

Working Women in Film: Syllabus 37:575:394:01

LSEER, School of Management and Labor Relations, Rutgers, the State University of NJ
Course will meet Mondays, 3/30, 4/06, 4/13, 4/27, 5/04 (no class 4/27), 12:35pm – 3:35pm, at the Labor Education Center.

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Images of workingwomen in film both reflect American culture and help shape new cultural standards. There are surprisingly few films about the workplace and even fewer films that focus on women and their work lives. However, these films have presented iconic images. The workplace is more prevalent on the television screen, but even here is usually the setting for personal relationships. Film and television creators have been accused of stereotyping and marginalizing women as workers.

This brief course will give us an opportunity to view some of these films and television shows and how they portray workingwomen in the factory, the office, and the home. We will analyze how the tools of film and television—scripts, dialog, camera work, music—communicate a specific vision of “women at work”, and discuss if this vision has changed over the years and the relationship of this vision with the reality of women in the workplace.

Learning Outcomes:

Students will:

Learn a framework with which to critically analyze films, television, and other visual media. Acquire knowledge about the history of significant labor films and television programs and about the gender, economic, and racial issues that they explore. Become aware of how working people and unions are portrayed in popular culture.

Attendance and Grading

Attendance is critical. All absences must be excused and you will be responsible for making up the work and getting class notes. If you miss a film screening, you will be responsible for viewing the film on your own.

Grades will be based on:

1. **Attendance & Attention. This includes arriving in class on time and staying for the full class period.** If you need to leave early, tell me. All Cell Phones turned off in class. No social media, including during film viewings.
2. **Contributions to class discussion** (quantity AND quality). You will be expected to listen to and respond to other student comments and questions as well as articulating your own views.
3. **Class assignments.** In some classes, you may be given specific questions, to be answered and completed after the film.
4. **Critical review** (writing assignment). The review will be graded on content and writing quality.
5. **Short Exams.** There will be 2 brief exams to test your comprehension of the readings and class lectures and discussions.
6. **Grade Review:** If you feel that your final grade should be changed, please submit this request by email with a detailed explanation as to why you think it should be changed. All requests will be viewed as Grade Reviews. Your work for the course will be reviewed and a decision made on whether your grade is appropriate. **Under grade review, your grade could go up or down or stay the same.**

Required Readings & Films:

Readings will be available on Sakai or handed out in class. Readings will be taken from film studies and labor and gender studies literature. In some cases, you will be referred to a web site, to read an article online.

Films will be viewed in class. If you miss a class, you will be responsible for viewing the film on your own.

You will also need to view a film or television series for your Critical Review. **This may involve purchasing or streaming a film (or television title); most films cost far less than the cost of a textbook.**

Critical Review

View a film or one season of a television program not viewed in class (a list of possible titles will be provided). The film/television show must center on a woman who works and which portrays her in the workplace actually engaging in work activities. Write a critical review of the film or program, focusing on how it portrays gender roles and the work process. The paper should be 2-4 pages

long, double-spaced. **More specific guidelines for the paper will be distributed in class.**

This is NOT a research paper; I am interested in what you have to say. It is acceptable to read articles about the background and history of the film and filmmaker(s). Please do not read professional reviews. If you do use any articles, web sites, etc., they should be documented according to MLA or APA style sheets.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is basically offering other's ideas as your own. Acts of plagiarism include direct copying from another source without attribution and close paraphrasing from another source without attribution. Incidents of plagiarism will have consequences, ranging from a failing grade to being reported to the dean.

- Tips on how to avoid plagiarism: http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/avoid_plagiarism
- Video explaining plagiarism: <http://library.camden.rutgers.edu/EducationalModule/Plagiarism/>
- How to paraphrase without plagiarizing: http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QPA_paraphrase.html
- Rutgers Academic Integrity Policy: <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy>



Class One

Hollywood and the 'Working Girl', 3/30

How do we view films critically?

Hollywood's early images of working women.

View In Class: ***His Girl Friday***, 1940, directed by Howard Hawks or another film from that period.

