



## Pornographic Film and Video: Bisexual

by Joe A. Thomas

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As a genre, bisexual pornography began in earnest during the mid-1980s, shortly after the popularization of the concept of a bisexual identity during the previous decade. While the sexological concept of bisexuality may be defined simply as an erotic or romantic attraction to both sexes, within the pornography industry it has taken on a more circumscribed meaning: films that feature some type of male homosexual activity in addition to the usual heterosexual and all-female scenes.

Examples of same-sex activity mixed with heterosexual coupling are found as early as Etruscan tomb paintings. In the modern era scenes of women together are found in pornography from its beginnings in nineteenth-century photography and the stag films of the early twentieth century--generally in conjunction with additional scenes of heterosexual intercourse.

During pornography's growth era in the 1970s and 1980s sexual activity between two women became an expected component of the content of mainstream pornographic film and video, being seen in such classics as *Deep Throat* and *Behind the Green Door*. However, these images were clearly designed for consumption by heterosexual male viewers. Male homosexual imagery was still off-limits outside of gay pornography.

Partly as a result of the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, less restrictive notions of sexual identity began surfacing. By the late 1970s readers' letters submitted to *Penthouse* and *Penthouse Forum*--relating various sexual escapades--began to include occasional forays into male bisexuality.

In 1984 and 1985 a few video companies such as Catalina and Vivid took the plunge into a new genre of porn: bisexual features that included not only the standard mix of heterosexual and all-female scenes, but also scenes of men together.

Director Paul Norman was among the first to establish a reputation for these new bisexual videos. His "Bi and Beyond" series, which debuted in 1988, was among the most famous examples of early bisexual porn. Bisexual videos' titles almost always play on the prefix "bi," as, for example, *Bi Dreams of Genie* (1994).

Frequently starring gay porn performers in the male roles, the sexual action is fairly evenly divided between heterosexual and same-sex activity. Bisexual videos offered heterosexual stars of gay pornography, such as Jeff Stryker, an opportunity to move towards the straight side of the industry.

The exact audience and market for these videos is not completely clear. Certainly the idea was to tap into the new bisexual population, which the media was touting as a sizeable and previously overlooked group.

While some free-thinking, self-identified bisexuals undoubtedly rented or bought these videos, perhaps a larger group was ostensibly heterosexual men who were curious about sex with other men, or who were coming to grips with their own burgeoning homosexual feelings. Straight women who enjoyed watching men together were also likely an underappreciated audience.

As the genre developed, however, bisexual videos became increasingly associated with the gay male porn industry. By the turn of the century scenes with women together became increasingly rare in bisexual porn, and bisexual videos frequently resembled gay videos with the addition of heterosexual scenes.

Perhaps partly a result of the AIDS epidemic, the performers, directors and producers of bisexual videos were rarely active in the straight porn industry. This alienation increased to the point that in 1998, when straight performer Mark Slade performed in some gay videos, he was no longer able to find work in straight videos.

Thor Stephans, a veteran director of bisexual and gay videos, has reported that many women refused to perform in bisexual videos for fear of being marked with a stigma that would prevent their return to the straight business. As a result, the quality and number of bisexual videos has decreased dramatically since their heyday in the 1980s, and the genre faces an uncertain future.

### **Bibliography**

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### **About the Author**

**Joe A. Thomas** is Associate Professor and Chair of the Art Department at Clarion University of Pennsylvania. His research focuses primarily on issues of sexuality and representation, but also digresses into American Pop Art and Italian Mannerism.