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Media Culture and Identity

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Media Final: Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt

Keywords: Gender, Representation & Power.

For my videographic criticism, I decided to do Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt because it is undoubtedly one of my favorite shows. Originally, I had avoided watching the show because it just seemed like a pointless show with little depth but once I did watch it I learned that it was much more than that. Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt was created by Tina Fey and it features a lot of Fey's type of humor so show is hilarious and culturally relevant. Through the placement of the main character, Kimmy Schmidt, in a role of authority at her workplace, the show is able to create a gender role reversal that goes against common themes in the workplace. Women are frequently not in positions of authority at work and because of this women often have less power in the workplace. "Kimmy is Little Girl, Big City" challenges cultural norms surrounding behavior in the workplace by showing how ridiculous and inappropriate it is for harassment to occur at work and that through the years since sexual harassment was last a major household topic, not a lot has changed in terms of ridding society of workplace harassment.

The entire process of creating this video did not first start off with this specific argument. At first, I knew that I wanted to focus on the first episode of season four in the series but I was not sure how I would go about actually creating an argument around that video. Without my specific argument in mind, I just decided to find additional media pieces that were relevant and

would aid my in narrowing donw my argument. It was important for me to include a clip of Anita Hill because I find it hard to discuss workplace harassment without citing the hearings of Clarence Thomas. I had a difficult time deciding how much of the hearing I wanted to use because of the time requirements for the assignment; there wouldn't be enough time to include more aspects of the hearings. In class, we discussed all of the prominent headlines surrounding the Brett Kavanaugh and Christine Blasey Ford. Those headlines were created by the news media and their decisions have influences on the people. The way in which news covers harassment creates a frame for how the public perceives the issue. I decided it would be more important to include Anita Hill than Ford because of how Hill was likely more of an influence to Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt since Kavanaugh's hearings recently occurred.

After deciding that I wanted to include Anita Hill, I made the decision of including John Oliver to serve as an example of news media discussing sexual harassment. I contemplated using clips from other broadcast media such as CNN, Fox or MSNBC but I chose John Oliver because of the impact his shows have and the depth in which he investigates issues. This decision helped me to narrow my argument and really look at how the news influences the public's knowledge and brings topics into the light. Coverage of Anita Hill's trial really helped paint a picture of workplace harassment and across the nation, people were made to think about how this issue looks like near them. John Oliver's show, Last Week Tonight, successfully delivers news in a comedic way that has gotten millions of people to view the show. For a lot of people, this can be how the learn in-depth information about an issue and his episode on Workplace Harassment did just that. I used this episode because it directly correlated to my video and helped add relevancy to my argument.

All throughout the semester, I have spent more time thinking about the ways in which media reflects on culture. This class has made me think about the complexities of the way in which media is created and showcased. It helped me go back through the episodes of Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt and perceive them differently than I did the first time I binge-watched the show. “Academics who begin creating video essays often create works that resemble traditional written critical works, such as academic essays” (Monaghan). I definitely went into this video project with this type of thinking but it helped formulate a beginning, middle and end for my video while keeping in mind the argument that I wanted to lay out.

One of the hardest decisions I had to make throughout the entire process of working on my final is deciding what keywords to apply. All of the keywords that we have discussed in class tend to be prevalent in many forms of media or they at least can be applied to various situations. I think I have changed the keywords that I wanted to use for this assignment multiple times. Master of None gave me inspiration in how I wanted to use the keywords because of the implicit and obvious ways that keywords played a part in the episode “Indians On TV.” In the end, the keywords that I have decided to use were: gender, representation, and power.

Gender plays an explicit role in the episode. The founder of the company is a nerdy guy that Kimmy had meant in earlier episodes and he hired Kimmy because of her personable and social skills that he lacks. Kimmy’s task for the episode I used is to fire Kabir because the founder is incapable of doing it himself. Kimmy decides to fire Kabir in “fun Kimmy way,” which means that her harassment toward Kabir comes from a place of innocence. The team behind the show showcased this issue in a way that makes the keywords representation and power important for understanding the episode. Kimmy’s role as manager gives her explicit

powers over the rest of the coworkers, which makes it easier for her to put Kabir in a situation that he does not want to be in. The way that the show places Kimmy in this role rather than a man flips social norms. Men are typically in managerial positions and across the country, they dominate these types of positions. A viewer would expect to see a man in this position which sets the viewer up to already go into the viewing of the episode with a certain type of idea of what Kimmy will act like. Kimmy's harassment of Kabir is an incredibly ridiculous situation because of many reasons but one thing that I think is important to understand is that a part of why the situation seems ridiculous is that it is coming from a man. This reversal of roles allows for the perception of the situation to be different than if it was what the viewer would expect. The expectations from the viewer follow the social and cultural norms of how men are expected to act in such positions. It wouldn't be surprising to the average viewer to see a man being overly friendly or overly touchy to a co-worker. The representation of the characters challenges societies expectations of men in the workplace.

There were many times through the entire process of creating my videographic criticism where I considered using different clips or different keywords. My final version was all decided upon what made the most sense to me. Through the readings and examples I saw in class, I was able to get a better idea of what my video should look like and how I could best formulate the video. The time limit for the assignment allowed me to think critically about how I could convey my thoughts about the episode in a timely and powerful manner. News media has influenced the ways in which we understand issues like workplace harassment and our go-to examples often come from clips that we have viewed. These clips then become social norms that Kimmy replicates these social/cultural norms that we all know to be true because of how often

harassment has been a national issue. Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt and Last Week Tonight w/ John Oliver challenge our social/cultural norms about workplace harassment.

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