THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF MARKETING

FUNNY GIRL: AN ANALYSIS OF THE GENDER SHIFT IN CONTEMPORARY COMEDY

SHIRLEY LIU
SPRING 2015

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for a baccalaureate degree
in Marketing
with honors in Marketing

Reviewed and approved* by the following:

Jennifer Chang Coupland
Clinical Professor of Marketing
Thesis Supervisor and Honors Advisor

David Winterich
Instructor of Marketing
Faculty Reader

* Signatures are on file in the Schreyer Honors College.
ABSTRACT

Throughout history, the world of comedy has always been seen as a male-dominated field, with very few females achieving the pinnacles of success as a comedian. There has long-been a stigma against women as the drivers and change-makers in the industry, and rarely were there female writers, producers, or directors in comedy. However, this lack of representation has shifted in recent years, as an elite group of women have been able to achieve isolated, high levels of mainstream success that have changed the field of comedy and brought the gender balance closer to equal representation. Why and how did this shift occur? This paper seeks to answer this question by exploring contemporary American comedy through the lenses of change theories. An analysis of the change process and the many historical, cultural, and technological factors that both resist and drive it will be presented using Kurt Lewin’s model for societal and organizational change. In addition, Malcolm Gladwell’s “Law of the Few” will be applied to conduct case studies on certain females who have impacted the industry shift the most in recent years, explaining how they have reinforced the largest amounts of change overall. Finally, the future of comedy will be examined, providing insight into how progress will continue to be made and why women will be the ones to make a significant impact.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures .............................................................................................................. iv

Acknowledgements ..................................................................................................... v

**Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review** ....................................................... 1
  - Introduction .......................................................................................................... 1
  - Literature Review ................................................................................................ 2

**Chapter 2: Framework Selection and the Unfreezing Stage** ................................... 9
  - Framework Selection: Kurt Lewin’s Change Model and the ADKAR Model .......... 9
  - Post-WWII United States & the Rise of Modern Feminism .................................... 12
  - Historical Context of Comedy in the US .............................................................. 13

**Chapter 3: Transition Period** ................................................................................ 19
  - Introduction to the Force-Field .......................................................................... 19
  - Resistance Forces ............................................................................................... 20
  - Driving Forces .................................................................................................... 23
  - Force-Field Analysis ........................................................................................... 27

**Chapter 4: Reinforcement Stage** ......................................................................... 29
  - The “Law of the Few” as a Model for How Change Occurs ................................. 29
  - Methodology: Definition of “Success” and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) .... 31
  - Case Selection Criteria ....................................................................................... 31

**Chapter 5: Case Analyses** ................................................................................... 33
  - Case #1: Tina Fey ................................................................................................ 33
  - Case #2: Lena Dunham ....................................................................................... 37
  - Case #3: Mindy Kaling ....................................................................................... 40
  - Case #4: Ellen DeGeneres .................................................................................. 44

**Chapter 6: Discussions and Conclusions** ............................................................. 48
  - The Present and Future of Women in Comedy .................................................... 48

Appendix A: Tina Fey KPI List .................................................................................. 51

Appendix B: Lena Dunham KPI List ......................................................................... 52

Appendix C: Mindy Kaling KPI List .......................................................................... 53
Appendix D: Ellen DeGeneres KPI List

Appendix E: Screenshot of Tina Fey and Sarah Palin onscreen

Appendix F: Screenshot of 30 Rock, Season 1 Episode 5: ‘Jack-tor’

Appendix G: Screenshot of HBO’s Girls, Season 3 Episode 7: ‘Beach House’

Appendix H: Collection of Dunham’s most shared tweets as of April 2015

Appendix I: Screenshots of Kaling’s blog that inspired her first book

Appendix J: Screenshots of Kaling’s Instagram feed

Appendix K: Collection of Kaling’s Twitter highlights

Appendix L: Screenshot of DeGeneres’s “Oscar Selfie”

Appendix M: Images of DeGeneres dancing and interacting with guests

BIBLIOGRAPHY
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Kurt Lewin’s Change Model.................................................................9

Figure 2: Combined elements of Lewin’s Change Model and the ADKAR Model.........11

Figure 3: Force-Field Analysis Diagram (“Leading Transformational Change: Using the Force
Field Analysis”, 2013).......................................................................................19

Figure 4: Summary of Driving and Resistance Forces ...........................................27

Figure 5: The Law of the Few Model (Livingston, 2009) ........................................30

Figure 6: Categorization of Cases........................................................................32
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank my thesis supervisor and honors advisor, Jennifer Chang Coupland, for her continuous support, guidance, and encouragement during this mostly exciting but occasionally long and agonizing process. I am so grateful for her enthusiasm, feedback, and confidence in me, as this thesis definitely would not have come to fruition without her. I would also like to express my appreciation for her sincerity and passion as a teacher and mentor.

In addition, I extend my gratitude to David Winterich for his time and interest in serving as my thesis reader and for always being an encouraging and engaging instructor. I would also like to thank the Schreyer Honors College for providing me with a research grant and giving me the opportunity to explore my topic first-hand.

