

"An Impermeable Structure": Minority and Female Employment

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In the realm of comedy both on and off screen like many other genres it has traditionally been a male dominated field. There are several explanations of this phenomenon such as the stereotype of women innately lacking sense of humor or pinning humor as an unfeminine quality that is unattractive for females to employ. In the bigger picture, the reason of these efforts to maintain humor to be inaccessible for females was to maintain existing gender hierarchies.

Amongst the impermeable structure of the television comedy, there have been strides of successful females. I wish to examine Tina Fey the head writer of Saturday Night Live for nine years from 1996-2007 and also Soomin Seo the head producer from South Korea's sketch comedy show that is the equivalent of SNL in Korea from 1999- 2006.

Tina Fey

The success of Tina Fey is constituted with several different factors and themes. First of all, although Tina Fey rarely acknowledges her hard work outwardly it is evident through various accounts on her hard work and professionalism. Tina Fey once commented on her work at SNL.

The week is just very full ... Regular writing tasks are Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and then on Thursday night I join the Weekend Update team. Where it used to be that I could maybe do one normal human task during the week, like sending a birthday card or buying a pair of sneakers, that's not possible.

She also mentions on her sudden stardom after her famous Sarah Palin impression on SNL during the presidential election period. She credits the success of being prepared for several years.

I had a great time doing [Sarah Palin] but it was one of the strangest things that's ever happened to me. ••• So much of everything I've ever done has come out of hard work and just hanging in there, being the last one standing at the bar - and then to have that fall in my lap was just crazy.

This Neoliberal stance also comes through when she is asked about female issues. When asked about having a second child she states that it will be challenging to have another child maintaining her career but that should be her own private decision.

I feel obligated to stay in the business and try hard to get a place where I can create opportunities for others and that's why I can't possibly take time off for a second baby, unless I do, in which case that is nobody's business and I'll never regret it for a moment unless it ruins my life.

She steps aside from the political view of feminism and although she feels responsible to help other females in the industry she feels it should be in her

individual effort and not a structural one.

On dealing with situations of discrimination Fey holds a consistent attitude that women should stand up for themselves. Fey recounts one particularly interesting incident that occurred between Jimmy Fallon and Amy Poehler at a cast read-through for Saturday Night Live. When Fallon chastised Poehler for an unladylike bit, Poehler curtly replied, "I don't [expletive] care if you like it!".

Finally she uses self-deprecation when mentioning her looks or even accomplishments on her career. During photo shoots and interviews she repeats that she never looks like so if it weren't for the whole work done on her. When asked about her influence on the perception of Governor Sarah Palin she minimizes her role as she responds, "Americans are smarter than that".

Soomin Seo

Soomin Seo also a Neoliberal approach in making her way in show biz. She remained strong and stood up for herself until she was high enough in the ladder to truly be herself. In 1999 when she first joined the network she was the only female among the producers. She would try her best to blend in by acting as masculine as she could. She would go home and practice swearing in front of the mirror. When she moved up as an associate producer she put on a show with her assistant. She told him that she would shout and swear at him in front of the whole crew and cast members to show nobody can mess with her.

In her interviews she confesses that after becoming the chief executive producer she realized that accepting herself as a woman became more natural. She started honing her strengths which she discovered were attention to detail, focusing more on dialogues and less emphasis on the visual aspect of comedy. It was a success and the show gained a new found popularity.

Furthermore she explores political satire and freedom of speech which has not been attempted before on national television comedy shows in South Korea. There is a sketch called 'The Brave Ones' where a hip hop rapping team of three comes out to stage and raps on various topics. One of their topics is producer Soomin Seo herself. They would declare that producer Soomin Seo is 'ugly' and rap about it. Seo explained in an interview that the sketch was a form of challenging the authority like the story of the King with Donkey ears. She tries new approaches towards comedy and is comfortable enough or less attached to power to be able to use it in the sketches. This aligns with Tina Fey's approach of self deprecation, where she allows the audience to seize the authority and power over her own.