Assignments for Week 2:

(1) Readings (available on Sakai or the Internet):

(a) Beginning of chapter 2, "The Structure and History of Hollywood Filmmaking." *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality at the Movies, 2nd ed.* by Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 21-28.

(b) Chapter 11, "Exploring the Visual Parameters of Women in Film," *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality at the Movies, 2nd ed.* by Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 238-256.

(c) Optional: The Dollar and Cents Case Against Hollywood's Exclusion of Women, by Walt Hickey, FiveThirtyEightLife, April 1 2014. <http://fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-dollar-and-cents-case-against-hollywoods-exclusion-of-women/>

(d) Optional: McDonald, Tamar Jeffers. *Mad Men* and Career Women: *The Best of Everything?* From *Analyzing Mad Men: Critical Essays on the Television Series*, ed. by Scott F. Stoddart, McFarland, 2011.

Class Two: Hollywood and The Career Girl, 4/06

The "Woman's Film"; The Big Choice of All Career Women (in film in the 1950's and early 1960's).

View in Class: Selections from **The Best of Everything**, 1959, directed by Jean Negulesco.

Assignments for Week 3:

(1) Readings (available on Sakai or the Internet):

(a) "Norma Rae", *Working Stiffs, Union Maids, Red, and Riffraff: And Expanded Guide to Films about Labor*, by Tom Zaniello, (ILR Press, 2003), pp.171 – 173

(b) Chapter 13, "Gender in American Film Since the 1960's," *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality at the Movies*, 2nd ed. by Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 278-290, 296-302. Sakai.

(c) Optional: "Real 'Norma Rae' dies of cancer after insurer delayed treatment," by Sue Sturgis, The Institute for Southern Studies, Sept. 14, 2009, <http://www.southernstudies.org/2009/09/real-norma-rae-dies-of-cancer-after-insurer-delayed-treatment.html>

(2) **Select film or television title for Critical Review.** Email selection to instructor at donna.schulman@gmail.com. Use subject heading Film Class. Suggested film and television titles are listed at the end of this syllabus.

All titles must be submitted for approval, even if they are on the list. I may cut titles if too many students decide to write about the same film. If you want to write about a title not on the list, keep in mind that it must be a quality film or television show that portrays a woman in the workplace for a significant percentage of time. Be prepared to explain how your title relates to the topic of this course. **You will lose points if your film/tv title is not selected by class 3.**

Class Three: The Union Maid - Norma Rae, 4/13

Quiz on first two classes and readings.

Introduction to films about women who take action.

View in Class: ***Norma Rae***, 1979, directed by Martin Ritt.

Assignments for Week 4:

(1) View Film or Television Program for Film Analysis assignment.

(2) Readings:

(a) Chapter 5, “Style and Structure in Writing,” from *A Short Guide to Writing About Film*, 9th ed. by Timothy Corrigan (Pearson, 2015), pp. 112-130.

(b) “Women and American Television”, pp. 284-285, *America on Film* (this was also part of last week’s reading assignment).

(c) McIntosh, Helen. Representations of Female Scientists in *The Big Bang Theory*. *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 2014, vol. 42, issue 4.

Class Four, 4/20

Working Women on Television: Single Gals and Working Moms

We will finish watching *Norma Rae*, if necessary, and discuss the film.

History of working women in scripted television—From Beulah to “our Mary” to Clare to “Ugly Betty” to Big Bang Theory.

To be viewed (tentatively): “The Good Times News”, episode 1, season 3, *The Mary Tyler Moore* show.

Assignments for Week 4, December 3rd:

(1) Readings (available on Sakai):

(a) Optional: Kessler-Harris, Alice. Rosie the Riveter: Who Was She? *Labor History*, 2001, pp. 249-253. Sakai.

(2) **Finish Critical Review, to be handed in electronically through the course Sakai site.**

Class Five:

Working Women Documented

I. Quiz on classes 3 and 4—films, discussions, readings.

II. View in class: *The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter*. 1980, directed by Connie Field.

What is a documentary?

Compare fictional and documentary portrayals of working women.

The stereotype and reality of “Rosies.”

