

Spring 2017

01-988-311 GENDER, RACE AND VISUAL MEDIA

T/Th 2:15pm-3:35pm

RAB-206

Professor Kyla Schuller

We live in volatile times. Across the country, people are faced with job insecurity, decreasing wages, long working hours, continual war, and police violence, all against the backdrop of a dramatically uncertain future for the existence of life as we know it on earth. How do we manage? How do our different positions according to hierarchies of race, class, gender and sexuality shape our ability to thrive in these difficult conditions? Do our popular forms of entertainment, especially TV and blockbuster films, serve to anesthetize us to our difficult reality or to engage with it and maybe even strategize resistance?

In this class, we will examine visual culture, especially Hollywood cinema and television in light of the economic structure of our day; neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is predominantly characterized by extreme wealth inequality. However, neoliberalism materializes not only in the economic realm, resulting in shrinking paychecks for the vast majority of us. It also works through the social structures of race, gender, and sexuality. We will analyze how TV shows such as *Scandal* and *Transparent* and films including *The Wolf on Wall Street* and *The Hunger Games* help to construct new racial, gendered, and sexual roles that respond to the political imperatives of late capitalism. In this way, we will be exploring how these notions of human difference function as dense sites of power, serving as sites of both oppression and resistance.

Taking our cue from the British Cultural Studies tradition, we will look at culture as political ideology and commodity, examining the story each text tells as well as its conditions of production, distribution, and reception. For example, when looking at TV, we will consider its function as cultural entertainment and also as a site of labor. We will examine a documentary about how Mexican women are organizing for better labor conditions in the Tijuana factories that produce most of the world's television sets. Students will gain practice in analyzing race, gender, and sexuality as sites of power, analyzing visual texts, and making connections between culture and politics.