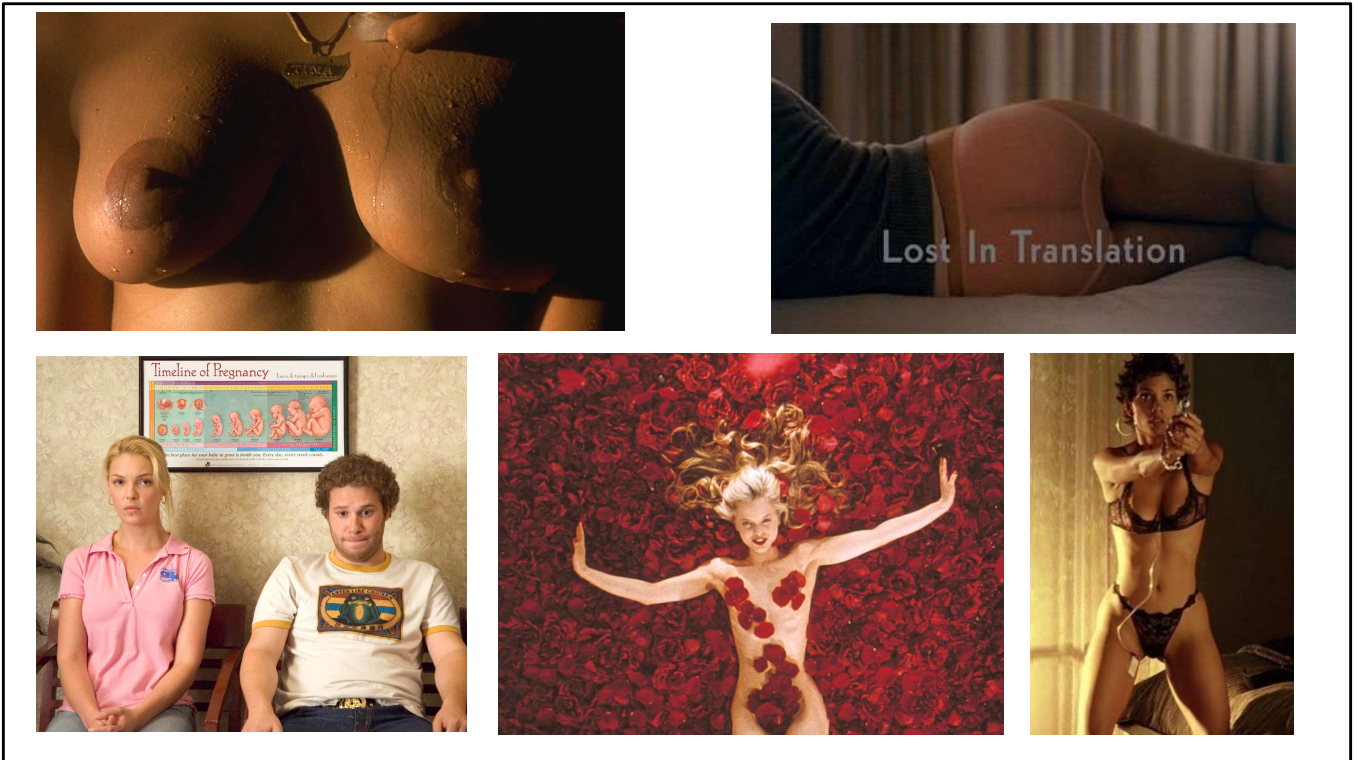


In my opinion, there are two main breakthroughs that are changing sex at the cinema for the better

