

Mindy Kaling: The Next Tina Fey

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"I'm the kind of person who would rather get my hopes up really high and watch them get dashed to pieces than wisely keep my expectations at bay and hope they are exceeded. This quality has made me a needy and theatrical friend, but has given me a spectacularly dramatic emotional life." — Mindy Kaling, Is Everyone Hanging Out Without Me?

Introduction

The systemic issues surrounding Mindy Kaling can be seen strongly through her memoir and her upbringing. Throughout Kaling's life, her challenge growing up with parents from India created issues in her rise through the comedy world. These issues include many aspects of community such as culture, social class, and diversity. Kaling's life experiences show her as an inspiration for determination and self-expression. Kaling sees herself as an awkward individual, but those around her see a strong woman with an even stronger sense of self, and much of that is due to her experiences and struggles as a rising comedian.

Culture, Diversity and Social Class

Kaling was born in Massachusetts, but both of her parents are Hindus from India. Growing up, Kaling and her family did not have a lot of money. For entertainment, Kaling would spend a lot of time at home watching old comedy VHS tapes. This was an interest her school friends did not share with her, and with both of her parents having successful endeavors of their own, Kaling spent this time alone. However, her parents instilled a sense of determination in Kaling that stuck with her. Kaling's parents always pushed her to try her hardest and go after the things she wanted. She started to build up a new community within the one she

was already a part of (Bartle, 2007). Kaling befriended another young girl who loved comedy, and they would watch and write their own sketches. As time went on, Kaling started spending more and more time with her comedy friend and less time with those whom she considered her best friends.

Upon graduating from high school, Kaling went on to Dartmouth College where she was a member of an improv group, creator of a comic strip, a writer for a magazine, and an intern for Conan O'Brien. After graduating college, Kaling moved in with her best friend Brenda Withers who she wrote plays and sketches with. What her parents had instilled in her about determination followed her through all of this. Due to their upbringing in India, Kaling's parents had very high expectations of her, and this drove Kaling to strive for greatness. She had a very close relationship with her parents and tried her best to make them proud of her. This drove her to many late nights and a very stressful young adulthood.

Structure

As Hustedde puts it, "structure refers to the social practices...and their relationship with one another" (Hustedde & Ganowicz, p. 4, 2009). The structure of Hollywood was much different than what Kaling was used to. She was not a high class person, and the social norms of Hollywood were not what she was used to. Kaling will openly admit that she is an awkward person, and she embraces her weirdness. However, upon arriving to California, she noticed that she did not quite fit in and that she was not as big of a deal as she thought she was. In her book, Kaling wrote about what the transition was like between college and the real world; she wrote that "I kind of killed it in college. You know that saying "big fish in a

small pond"? At Dartmouth College, I was freakin' Jaws in a community swimming pool" (Kaling, 2011). It didn't take long for her to realize that what she had experienced at Dartmouth was not at all what the real world was like.

Throughout her book, Kaling makes it clear that she is not (or at least does not consider herself to be) an average member of the social community. Kaling has many odd habits and personality traits that don't necessarily fit in to the social practices of Hollywood. The structure of Hollywood is completely different than that of the college that Kaling attended, and she had to find a way to transition between the two. Through her struggle to become noticed as a comedy writer, Kaling was caught between two worlds: that of the writing community and that of the comedy community. In the writing community, one must be professional in every sense of the word. However, comedy is very relaxed and laid back. Kaling would go to some interviews overdressed, and others underdressed. These two different structures made it confusing for Kaling to find her role in the comedy world.

"...write your own part. It is the only way I've gotten anywhere. It is much harder work, but sometimes you have to take destiny into your own hands. It forces you to think about what your strengths really are, and once you find them, you can showcase them, and no one can stop you." — Mindy Kaling, Is Everyone Hanging Out Without Me?

Finding Mindy

Throughout her journey, Kaling struggled a lot with figuring out who she was as a woman, a friend, a daughter, and a comedian. She struggled in young adulthood to support herself, but was determined to do exactly that. Kaling strove

to ensure that her parents would be proud of her, but she also made sure not to lose sight of herself. Kaling is a strong and humble individual who has accomplished a lot in her lifetime. After becoming a writer for *The Office*, Kaling really started to build her voice as a comedy writer. She was able to begin writing and directing entire episodes, as well as act in some of them (she played Kelly Kapoor). *The Office* opened a lot of writing opportunities for Kaling, and she was able to go work alongside some of her comedy heroes.

Conclusion. Despite all the hardships Kaling went through while growing up, she was able to find herself and go for what she wanted. Her parents came from India, and spent time in various other countries. This resulted in Kaling being brought up with Hindu values and beliefs. Being in America, this was not a social norm, but she did not let that hold her back from achieving what she wanted. Kaling's parents instilled in her a sense of pride and determination, and Kaling took that with her through her whole life. Kaling was able to adapt to her different environments and situations with little struggle, and this aided her in her transition from Dartmouth to Hollywood.

Above all else, Kaling's ability to maintain her sense of self is exhilarating. In a town where it is easy to fall into the trap of money and fame, Kaling went in and came out as Mindy. Hollywood is a difficult place to maintain individuality, especially for those like Kaling who consider themselves to be a tad bit socially awkward. However, Kaling has managed to embrace her inner Mindy and hold on tightly. Her memoir shows a great deal of confidence, self-esteem, and genuine happiness, traits rarely found in Hollywood celebrities.

References

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