Suggested Films & Television Shows for Critical Review

These titles are available through Netflix, Amazon.com, and other film sources; many titles are available from the public library. Some films are available for in-library viewing at the Carey Library (the SMLR Library located in the Labor Education Center). Many titles can be purchased through Amazon, Barnes & Noble, or TCM for far less than the cost of a textbook.

If you have a film in mind not listed here, you must get the instructor’s approval. You may also analyze a television program; if you decide to do that, you must view **one complete season** of that program.

FILMS

Alice Doesn’t Live Here Anymore. 1974, directed by Martin Scorsese. Alice, widowed suddenly, must recreate the way she relates to the world as she waitresses at Mel and Ruby’s diner in Arizona.

Baby Boom, 1987. Diane Keaton gives up her high-powered career to take care of a baby she has inherited in the country. It doesn’t quite work.

Bread and Roses, 2000, directed by Ken Loach, the fictional story of two Mexican sisters who become involved in a union organizing drive of janitors in L.A., based on the real-life Justice for Janitors campaign.

The Business of Strangers, 2001, directed by Patrick Stettner, starring Julia Stiles and Stockard Channing.

Clockwatchers, 1998. Independent film; four young women “temping” for a large corporation. One of the few fictional films around that depicts what it is really like to be a part of the corporate lower ranks.

Desk Set, 1957. Katharine Hepburn as a corporate librarian, along with Dina Merrill and Joan Blondell, and Spencer Tracy as the inventor of the large computer that they think will replace them.

The Devil Wears Prada, 2006, directed by David Frankel. Based on the roman à clef by Lauren Weisberger, this film is notable for Meryl Streep's nuanced portrayal of "evil" magazine editor Miranda Priestly.

Erin Brockovich, 2000. Directed by Steven Soderbergh. Working class, undereducated, single mother Erin Brockovich (Julia Roberts) instigates and leads a legal fight against Pacific Gas & Electric, resulting in one of the largest class action settlements ever. Based on real life events, Roberts won an Oscar for her performance.

The Help. 2011, directed by Tate Taylor. Based on the best-selling novel, this film about a young writer who decides to write about the African-American maids in her hometown during the 1960's was both praised and severely criticized.

Legally Blonde. 2001, directed by Robert Luketic. This comedy turns the stereotype of the ditzy man-hungry blonde (Reese Witherspoon) upside down when she gets into Harvard Law School.

Live Nude Girls Unite! 2000, directed and written by Vicky Funari and Julia Query. A documentary about the 1996-97 organizing drive at the Lusty Lady to form the first Exotic Dancers Union. Query, a stripper and comedian, is a major character as well as film creator.

Made in Dagenham. 2010. A dramatization of the 1968 strike at the Ford Dagenham car plant, where female workers walked out in protest against sexual discrimination.

Mildred Pierce. 1945, directed by Michael Curtiz. Divorced mother Mildred (Joan Crawford) embarks on a restaurant business to support her family. The business is successful, but Mildred's family life, especially her relationship with her daughter, is a disaster.

Morning Glory. 2010, directed by Roger Michell. Rachel McAdams as a young, workaholic producer of a morning television program.

Nine to Five. 1980. Highly publicized and successful (in its time) comedy of women's work rights, starring Jane Fonda, Lily Tomlin, and Dolly Parton. Although slapstick comedy takes precedence over reality, it makes some points while having fun.

North Country, 2005, directed by Niki Caro. Based on the sexual harassment law suit Jenon vs. Eveleth Mines, this film also tells what it is like to be one of the few women to work in a mine.

Salt of the Earth. 1954, The only blacklisted film made in the U.S., this story about striking Latino miners in New Mexico also focuses on the roles women played in the community, as homemakers, and as strikers themselves.

She Married Her Boss, 1935. Claudette Colbert is the super efficient secretary who marries her boss.

Silkwood, 1983, directed by Mike Nichols. Karen Silkwood was the original whistleblower, a worker in a Kerr-McGee plutonium processing plant who exposed dangerous working conditions and who died under suspicious circumstances. This fictional version of her life stars Meryl Streep Kurt Russell, and Cher. Direction, acting by Streep and Cher, editing, and screenplay by Nora Ephron and Alice Arlen were nominated for Oscars.

Swing Shift. 1984, directed by Jonathan Demme. Goldie Hawn stars in a comedy/drama based on the Rosie the Riveter stories—women who worked in the factories when the men went off to fight World War II.

Waitress. 2007, directed by Adrienne Shelley. This charming, independent film features Keri Russell as a waitress who bakes unusual pies and who dreams of escaping her dead end job and unhappy personal life. Nathan Fillion also stars.

With Babies and Banners: The Story of the Women's Emergency Brigade. 1979, directed by Lorraine Gray. Documentary on the role of the Women's Emergency Brigade in the famous 1936 Flint sit-down strike.

Woman of the Year, 1942. Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy (in their first film together) as married reporters whose marriage becomes endangered when Hepburn becomes super successful.

Working Girl, 1988, directed by Mike Nichols. A modern fairy tale in which working class secretary (Melanie Griffith) from Staten Island finds career success and a man (Harrison Ford) in corporate Manhattan. Mostly by working behind the back of her evil, successful female boss (Sigourney Weaver).

Television Series

Alice (1976-1985) – Waitressing in a diner.

Being Mary Jane, 2013-present. One of BET's scripted series; focuses on the professional and personal life of Mary Jane Paul, a television journalist. Though Mary Jane's search for the right man is the main subject, there are plot threads dealing with her career.

Cagney & Lacey (1981-1988) – Drama of two female police detectives working together, one a married working mother, the other single and career-oriented. Acclaimed as groundbreaking for its gritty portrayal of the main characters' professional and private lives.

The Good Wife (2009 - current) – High-powered legal work and/or wife of a powerful man. There are actually two great working women roles here—good wife Alicia Florrick and law partner Diane Lockhart.

Gray's Anatomy (2005 – current) – Woman as surgeons. Again, multiples characters—Meredith, Cristina, Callie, and the wonderful Miranda Bailey.

Mad Men (2007 – current) – Women working in the advertising world of the 1960's as secretaries, office manager, and, finally, a partner. Lots of choices are made by these women, between work and family.

The Mary Tyler Moore Show (1970-1977) – Associate news producer, Minneapolis station WJM. Although this series started with the intent of showing single woman Mary at home and in the office, it was the office world that soon became the dominant set and her extended family.

Masters of Sex (2013-current). Virginia Johnson's problems getting accepted, as a credible social scientist is one of the continuing themes of this series set in the 1950's and early 1960's.

Murphy Brown (1988-1998) – Television journalist in Washington, DC. Abrasive, successful, and ultimately, a single mother, Murphy Brown broke small screen boundaries.

The Office (U.S. version, 2005-2013) – Women as receptionists, and other assorted white-collar, office jobs at Dunder Mifflin, a paper supply company; told in “mockumentary” format.

Roseanne (seasons 1-2)—Roseanne was famously about a working class family headed by a down-to-earth working mother and a building contractor/mechanic father. Roseanne held several different jobs during the show's tenure, but only seasons 1 and 2 focused on her struggles with employment.

Scandal (2012 – current) – Created by Gray's Anatomy Shonda Rhimes, Scandal focuses on professional “fixer” Olivia Pope, who is also involved with the president of the United States.. An interesting contrast is the role of Mellie, the president's wife. Scandal can be seen as the modern day equivalent of the “woman's film”.

Ugly Betty (2006-2010) – There are a number of working women to examine in this comedic series about a young Latina woman who goes to work for a high-fashion magazine—Betty herself; Wilhelmina, the editor-in-chief; Hilda, Betty's hair dresser sister.

Sources for More Information About Women in Film and Television

Center for the Study of Women in Television & Film, San Diego State University
<http://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/>

Gena Davis Institute on Gender in Media
<http://seejane.org/>

SAG-AFTRA (union for actors in film, tv, and radio)
Studies & Reports on EEO & Diversity in Media
<http://www.sagaftra.org/content/studies-and-reports>

Resources—List of organizations that address diversity issues related to employment in media
<http://www.sagaftra.org/content/resources-0>

New York Women in Film and Television
Status of Women in the Industry: Articles and Studies (from various organizations)
<http://www.nywift.org/article.aspx?id=STAT>