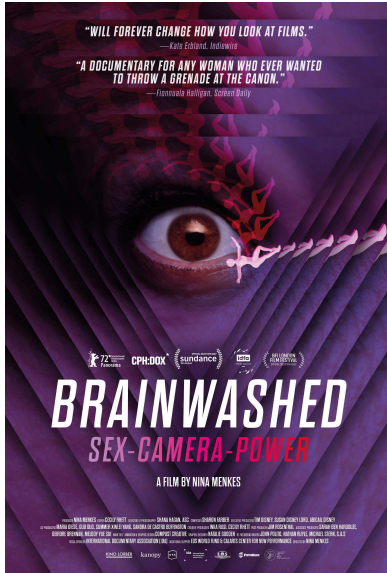
Ita O'Brien is the intimacy coordinator who has worked on *NORMAL PEOPLE* and *I MAY DESTROY YOU* and believes that simulated sex scenes and filmed intimacy connections need to be choreographed just like you would a fight scene or dance to ensure that everyone is comfortable and to prevent anyone getting hurt, which all seem like common sense but...

I haven't really talked about the male gaze in this talk as it is really too big a subject for this talk, but it is an important part of the history of sex and women in movies and was first documented in LM essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'

Essentially, the male gaze is about the objectification of women – to become literally passive objects to be looked at while men have all the power and control how women are seen and how they act

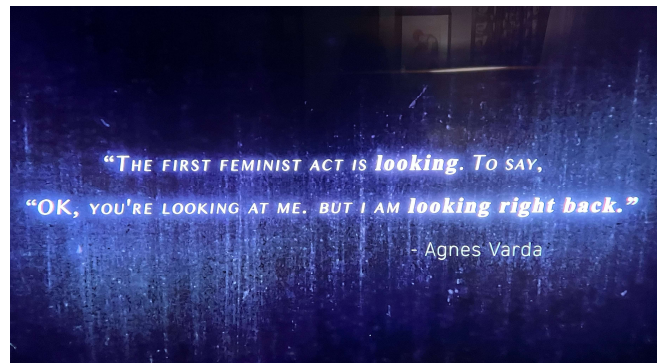


The male gaze is why women's bodies are often seen in fragments (legs, breasts, lips) (DO THE RIGHT THING) with panning shots along them or moving in slow motion (LOST IN TRANSLATION). It's why women have to be beautiful and men can be interesting. It's why funny average looking men always get hot girls (KNOCKED UP) It's why movies are filled with gratuitous nudity (SWORDFISH) and why youth and young bodies are so valued and fetishised (AMERICAN BEAUTY)...and it's why the Patriarchy still has such a strong hold over our society.



What does desire look like when it's not subject and object?

