

"An Impermeable Structure": Minority and Female Employment

An Impermeable Structure: Minority and Female Employment (or lack thereof) in the Television Industry

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The notion that the television industry is predominantly a "boys club" is one fueled by the seemingly invisibility of females, particularly minority females within Hollywood. While we currently live in a "post-race" and "post-feminist" society, the institutional changes within Hollywood are slim; only providing a cosmetic change rather than something substantial. These cosmetic changes have spread across the entire television industry spectrum. It can begin with a television character like Hannah Simone's character "CeCe" on Fox's *New Girl* and permeate into an entire series like Margaret Cho's ill-fated *All American Girl*. Although the majority of Hollywood's leading professionals within the industry are overwhelmingly masculine, it is necessary to recall the few females, more specifically female minorities who have made more than ornamental changes to the industry and just how effective said changes are.

An example of a deeper, industrial change would be the recent surge of female show runners. The term "show runner" entered television lexicon only in recent years, serving as an umbrella term for one who for all intents and purposes *runs* a show. These female show runners are in charge of every aspect of the series; ranging from the casting and writing, to the post-production practices. Although there are many creative forces behind a particular show, it seems that it is easier for a show to have a single poster child or a guiding light in a sense who can wield questions and provide the answers for audiences and industry players alike. Instead of highlighting these female minority show runners for their intellectual merit, Hollywood seems to tinker with their industrial change by again initiating a cosmetic element; in this case their racial identity. There is such potential for these show runners like Shonda Rhimes, an African-American woman whose programming currently makes up ABC's Thursday night lineup and Mindy Kaling, an Indian-American woman who is the first Indian minority to ever have her own show, yet their creative genius is always shown behind the veil of their racial identity.

In recent years, Mindy Kaling, best known for her work on the US version of *The Office*, has invited herself into the aforementioned "boys club" with the creation of her hit FOX series *The Mindy Project*. Serving as head writer and lead actress, Mindy does not concern her character Dr. Mindy Lahiri with preconceived ideas of her Indian identity. Kaling informs Lahiri's racial identity on her own terms; never fervently focusing on her skin color. Kaling has publicly stated that she should not have to bear the responsibility for representing all Indian-American woman but instead should be treated like any other show runner. The glorification of her race and gender is what silently holds her back from breaking down the "impermeable structure". The fact that she started as a writer for one series and worked her way up to show runner of another successful series is not enough for Hollywood's television industry. Kaling is projected as the success story for diversity within Hollywood rather than just another successful female show runner. Airing on the same network as *Mindy*, female show runner Elizabeth Meriwether's series *New Girl* places racial identity in a very different light. Hannah Simone, a half Indian half European actress, is portrayed as an Indian woman whose racial identity is assigned to her by the show's writers who are predominantly white. The assignment of Indian characteristics by non-Indians allow for a false sense of representation to grow, fueled by the

writers euro-centric ideologies.

It is in these two distinct characters that the issue of racial representation hinder female minority employment. On one hand is a successful Indian-American woman who has showcased her talents to only be somewhat prevented by her racial identity and on the other hand is a woman who is type cast by white, male writers. The future employment for female minorities, may it be within a television series or in more network/industrial positions, will always be obstructed by their race, no matter how successful they may be otherwise. The pressure put on the female minorities who have finally found success is not of their own doing but by Hollywood's desire to engage in hot button issues, like race and gender politics. In a visual medium like television, the playing field for such issues is far and wide.