Essay #3: Exploring Representations of Identity in Film/TV

Dates & deadlines:
Choose your identity aspect: in class 11/18
Contribute to the group annotated bibliography: In class on 11/23
First draft due date: 11/25 Final draft due date: 12/9 (hard copy: by 5 pm, digital: by 11pm)
Length: 6-7 pages

Aims:
- Develop a strong argument: write a clear thesis and provide supporting evidence
- Critically examine representations of a particular aspect of identity (race/ gender/ sexuality/ class) in the film “Imitation of Life 1934 or Imitation of Life 1959”
- Examine the relationship between representations of (race/ gender/ sexuality/ or class) in one or both of these films and the discussions of identity construction as articulated by two related scholars
- Identify reliable and appropriate academic sources
- Accurately reference all sources using MLA format

Assignment:
This assignment asks you to critically explore the representations of identity the film “Imitation of Life” and to consider how your findings relate to the larger scholarly discussion of identity construction in the media. In other words,
1) What does the show or film project about your chosen aspect of identity?
2) How do these representations fit into the scholarly discussion of that identity aspect in the media?

In brief, you will do the following:

a) examine one or both films
b) examine representations of at least TWO aspects of identity in that movie (pick: gender, race, sexuality, or class) using inductive methods if you select to write about the both movies; if you choose to write about one movie select at three of the four categories
c) explore the scholarly discussions of representations of your chosen identity aspect in the media and contribute at least TWO appropriate sources to a group annotated bibliography (see more information below)
d) consider how your findings in step b fit into the discussions of the literature (you can draw on any of the sources from your group’s annotated bibliography)
e) write an essay that makes a claim about how the film frames your chosen aspect of identity and how this representation aligns with the scholarly discussion of identity construction

More information on each step:

a) For this assignment, you will need to view the film multiple times. The film is available in the Powell Library media center. You should be able to access the film readily available via online through sites such as Hulu, Amazon, or Netflix. By 11/23 you must commit to your topic (identity aspect of the film) on our CCLE page. After this point, changes can only be made with teacher permission.

b) Examine the representations of gender, race, sexuality, or class in your text using inductive methods. Take detailed notes each time you watch the text and pay special attention to details. Critically explore what the producers choose to include or exclude. You might consider the following elements: characters, plot, camera angles, soundtrack, editing, casting choices, or costume/makeup choices. Based off the overt and subtle representations you observe, consider what the producers/directors project about what it means to be male/female/transgender, white/black/Asian/Latino, straight/homosexual, upper/middle/lower class in the USA.
c) Recall we took a library tour on 11/4; in it you should have learned about resources available. Use the UCLA library catalog or article database to find at least two scholarly articles, chapters, or books on representations of your chosen identity aspect in the media (ex: an article that examines representations of African-American males in the news; a book that explores attributes of female protagonists in films; etc.). Note that articles do not need to correlate directly to the text that you examine (in other words, you might look at sexuality in film, while your article explores sexuality in sit coms). However, your resources should relate to your chosen identity aspect (X) and to contemporary representations of it in American mass media. Please note that all sources you reference should be published within the last ten years (and aim for the last 5 whenever possible).

While this is an individual project, you will share resources with your peers through a collaborative annotated bibliography; you will then be able to draw on any of these posted resources in your final paper (please note that you still must read the articles, though!). On the group bibliography, you will share: the source’s citation, a brief summary of the authors’ key points, and a paragraph of personal views on the texts’ strengths, weaknesses, and relevance. On 12/2, we will devote the entire period to swapping resources and presenting your findings.

d & e) Next, you will consider how several pieces come together:

- your inductive analysis of the film (in other words, your interpretations of the way the show portrays X)
- the perspectives of at least two related media scholars (their arguments about the portrayals of X in the media)

Your central argument will articulate the relationships between these elements.

The following questions might help you arrive at a main argument:

- Are there issues that the authors raise that the film exemplifies?
- Does the film contradict certain things that the scholars articulate?
- Do scholars even agree with each other? If not, why? If so, why?
- Do you see any of these tensions in the film?
- Do you see identity construction issues in the film that scholars seem to ignore? Why are they relevant if the literature is ignoring them?

Your argument should draw on evidence from both the film and the literature. Ensure that you delve into both the media text and the related articles in detail. Please pay special attention to citations and textual integration, as I will be examining these elements of your essay closely.

**Formatting Requirements:**

- Times New Roman 12 pt. font
- Double spaced, 1 inch margins
- Running header: include your last name, draft #, and page# on every page
- Include an original title
- Use MLA style to cite all sources