- **Nina Menkes**



7/16/2023

Sample Footer Text

46

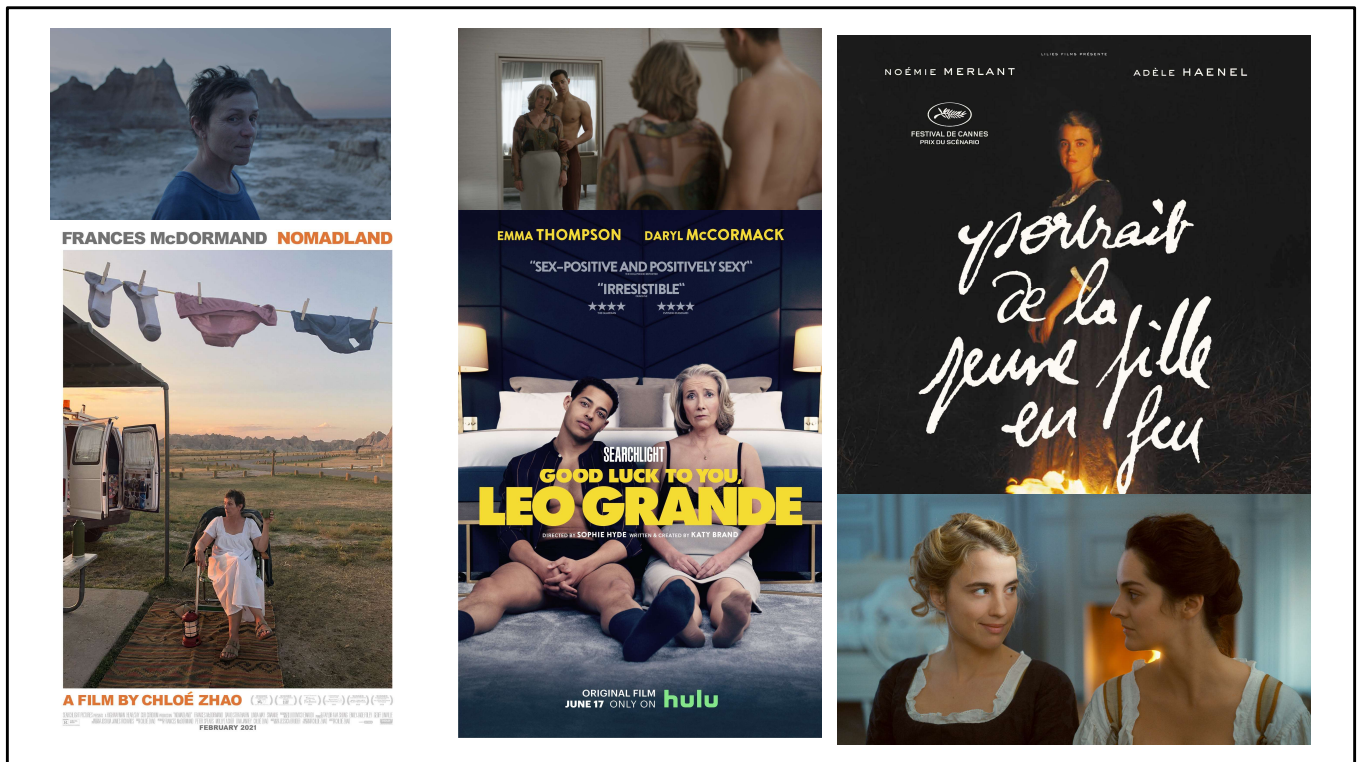
But people – and importantly film makers – are talking more about the male gaze and acknowledging its hold over Hollywood

Nina Menkes has made an incredibly powerful documentary currently available for rent on BFI Player that really is a feminist call to arms as it deconstructs how Hollywood movies and cinema have portrayed women over its entire history, and how this can be linked directly to #MeToo and rape culture, employment discrimination and sexual harassment.

If women are only ever there to be looked at, what does it matter what she says or what she wants or doesn't want?

I could spend another 45 minutes talking about the influence of freely available porn and the input of the internet on Hollywood sex, but that's a whole other topic.

Instead, I want to wrap this up by talking about how things may be changing for the better...



But we are now starting to see what cinema could look like without the male gaze, and I like it and I hope that this is our future.

It looks like CHLOE ZHAO, a POC and a woman, winning both the Best Picture and Best Director Oscars for Nomadland in 2020 – a movie whose subject is a woman in her 60s. Zhao may have been the second best director who was a woman

And from a sex and desire perspective, change looks a lot like 2022's GOOD LUCK TO YOU, LEO GRANDE, a movie directed by Sophie Hyde, that largely avoids the tropes of the male gaze and not only centres female pleasure but the sexual pleasure of older women.

And it looks like 2019's A PORTRAIT OF A LADY ON FIRE by Celine Sciamma, a film where both women are subject and object, and desire each other equally, gazing at each other equally.

...and it's really fucking hot!

And its no accident that these are all made by women. Equality in film making will lead to more diversity and equality on screen and that can only lead to better, hotter

and more interesting and equal sex. And I'm very excited about it!!

COPYRIGHT NOTICES/REFERENCES

- Stills and photos are sourced from [MovieStillsDB.com](https://www.moviestillsdb.com)
- Movie posters are sourced from [Cinematerial.com](https://www.cinematerial.com)
 - They are provided courtesy of their respective production studios and/or distribution companies. Images are intended for educational or editorial use only
- Gifs are sources from [Giphy.com](https://www.giphy.com)
- Full references will on sexlovevideo.com next week!
- Full list of movies discussed and where to stream them is on my Letterboxd:

