

Bitches Get Things Done

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Okay, so stop me if you've heard this one: "Television's content is controlled by liberal white males, but the American television viewing audience is still largely caught up in conservative traditional values as it regards the role of women." Don't bother going back to read it again, it's not funny. In fact, it's really not funny if you are a female comedian attempting to launch or maintain a successful comedy on broadcast television. I believe that the vast majority of people working in television are open-minded, well-meaning, intelligent people. I also believe that they were some of the folks most at fault for creating the "Political Correctness" ("PC") craze of the '90s. Ask any comedian and they'll tell you that "PC" is not funny, it's comfortable. If there's anything comedy isn't, it's comfortable. We've done a great job getting away from "PC TV" in recent years, except where it concerns women and comedy.

I've heard educated people, who would otherwise never publicly postulate that "Women make bad directors" or "Women can't write," say, "Women aren't funny" with as much matter-of-factness as "Women have vaginas." Well, *I Love Lucy* is arguably the best sitcom ever made. Why did it work then and why does it still work now if "women aren't funny?" Lucy was a great comic actress and this should be noted first. Beyond this though, her character was at her funniest when she was struggling in the workplace. Lucy Riccardo was funny at home too, but in ways considered non-politically correct for our time. We accept it as funny with the caveat, "Well, women were looked at differently then." Her workplace humor, however, is absolutely timeless and completely relatable to both sexes even now. Two of her all time funniest bits as chosen by fans were workplace skits where she was less than "lady-like": "Lucy Does a TV Commercial" where she gets drunk on Vitameatavegamin and "Switching Jobs" where she shoves massive amounts of chocolate in her mouth on an assembly line. Workplace comedies work well to showcase female comedians as they don't rely on traditional "sacred" female roles ("the mom" or "the wife") and men more readily identify with the lead character's conflicts and frustrations.

I challenge you to find a successful American family comedy (vs. workplace comedy) where female lead portrays the only clueless parent, the only overweight spouse and the only ignorant, but well-meaning, "get rich quick" schemer. Roseanne as a character comes close, but Dan's character is equally overweight and funny. Sure, Peg Bundy is a funny, less than perfect mom, but she's also paired with an even bigger loser of a husband/father in the form of Al. Lois is rough and gruff with her all boy brood, but Hal is represented as being slower and more of the comic foil than his mate. Marge Simpson, Debra Barone, Jill Taylor, Judy Miller, Carrie Heffernan, and Lois Griffin are only a few of the other comic characters playing second fiddle, and ironically "straight man", to their male TV comedy character counterparts. Female comedians and writers who concentrate on traditionally male-oriented, workplace humor do better on television than those whose material is based on more traditional female roles or on the family. In

fact, workplace comedies have always done well for female lead comedians/actors: *Mary Tyler Moore*, *Murphy Brown*, *30 Rock* were/are all successful workplace comedies. The success of Tina Fey's *30 Rock* is no surprise. First of all, Tina Fey is an excellent writer. But beyond that, she's created a character and a show to which both men and women can relate that also happens to be loosely based on her own experiences and truths. This is what makes a good comedian, regardless of their sex. In the words of George Carlin, "Specific and individual women are as funny as any specific and individual man. The difference is in the acculturation and conditioning that people go through . . ." ¹

Networks are missing a huge opportunity by not hiring more female comedians as writers, actors and show runners. After all everyone knows that if you put a bunch of female comedians in a room together, their comic timing eventually syncs up (usually by mid-season).

¹ "History of the Joke." Narr. Lewis Black. The History Channel. 18 Feb. 2008.