

## ***Strong Films/Strong Women***

**Description:** In this course we will focus on nine recent award-winning films (listed below; all are available to rent from Amazon) dealing with women facing various types of adversity in the struggle for equality and trying to cope with them. We are currently in the midst of a major cultural conflict between the masculine and feminine forces in our society. Women are striving to end the patriarchy and to achieve equality in all domains of life from their personal as well as their work place relationships, and to control over their bodies. We will ask if the films forecast the issues confronting women as they struggle for equality both physically in dealing with issues like dementia and rape as well as psychologically in their romantic and work relationships, and even spiritually; and if they depict how women are “strong” and cope successfully.

**Format:** Each week we will all watch the film listed (below) for that session at home and then to discuss it in class. You will be asked to sign up (below) to lead the discussion of either the content of the film or its technical aspects that include the acting, costumes, directing, photography, music, sets and special effects. **If for any reason, you find yourself unable to watch a film perhaps due to its content, please feel free either not to watch it or to skip those scenes that you find objectionable.**

**Guidelines for Presentations:** You are welcome to present by yourself or in a team of two. Your session (whether individual or team) should be no longer than 45 minutes in length (including at least 25 minutes of class discussion time). There are many different formats you may use for your session. You can do a PowerPoint presentation, or use flip charts or handouts. You are encouraged to use short video clips from the film that help to illustrate your topic, and then manage a discussion of it. *You may also wish to send some discussion questions out to the class ahead of time.* If you want to send material to the class, you can send it yourself or to one of us and we will forward to the class. If you plan to do this, please try to get this information to your classmates as early as possible (ideally at least a week ahead). We encourage you to consult LLC’s guidelines for session leaders on:

<http://lifelonglearningcollaborative.org/resources-for-classmembers-session-leaders/>

**Film Topics:** The following are brief descriptions adapted from Rotten Tomatoes that should help you decide which film you want to lead the discussion of:

**Gravity.** A science fiction thriller, Gravity explores a space disaster experienced by astronauts played by Sandra Bullock and George Clooney. Although set in outer space, Gravity explores the psychological inner space of the protagonist, and her need to cope with personal tragedy. Gravity received six Academy Awards including for Best Director and Best Visual Effects.

**The Accused.** The Accused follows the struggle of a young woman seeking justice after having been publicly gang-raped in a local tavern. Jodie Foster received the Academy Award for Best Actress.

**Thelma & Louise.** Two working-class friends set out on a weekend getaway from the men in their lives. Their encounters along the way cause major detours, ultimately forcing the women to make a drastic choice. The movie received the Academy Award for Best Screenplay.

**Erin Brockovich.** Julia Roberts stars [as Erin Brockovich, a single mother] in this legal drama based on the true story of a woman who helped win the largest settlement ever paid in a direct-action lawsuit. Roberts received the Academy Award for Best Actress.

**Volver.** Set in Spain, *Volver* is the story of three women fully committed to supporting one another through personal challenges, often brought about by abusive or hapless men. *Volver* is a curious mix of light and dark, of reality, and otherworldliness.

**Still Alice.** Alice Howland, a renowned linguistics professor, receives a diagnosis of early-onset Alzheimer's disease. She and her family find their bonds thoroughly tested. Julianne Moore received the Academy Award for Best Actress.

**Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri.** Frustrated by the lack of progress in the case around the murder of her daughter, Mildred Hayes forces public attention on William Willoughby, the town's revered chief of police. Frances McDormand received the Academy Award for Best Actress, and Sam Rockwell received the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor.

**Hidden Figures.** Based on the book by Margot Lee Shetterly, *Hidden Figures* (nominated for the Academy Award for Best Picture) tells the story of three gifted African-American scientists, working at NASA in 1962 on the launch of astronaut John Glenn into orbit. Katherine G. Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan (Octavia Spencer, nominated for the Academy Award for best Supporting Actress) and Mary Jackson are instrumental in achieving their goals at NASA in spite of daily challenges of racism.

**Little Women.** *Little Women* (nominated for the Academy Award for Best Picture) is Writer-director Greta Gerwig's creative version based on both the classic novel and the writings of Louisa May Alcott. In Gerwig's take, the beloved story of the March sisters - four young women each determined to live life on her own terms -- is both timeless and timely.

***Locating and Watching the Films:*** All of the movies on our list are available to rent on Amazon Prime, with costs ranging from \$2.99 to \$7.99 depending on the age of the movie. Rentals last for 30 days so you will have lots of time to view the film - multiple times! Another option is to request the movie from your library system. If you have a library card from the Bay State Library system, you can search online for a movie, request it, and specify delivery to your local library. When the movie comes in, you will be notified by email, so that you can go and collect it. Movies can be taken out **for only one week**, so you will have to plan ahead. LLC people who live in MA have a similar system going with the Massachusetts Library System.

If you choose to take the movie out from your library, notice whether the recording you want is in standard DVD or Blu-Ray. Blu-Ray recordings are more recent, and have better clarity and resolution. If you have a Blu-Ray player at home, you can watch movies that are made in Blu-Ray mode or movies that are in standard DVD. What you cannot do is watch Blu-Ray movies on a standard DVD player! **Be sure that the form you request is compatible with the player you are using at home.** IF you have an older DVD player (standard), do NOT request a Blu-Ray movie! ***It will not work.***

**Note to Discussion Leaders:** *Only standard DVDs will work in the classroom DVD player so make sure you bring a standard DVD to class to show **short excerpts** from the movie that illustrate important points.*

One advantage of taking the movies out from the library is the supplemental material included. That material often contains interviews with actors or the director, and sometimes a running narrative that extends over the length of the film, over the sound track of the movie. That extra material is often very interesting and provides further depth to understanding the film.

Sometimes “special features” will be a menu option of a movie watched online. They are similar to the supplemental materials offered on a DVD or Blu-Ray. We encourage you to watch them for a better understanding of the film.

The **closed caption** option is useful if you are having difficulty catching all of the dialogue. Learn how to turn this on and off using your remote. You need to find a balance between catching most of the dialogue without assistance OR resorting to the closed captions option, which requires speed-reading and can be distracting.

***Coordinators:*** **Helen Hawkins**, M.S., (Learning Disabilities), is a retired Special Education teacher. She has also worked for the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign, Amherst and Hampshire Colleges, and Harvard University. She has always loved movies.

**Becky Randolph**, MS, CIH, CSP is a retired industrial hygienist. She is new to Rhode Island and walks everywhere.