Introduction:
To spark critical thinking and generate rhetorical writing in English 102, we discuss the various ways modern scholarship has identified “Othering.” Othering is powerful. When a group of people (be it based off of culture, gender, economic status, education level, ability, religious beliefs, etc.) is “othered,” that group ceases to hold an equal place of power. In fact, this class centers on the discussion of power and how it is used to create a dominant culture and dominated culture. If you are the Other, you are something less than (a perception, not reality!) someone of the dominant culture.

As we read Leslie Marmon Silko and Gloria Anzaldua, we learn that, in addition to gender, even one’s cultural rhetorical style and language can be used to “other” people. Both Silko and Anzaldua detail how dominant American culture labeled them as inferior Others. They were women who, according to the dominant culture, used language and argument “improperly.” The reality is that every cultural contribution is integral and valuable, regardless of what dominant culture may perceive as acceptable and not acceptable.

When we watch the films of “La India Maria,” remember some have argued that these films are examples of how a dominant culture tries to distance itself from its indigenous roots; therefore establishing power for the dominant culture by “othering” the indigenous. The character Maria experiences sexism and racial discrimination in her many adventures. She is the naïve country girl who struggles to learn big city ways. Her naivety saves her in her adventures and everything works out because of her good, womanly nature. It is interesting to note that Maria was created by a woman.

Your Tasks:
1. Watch Two “La India Maria” Films
In addition to the Maria film we watch in class (see above), access YouTube and watch at least one additional “La India Maria” movie. Be sure to note the title, etc. so you can properly cite your source.

2. Read and Incorporate This Article
Author’s abstract: “Since the 1970s "La India María" has become Mexico's most popular indigenous female media character. María Elena Velasco created and played La India María as the starring role in 15 comedies, had her appearances on different TV-Show, and in the theater. Until today, her films continue to be popular with Mexican audiences and immigrants living in the United States. On the other hand, her films have tended to be dismissed by film
critics as reactionary and ethnically discriminating. This contribution sketches out different aspects of the indigenous woman as a filmic stereotype focusing on character traits, performance, dialogues, and embodiment. The films will be examined and four story formulas will be proposed. Other determinations besides the filmic text will be taken into consideration in order to raise the question of how different spectators might read the established stereotype. I insist on the mode of "ironic" or "counter" reading, which results in a shift of meaning. La India María as a stereotype no longer just affirms the predominant mode of representation of the indigenous woman, but offers self-reflexive counter-images to certain spectators.”

3. Incorporate One of These Articles:


Your Assignment:
Write a three-page argumentative APA paper (not including title and reference pages) that cites two of the “La India Maria” films, the article above, and one of the other articles we have read in class (like Silko and Anzaldua). After watching at least two films and reading the article above, decide if “La India Maria’s” character is othered and a representative of discrimination. Here are some other questions to consider:

- Does the fact that these films are comedic matter? How?
- Is Maria “othered” for the audience’s benefit? If so, what is the benefit?
- If you are interested, do some research about the film’s writer, Maria Elana Velasco. Does is matter that La India Maria was created and written by a woman?

Defend your position with textual back up from the materials you have read. Do not be afraid to disagree with any of the authors or filmmakers (or me) we have covered! Determine your position—your thesis statement—and write a well-organized argument. Be sure to visit the Writing Center at least once; more is better.

Objectives:
After this assignment, students will be able to

- Identify how discrimination that involves gender, culture and language is complex business
- Recognize power structures of dominant culture that are sometimes disguised as comedy.
- Form an opinion on a controversial topic and create a thesis-driven argument.