I would also like to give my sincere thanks to my friends and family for their unconditional love, support, and random advice whenever I asked, especially Cindy Chang for being the best writing partner—there’s no one I would rather share so many Irving’s breakfast sandwiches with.

Finally, I want to thank all of the incredible ladies featured in this paper (as well as the many more that I didn’t get to mention) for the amount of inspiration and laughter you have brought all of us.
Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this research is to analyze why and how the nature of comedy in the United States has shifted from male dominance to a trend of increased female representation over the past few decades. In the entertainment industry as a whole, there is a lack of female representation in creative or executive roles—there have always been fewer female writers, directors, and producers than male, and this imbalance is even more pronounced in the field of comedy. Throughout the field’s history, while women have had a variety of acting roles, there have been very few females who built careers solely based on being comedians, creating their own content, producing their own television shows and movies, and driving the industry by taking on leadership roles.

There has long-been a stigma in comedy that it is male-dominated for a reason, and that “women’s humor” was different, less funny, and had less mass appeal. In the second half of the 20th century there has been increasing upward mobility for women in the field, but seldom did a female comedian become a household name in American society the same way many males did (Kohen, 2012). However, in the past decade in particular, a small group of women have been able to break through the glass ceiling and shift gender representation in the industry more and more towards equilibrium, or equality in terms of power within the field. These few women have been able to become household names and not only build careers but build entire comedy empires, reaching levels of success that many male comedians today have not or cannot seem to reach. Why have these specific women been able to achieve levels of success that have never been seen before in comedy, and how did this change occur?

In attempting to answer these questions, an explanation of how the process of change occurs within an industry or culture will be given, along with an analysis of the factors driving and resisting that
change, including historical, economic, social, cultural, technological, and industry-specific factors. In addition, analyses on isolated cases will be performed to examine how specific females in the industry have achieved elite levels of success through distinctive, marketable strengths, and how these successes have helped reinforce the change that has occurred. On a broader level, the conclusions from this research will hopefully provide insight into how and why change occurs in any culture or society, through the lens of the liberalized gender roles that have affected the modern entertainment industry.

**Literature Review**

To date, relatively little research has been done specifically on the topic of American women in comedy, though there is some literature on gender representation in entertainment as a whole and related discussions and issues. The majority of this research has been done in the fields of communications and media studies, as well as cultural and women’s studies. An overview of this prior research is an important basis to analyzing female representation in comedy as industry change-makers, as this paper serves to look at representation beyond just media portrayal, but rather media creation and executive leadership as well.

In the journal article “(Un)funny Women: TV Comedy Audiences and the Gendering of Humour,” scholar Bore conducted a study done with focus groups, testing the reactions and responses of males and females towards female-dominated sketch comedy shows. The study indicated that comedy centered around women was less well-received by both genders compared to comedy centered around men because of an existing perception that the comediennes were only discussing “women’s issues” that had little relevance to male audiences. These are topics that the focus groups deemed more relatable to females because they have a greater understanding of the gender. Because of this, the quality of the female-centric comedy was seen as lower, and the comediennes’ skills were devalued as a result. Bore concludes that these gendered distinctions in humor are related to the cognitive dissonance of what it
takes to be funny and what is seen as appropriate feminine behavior in society. The preconceptions that the focus groups already had and the results of the study both prove the existence of and perpetuate the notion that females aren’t as funny or relevant while exhibiting the same type of humor as males do (Bore, 2010).

In the 1990’s, a comedian named Sarah Silverman entered the scene who became prominent for not conforming to what had become known as “women’s humor,” the only way most female comedians could gain traction in the industry up until that point. Silverman’s work was criticized and analyzed greatly due to the fact that she was pushing the existing boundaries of women trying to make careers in comedy, which brought much more attention to the subject. In a case study on Silverman in particular, authors Eric Shouse and Patrice Oppliger argue that Silverman represents an important turning point in comedy because she paved the way for females to achieve a new kind of industry success with a non-traditional (at the time) approach (Oppliger & Shouse, 2011).

The authors believe that Silverman was the first female comedian to achieve mainstream success without falling into the gendered distinction of women’s comedy and conforming to the social constraints of entertainment creation in a patriarchal culture. They argue she was able to do so because her style was to make fun of everyone and treat everyone as equal subjects, rather than discussing easily relatable issues or relying on lighthearted self-deprecation, which were markers of what was generally labeled as women’s humor. They believe that Silverman’s crudeness and propensity for traditionally taboo subject matter helped identify her as brave and equal to what male comedians discuss, and that she focused on presenting herself cleverly, ridiculing others rather than herself in order to leave audiences feeling powerless and vulnerable to jokes. Silverman’s level of aggressiveness as a performer and comic had never been exemplified before by a female comedian, and much of the criticism she received suggested her humor was vile, cruel, and highly irritating. This demonstrates the existing gender bias and constraints within the field of comedy, as male comedians who employed the same styles of humor were not criticized but were rather revered as cool and edgy. Overall, the widespread backlash and criticism that
Silverman received show the severe inequity that existed in the field at the time she entered the industry, and clearly demonstrated that there would be a long climb ahead (Oppliger & Shouse, 2011).

The first person to achieve the next level of success, so to speak, or a female who has been accepted by mainstream audiences as funny and respected by critics and masses alike as talented, is Tina Fey. Rising to stardom in the mid-2000’s, an analysis on how Fey contributed to the comedy shift will be explored later in this research. However, some pre-existing literature on Fey explores her success and its impact on gender equality, mass media, and postfeminism in popular culture. In “Fracturing Tina Fey,” author Eleanor Patterson explores the relationship between Fey’s portrayal of herself in her memoir *Bossypants*, her work as the head writer on *Saturday Night Live*, and her portrayal in and creation of her highly successful sitcom *30 Rock*.

Patterson says “television comedy’s production culture is absolutely gendered and privileges masculinity, and it is within this environment that Fey writes, performs, and produces comedy,” and believes that her role within a masculine field creates dissonance with Fey’s public persona. She argues that Fey has cultivated an image that “combines hegemonic beauty ideals with bookish intelligence,” due to the many times she has been featured on magazine covers and beautiful people lists, and she frequently references Maureen Dowd’s 2009 Vanity Fair cover story on Fey, in which she is portrayed as having an “ugly-duckling to swan” transformation story. Patterson believes that this creates a conflict in purpose, because while Fey critiques the ideals of stereotypical femininity by caricaturing and impersonating it, she is still embodying and embracing her own femininity, which perpetuates objectification. Patterson argues that Fey’s femininity in real life combined with her intellectual appeal has turned Fey into a postfeminist sex symbol, which is a contradiction in that that is exactly the type of ideal Fey intends her work to fight against (Patterson, 2012).

Apart from Fey’s created image of her actual self, Patterson states that Fey masculinizes the characters she writes for herself, such as Liz Lemon on *30 Rock*. The main character of Liz is known within the show as having a complete lack of traditional femininity, portrayed as being mannerless,
beautyless, and aggressive. Patterson believes that this creates too much contrast with Fey’s public persona, as someone who is playing a character they wrote themselves tends to blur the line between reality and fiction in the audiences’ eyes, and Fey’s characterization on 30 Rock adds to the contradictions of the social critiques Fey is trying to make. While Fey’s success indicates positive change, Patterson believes that as a result of it, there is a misconception in how much progress towards equality within the field of comedy has actually been achieved. This in-depth analysis of Fey’s position shows that more attention is being brought to the situation, and shows her increasing sphere of influence in the industry. However, it also demonstrates that while she has made major contributions to the shift in comedy, she is still only one element of the many drivers to change (Patterson, 2012).

There has also been some literature written on Lena Dunham, still a rising star in most regards despite the success of her first major vehicle, the HBO television show Girls. In a journal article that discusses the development of Dunham’s show and its role in the entertainment world, author Taylor Nygaard explores the reasoning behind why HBO, a network known for choosing established, prestigious directors and producers to create their original programming, enlisted a young newcomer such as Dunham to completely take the reigns on a new show. In addition, HBO is seen as having a masculine bent in terms of branding and content, known for shows such as the gangster-themed The Sopranos and Boardwalk Empire, vampire series like True Blood, and fantasy-drama series like Game of Thrones.

Nygaard states that Dunham was chosen to write, produce, direct, and star in a new show “in an attempt by the network to expand its viewership by appealing to younger female viewers, while also repositioning itself in the cable industry among the threat of increased competition.” HBO’s gamble on Dunham was an effort to recreate some of the success it saw with female audiences during the peak success of Sex and the City, and was primarily a business move. However, the network’s decision to have a female create and run the show sets the decision apart from simply creating more female-centric programming, and indicates that a leading cable network recognized an industry shift towards increasing the number of women working in positions of power (Nygaard, 2013).
However, another element that is interesting in HBO’s risk to put Dunham in charge was her lack of experience – beyond the fact that she was a female at the helm, she was also a 24-year-old who to date had done a total of one feature film, the quiet, indie *Tiny Furniture* that only saw release at the South by South West film festival, which was very far off-brand of the typical HBO fare. While this film won her best dramatic feature, the accomplishment hardly put her in the leagues of the directors and producers that HBO tended to choose – Dunham was needless to say still quite far removed from likes of Martin Scorsese, an HBO staple. Nygaard argues that some of the strategy behind such an inexperienced pick was to diversify and hit more “technologically sophisticated” viewers, all of whom tend to be young. In order to do this, they had to find a filmmaker who could connect with both millennials and females (as the other part of their overarching strategy), and the only way to do so was to find a millenial female herself (Nygaard, 2013).

While HBO’s risk seemed to pay off immediately when *Girls* received positive reviews and took off in popularity, many of the branding and production choices exemplify the industry reluctance towards females in comedy. For example, the network hired Judd Apatow as the executive producer of the show, known for his big-screen, male-centric film successes like *40-Year-Old Virgin* and *Knocked Up* ("Judd Apatow", 2015), and Nygaard believes that linking Apatow’s name with the vehicle was to try and diffuse any “for girls only” stigma that the show would gather. Another example is the branding campaign for the launch of the show, which, instead of highlighting the often socially and culturally-relevant themes of the show or Dunham’s own artistry, tried to associate Dunham with established, prestigious male comedians like Woody Allen and Larry David in order to legitimize her. Nygaard argues that these examples conflict with what HBO was trying to do, appeal to a young, female audience, and that it also undermined Dunham’s position of power and ability to lead a show on her own. Ultimately however, despite these elements of resistance, the controversy brought more attention to the show and the network, and Dunham’s success with the show is clearly a positive development for the industry (Nygaard, 2013).
In contrast with newcomer Dunham, much more has been written about Ellen DeGeneres, who has been a mainstream entertainment success for decades, and has been able to achieve that success despite identifying as a part of two underrepresented groups – being both a female and an out lesbian. The existing research and analysis on DeGeneres primarily focus on her impact on LGBT visibility and position of power and influence as an out lesbian that is popular in the mainstream media and entertainment world. In 1997, during the peak of her sitcom *Ellen*, in which DeGeneres played the first lead character to be out on network television, DeGeneres herself publicly came out, which was followed by immense public attention and scrutiny. Helene Shugart writes in a journal article about the “passing” of DeGeneres, meaning when one is accepted and seen as something that one is not. Shugart states that DeGeneres had always been seen in the public eye as heteronormative, or passing for it, so when she reinvented her career as a comedic talk-show host on her own *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* a few years later, she still utilized such strategies in order to retain mass appeal. Shugart argues that DeGeneres makes an effort to not outwardly portray or acknowledge her sexuality so that there remains a guise of ambiguity, and therefore this allows her to avoid societal ostracization, be well-liked by mass audiences, and still help the development of underrepresented groups gain visibility in popular culture (Shugart, 2003).

Subsequent scholars echoed these sentiments, as Jennifer Reed states in her journal article that “[Ellen] is a perfect television personality. She is easily consumable, funny, and nice to be around. There seems to be nothing threatening about her” (Reed, 2005). Reed focuses on DeGeneres’ accessibility and explores what such a public coming out and eventual success meant for broader change across media and culture. As rumors were abound that DeGeneres’s sitcom character Ellen Morgan was going to come out, DeGeneres’s actual life was similarly speculated on and played out in mainstream media, bringing high visibility to LGBT issues for the first time. In terms of DeGeneres’s talk show, Reed argues that just the sheer fact and existence of publicly gay hosts helps challenge heteronormativity and works towards the
social acceptance of different, non-majority identities, despite the fact that DeGeneres prefers to assimilate, refrain from referencing her sexuality, and remain as benign as possible (Reed, 2005).

Finally, Jamie Skerski further explores DeGeneres’s public persona and coming out, which prompted a fall from public acceptance to an unprecedented comeback, in her journal on DeGeneres’ “domestication.” Skerski states that after DeGeneres and her sitcom character Ellen Morgan came out in 1997, DeGeneres’s creative desires for the show ultimately were too progressive and extreme for the network and audiences at the time. DeGeneres wanted to represent relationships on the show with the same standards as heteronormative ones would be shown. However, the network refused and also attached a parental advisory warning on the show, despite there not being any inappropriate content, all of which eventually led to the show’s cancellation and DeGeneres’s public downfall. Skerski argues that the mass acceptance and adoration of DeGeneres seen today is a result of domesticating herself after her fall from grace, shaping a persona that simply removed sexuality from the equation and could therefore be “more palatable,” or as in line as possible with society’s standards of “acceptable behaviors set by prevailing cultural norms.” DeGeneres has made it a point to remain apolitical and neutral, refraining from being seen as too strong of an LGBT spokesperson or celebrity activist. Skerski believes that for all of the progress that DeGeneres has made in increasing visibility, the limitations she has had to construct exemplify how much more work there is to be done (Skerski, 2007).

The existing literature on prominent females working in the field of comedy shows that while significant development and growth has been achieved by some women in a variety of different ways, there is still a long way to go before a sense of equality is reached and accepted. The research below will continue to analyze how selected women have been able to impact change, and will build on these existing analyses in regards to the obstacles that these women have faced and surpassed.
Chapter 2: Framework Selection and the Unfreezing Stage

Framework Selection: Kurt Lewin’s Change Model and the ADKAR Model

The framework selected for this research is adapted from two different theories of change, Kurt Lewin’s 3-Step Change Management Model and the ADKAR Model. Lewin was a social psychologist in the mid-19th century who defined organizational change as a three-step model: unfreezing, transition, and refreezing, which he believed could also be applied on smaller and greater levels, such as small group/institutional change or overarching societal change. For the purposes of this research, the body of change in reference to is the field of comedy in the US. Lewin believed that every organization or entity is in a state of equilibrium supported by factors that would both drive and inhibit change, and that in order for change to occur, the equilibrium must be destabilized and a new one reached. This model is visualized below:

Figure 1: Kurt Lewin's Change Model,
Retrieved via https://learning.uonbi.ac.ke/courses/LDP601/scormPackages/path_4/11.5.1.jpg
The first stage, unfreezing, consists of the emerging signs of change. These are the first disturbances to equilibrium, in which it is realized that there is something about the current state that needs to be altered. An example of unfreezing would be a questioning of the status quo, and the motivations for change begin. The second stage is the transition period, in which the processes of change actually occur. This stage includes a sub-element to the model called Force-Field Analysis, which states that the more driving forces there are in relation to resistance forces, the more change will occur. The transition stage encompasses all factors of change as it is being implemented and learned (Burnes, 2004).

Finally, the third step of the Lewin model is refreezing, or a stabilization of the newly shifted equilibrium in which the intended change is accepted, normalized, and successfully established. However, this stage implies a high level of concrete stability, which only exists idealistically because change is dynamic and continuous. Many scholars believe there are significant limitations to Lewin’s 3-Step Model because it is too simplistic, and change is impossible to be as concrete as Lewin’s model suggests. Opponents to this model argue that change is too complex and open-ended to be seen as a 3-step process and that a complete refreezing is unrealistic because no society, group, organization, or culture is one-dimensional or linear (Burnes, 2004).

To make a more flexible and practical model for this research, the refreezing step of Lewin’s model will be replaced and the final step of the ADKAR model, developed in the early 2000’s by research firm Prosci, will be used instead. The 5-step ADKAR model consists of 1) awareness of the need for change, 2) desire to support and participate, 3) knowledge of how to change, 4) ability to implement, and 5) reinforcement to sustain (Hiatt, 2006). Having a reinforcement stage rather than a refreezing step more accurately suits the nature of organizational, social, and societal change, all of which this research incorporates.

While both refreezing and reinforcement indicate that enough stability has been reached so that regression to the pre-change state will not occur, reinforcement is a better concept for the purposes of this
research. As the framework is applied to research on women in the entertainment industry, the attainment of refreezing would require complete equality in relation to female representation in comedy – until their success is normalized instead of the exception. Since the intended change has not been fully achieved, but there are reinforcements in the form of isolated successes that continue to both drive change and sustain what has already occurred (enough to prevent regression to the status quo), defending the idea that the industry is currently in a reinforcement stage is much more accurate. While Lewin’s 3-Step Change Model is the basis for the framework of this research, the stages used for analysis will instead consist of 1) Unfreezing; 2) Transition; and 3) Reinforcement. This revised model is visualized below:

![Diagram of the revised model](image)

Figure 2: Combined elements of Lewin's Change Model and the ADKAR Model

The changes in the field of comedy are a natural shift as a result of a variety of different impacting factors, and were not actively planned or desired in the way that an organization or institution might try to implement change. Because of this, the most relevant elements of both Lewin’s model and
the ADKAR model were chosen to make this framework as a basis for analysis. Lewin’s model can be applied more broadly in terms of cultural or societal change because it does not require the knowledge of how to change or whether or not the ability to implement change exists. It also includes the force-field element to investigate the variety of factors impacting this change, while the reinforcement stage of the ADKAR model is more applicable to this research because it implies stability while acknowledging that the change is incomplete.

Post-WWII United States & the Rise of Modern Feminism

The unfreezing stage of the changes in comedy is rooted in the economic, political, and social position of women in post-World War II United States. During the war, women played a larger role in the workforce than ever before, not only filling direct support roles such as manufacturing war equipment, but also took on roles that were generally considered more honorable, manly professions such as government or civil service work (Strom & Wood, 1995). By the end of the war in 1945, over one-third of the US population of adult women was part of the workforce, and the Women’s Bureau of the Department of Labor surveyed women workers at the time, finding that 75% expected and intended to remain part of the post-war labor force (“Continued Employment After the War”). This was the first sign of unfreezing, a challenging of the status quo.

However, after the war, many men returned to their pre-war occupations, pushing women out of the workforce and into a period of domesticity in the 1950’s, which is thought of today as the origin of the homemaker ideal, the birth of the nuclear family, and the reinforcement of pre-war gender roles. The women that were able to remain in the workforce due to post-war reconstruction efforts were relegated once again to “women’s-work” type of professions that paid low wages, such as nurses, cleaners, typists, and other clerical and secretarial jobs. With the post-war economic boom and expansion of many
industries such as banking, electronics, and textiles, more jobs were created, but women still fell into the secondary worker roles ("Gender Roles in a Post-War America", 2013).

This domestication in the 1950’s was a resistance force to the changes of the position of women in US society, shifting the equilibrium again towards its state in the early 20th century and prior. However, the stability had already been disturbed, so by the 1960’s the unfreezing process was apparent. This decade gave rise to what is known today as modern feminism, and the movement began and strengthened in parallel with the Civil Rights Movement during a time marked by high awareness of the need for social justice. In 1963, Betty Friedman published a book called *The Feminine Mystique* that questioned whether the responsibilities women had in the home – preparing food, caring for the children, and entertaining – was all there was to being a woman and all they were capable of. Many women were not happy to accept being homemakers after contributing to the labor force in such an essential way during the war, looking instead to have jobs and careers of their own, and Friedman’s book became something tangible to unite and rally behind. In 1966, the National Organization for Women was formed, dedicated to the fight for equal pay and the fight against gender discrimination, creating a strong movement for women’s rights that hadn’t been visible since the suffragists ("Modern Feminism", 2008).

Complemented by national sentiment and the attention and successes of the Civil Rights Movement, the social revolution mindset of the 1960’s allowed the feminist movement to rise, unfreezing stability and paving the way for the transition period of change. Despite being employed in secondary roles, the proportion of women joining the workforce was still increasing, and this naturally trickled into the entertainment and media industries as well.

**Historical Context of Comedy in the US**

In the mid-20th century, post-World War II United States, the world of entertainment closely corresponded with what was actually occurring in society. Since the 1950’s became known as an age of
domesticity in which many women were relegated to housewife roles after the men came back from war, this was naturally how women were represented in the media of this era, from print advertisements to television shows. While there of course were female actresses, Hollywood was controlled by men, and every position of power in the entertainment industry, as well as the writing, producing, and directing roles, were filled by males (Kohen, 2012).

In the PBS documentary “Women in Comedy,” as part of the Makers: Women Who Make America series, the program takes viewers through the historical path of female comedians in the last half-century. In the 1950’s and 60’s, comedy was seen as a man’s domain. The primary places for visibility that comedians had during this time period were either on television through late night variety shows, or in-person performances in bars and other similar venues, both of which were seen as ‘boy’s clubs’. In television shows, women were rarely portrayed as funny, and were often represented in very static ways, taking on subordinate character arches and playing housewives. Even the few characters written to be funny were still under a man’s domain. In I Love Lucy, Lucille Ball’s character Lucy Ricardo, while she is funny and rebellious in nature, is still a housewife that is not permitted to do anything her husband does not approve of – though of course when she did them anyway, her trials and tribulations made for great entertainment. Lucy Ricardo was arguably the most progressive female character on television at the time, and even her role left much to be desired as her comedy was rooted in physical or situational scenarios rather than intellectual (Season 2, Episode 1: “Women in Comedy”, 2014).

Another example of the limited female representation in comedy during the 1960’s is Phyllis Diller, who was an actress and entertainer that often made appearances on sketch comedy variety shows and did her own stand-up routines as well. She was known for taking on an “ugly duckling” persona in her acts, always playing crazy-looking, highly self-deprecating characters. This was due to the idea that only ugly girls could be funny and entertaining, because it was too crude for the more attractive females to act humorous, make fun of themselves or others, or do any sort of physical comedy. This idea
permeated the industry at the time, and was the only way a female could achieve mainstream comedic success, like Diller made a name for herself. One could be a famous comedian and entertainer “as long as the joke is on you,” and Diller’s on-stage persona did just that. Off-stage, however, she was actually known as a beautiful and highly chic woman, which is what made the need for her to appear ugly on television seem even more ludicrous (Season 2, Episode 1: “Women in Comedy”, 2014).

In the 1960’s, the rise of the feminist movement was portrayed in media as having no sense of fun or humor, and the women involved were often seen as unappealing, overly-serious radicals. However, the efforts and existence of the movement itself began to trickle into the entertainment world, with the increasing rates of women joining the workforce and the character archetype of the “liberated single girl” beginning to have a presence in television shows and movies. In 1967, Carol Burnett began starring in her own variety and sketch comedy show, The Carol Burnett Show. The network initially did not support the show, convinced that a woman would not be successful in doing a comic variety show, but when it turned out to be highly popular and profitable, Burnett became one of the first women to be at the center of a network television show. In many of the skits, Burnett would play working women, and though they were often poking fun at female stereotypes, her representation shows the progression in the 1960’s and a clear unfreezing process from what was previously a “boys’ club” in comedy (Kohen, 2012).

Throughout the 1970’s, this unfreezing process continued, with more and more independent female characters represented in media. There was The Mary Tyler Moore Show, a sitcom about an unmarried, career-focused woman (in which many of the themes explored were about the challenges a “liberated, working single girl” like Mary Tyler Moore faced), and a number of Norman Lear-produced shows that featured independent female characters. In particular, the show Maude had its main character married to her 4th husband, and even produced an episode centered on abortion, which was an extremely controversial and appalling subject matter for mainstream media at the time (Season 2, Episode 1: "Women in Comedy", 2014).
Another significant advancement was the beginning of *Saturday Night Live* in 1975, which featured three female comedians/actresses as lead players in a highly visible, popular show that was a nationwide success – however, a lack of female writers meant that the competition was high for screen time among the women, as the men would get to be featured in more sketches (Kohen, 2012). The late Gilda Radner was a breakout star on *Saturday Night Live* as one of the three women, and was actually the first performer cast for the show entirely (Hevesi, 1989). She received an Emmy Award for her work in 1978, and developed her own Broadway show in 1979, which were key contributions that helped establish a foundation of success for future women in the field. For *SNL* in particular, Radner was noted for being the most impactful actress and the biggest hit with audiences. The breakthrough she made helped pave the way for the long, challenging road ahead for females on the show, as a female presence like hers was not seen again until comedians like Tina Fey and Amy Poehler joined the show at the turn of the 21st century (Kohen, 2012). Radner passed away at the young age of 42 from ovarian cancer, but left an important legacy for women in comedy with her work, as well as helped cement *SNL*’s progressive role in the media ("Gilda Radner Biography", 2011).

Joan Rivers was similarly a change-maker, constantly pushing the envelope throughout her storied career spanning nearly six decades. From the 1960’s through the 1980’s in particular, however, is when Rivers impacted the most change and was highly influential. She got her start performing as one of the few female stand-up comedians in the 1960’s and appearing on *The Tonight Show* with Johnny Carson during the late 1960’s and 1970’s, along with other various television and variety show appearances (Dockterman, 2014). By the early 1980’s, Rivers was a regular guest host of *The Tonight Show* and became known as Carson’s mentee, often seen as his eventual replacement. However, Rivers instead began hosting her own late-night talk show in 1986, titled *The Late Show Starring Joan Rivers*, becoming the first woman to do so (King, 1993). This leadership and entry into new television territory was a groundbreaking moment for women in the field, because it was a shift towards women creating
content and wielding influence themselves, rather than portraying characters written and produced by others.

The entire comedy industry experienced a boom in the 1980’s, as comedy clubs became more prevalent in nightlife and non-traditional venues were used by stand-ups, including bowling alleys, coffeehouses, and nightclubs in addition to bars. The 1980’s is also seen as the birth of the modern sitcom, as nearly every single American household had a family television to gather around. People could consume more media within their own houses, which had a highly positive effect on the television industry as a whole and especially impacted comedy because sitcoms provided a platform for light-hearted enjoyment, and their relatability to audiences was integral to their success (Season 2, Episode 1: "Women in Comedy", 2014).

This continued throughout the 1990’s, where comedians like Ellen DeGeneres and Roseanne Barr found success on network television sitcoms in which they portrayed funny, independent women who were constantly pushing the boundaries of what was and wasn’t acceptable to do or say on television. Sitcoms in the 80’s and 90’s began representing divorced women and single moms, yet while more females were portraying progressive characters, the writers of these shows were dominantly male. Oftentimes on these sitcoms there would only be one woman on a team of 10-20 writers, because networks thought that hiring more female writers would inhibit the creativity of the show and change the dynamic of the writer's room (Season 2, Episode 1: "Women in Comedy", 2014).

Following the comedy club boom, an alternative stand-up comedy scene emerged in the 1990’s as well. Comedians like Kathy Griffin, Margaret Cho, and Sarah Silverman became part of a new generation of female comedians, focused on pushing the envelope and crossing the line whenever they could – telling crude jokes that would have been unheard of coming from a woman in decades past, and no topic was off-limits to them. They found alternative ways to perform during a time when many nightclubs, bars, and comedy clubs were segregatory and discriminatory towards including female comedians on their
schedules, convinced that they would not bring in as much business (Season 2, Episode 1: "Women in Comedy", 2014).

It wasn’t until the 21st century that certain female comedians were able to do more than star in a television show or find moderate success doing stand-up comedy – there was yet to be a woman who had complete creative and executive control, having a hand in more than acting or performing in a show or movie but producing, writing, and directing one as well. While the 2000’s brought more comedians in positions of power within comedy, very few achieved mainstream success and build media or business empires like female celebrities have been known to do in other entertainment fields such as film or music. The case analyses presented later in this research will look specifically at selected female comedians that have introduced the most change and have the largest spheres of influence within comedy, bringing the industry into the stage of reinforcement based on their levels of success that have never before been achieved by women.
Chapter 3: Transition Period

Introduction to the Force-Field

As mentioned above in the overview of Kurt Lewin’s Change Model, the second stage of the change process in any institution, domain, or society consists of the transition period. Within the transition period is an element called a Force-Field Analysis, visualized below. This element states that there are simultaneously driving and resistance forces upon any state of equilibrium, and any change to the status quo towards a different state can only occur when there is an imbalance of these forces. The transition period consist of both driving and resistance forces working concurrently in a dynamic way, creating a multi-step change process (Lewin, 1947).

Figure 3: Force-Field Analysis Diagram ("Leading Transformational Change: Using the Force Field Analysis", 2013)
Below, some of the driving and resistance forces affecting change in comedy will be analyzed to show the many factors of transition that both encouraged and discouraged female success in the field. The majority of the impact of these factors took place in the second half of the 20th century, beginning with the 1970’s as the increased presence of women in the industry at the time also increased the opposition towards it. However, many of these factors are non-concrete and are not only limited to the transition period, such as the constantly changing habits of media consumption in the US, which is driven by advancing technologies. As a result, many of these factors continue to affect the equilibrium and state of reinforcement reached today as both drivers and inhibitors, showing how complex and multi-dimensional the change process can be.

**Resistance Forces**

While a lot of change, especially during the transition period, occurred within the television industry, it was similarly the source of some of the greatest amounts of resistance. In the 1970’s, working women finally began being portrayed on network television on programs like *The Carol Burnett Show* and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. However, this did not happen without considerable pushback: the women that Carol Burnett played in skits were stereotypes and often served as the recipient of the jokes, and the working, “liberated single girl” trope that Mary Tyler Moore brought into the limelight was always shown as subservient to her boss in the office. When *Maude*, a sitcom about an independent woman married to her 4th husband, aired an episode centered around abortion, a media storm of criticism and shock followed, as the topic of abortion was absolutely unheard of as subject matter for mainstream television at the time, and many cultural and societal groups were offended. Despite these resistances, however, the sheer existence of these characters being represented on television still indicated that change was occurring.
In another facet of the industry, stand-up comedy, even stronger resistance forces existed. The appeal of in-person stand-up boomed in the 1980’s as comedy clubs opened in cities across the United States and venues such as nightclubs and even bowling alleys began hosting comedy nights. However, the performers for these sets were 95% male, and many clubs did not let women perform because they believed they would not bring in as much revenue. There was a widespread notion that women could only tell a certain type of joke (“women’s humor”), which would not resonate with mixed audiences. Some clubs, if they did let women perform, actually went so far as to segregate male and female performers. An example of this is the famous Comedy Store Los Angeles, which was highly renowned at the time and was a launching ground for many up-and-coming comedians, partly because of its proximity to Hollywood. The venue, while progressive enough to allow females to do stand-up routines occasionally, also inhibited the change process because it hosted the male comedians in the main room and relegated females to performing in the small, unappealing, and cramped back room. Venues cited the need to bring in customers and revenue, therefore preferring more widely accepted male stand-ups, but they couldn’t see the profit potential in hiring female performers if they did not give them the visibility or opportunities in the first place (Season 2, Episode 1: "Women in Comedy", 2014).

However, the strongest resistance forces during the transition period came from the systemic beliefs and public words of men in the entertainment industry. In 1998, comedian, actor, producer, writer, and director Jerry Lewis famously discussed his opinions on females in comedy to a large public audience while being interviewed at the US Comedy Arts Festival. When asked about women he admired in the industry, Lewis frankly stated, “I don’t like any female comedians…A woman doing comedy doesn’t offend me but sets me back a bit. I, as a viewer, have trouble with it. I think of her as a producing machine that brings babies in the world” ("Jerry Lewis: Not Funny", 1998). His audience was highly offended and the quote made many headlines, and since then this discourse has frequently been cited in work discussing funny women. Although this is a particularly extreme ideology, Lewis’s words display a sentiment towards women in comedy that has existed for decades.
Even in recent years, Lewis has stood by his comments, stating at the 2013 Cannes Film Festival press conference, “I don’t have any” when asked about his favorite female comics. In reference to women doing broad comedy, he added that “I can’t see women doing that. It bothers me. I cannot sit and watch a lady diminish her qualities to the lowest common denominator. I just can’t do that” (Coyle, 2013). In 2014, while at the ceremony for cementing his handprints at the famous Grauman’s Chinese Theater in Hollywood, Lewis argued,

“Seeing a woman project the kind of aggression that you have to project as a comic just rubs me wrong. And they’re funny — I mean you got some very, very funny people that do beautiful work — but I have a problem with the lady up there that’s going to give birth to a child — which is a miracle” (Rothman, 2014).

Lewis continues to hold on to antiquated standards in thinking women should be domesticated, which conflicts with his belief that in order to be funny one must be aggressive, which he thinks women are inherently not. Clearly, Lewis’s logic is highly flawed, as not all male comedians are aggressive, and plenty of aggressive female comedians, like Sarah Silverman, have achieved success in being so. Lewis’s perpetual repetition of his ideology for over a decade, while an extreme view, is not far from the lines of thinking that resisted the shift from male dominance in comedy.

Beyond Lewis, renowned author and journalist Christopher Hitchens once penned a highly controversial and often-cited Vanity Fair essay in 2007 titled “Why Women Aren’t Funny.” Hitchens attacked the core of what it means to be funny versus having a sense of humor, and argued that just the existence of female comics (while he believes there are many great ones) does not discount the overarching lack of females’ sense of humor, and writes about what he sees is a “humor gap”. He believes that there is no evolutionary need for women to be funny because, from a biological standpoint, a sense of humor as a female wasn’t necessary to attract a mate. Hitchens also argues that while there are successful female comics, his issue with them is that they are all simply women emulating male humor, and playing by the men’s rules – achieving success through aggression, citing the likes of Roseanne Barr and Sarah
Silverman (Hitchens, 2007). The issue with Hitchens’s reasoning is that he claims comedy and being funny inherently belongs to men, which makes his perceived humor gap a self-fulfilling prophecy. Hitchens’s views again put on display the fact that such a backwards way of thinking existed among men in the entertainment world, strongly contributing to the resistance forces of change in the industry.

**Driving Forces**

Despite the variety of resistance forces, however, the transition period consisted of a higher quantity of driving forces, impactful enough to continue shifting the equilibrium away from its original status quo and towards the desired state of equality within the industry. One of the most notable forces is how the changes in media consumption have aligned with and highly benefitted the shift in comedy. Despite the resistance forces in television industry, there were even stronger driving forces during the second half of the 20th century, such as the changing viewing habits of consumers and the growth in popularity of the modern sitcom.

In the 1980’s, many American families would gather around their television sets at night to spend time with one another and enjoy family-friendly, relatable programming. As this habit became a norm and an indicator of an average, stereotypical family, television networks profited greatly and increased dramatically in size. They began developing exponentially more programs, and learned how well sitcoms resonated with middle-class American audiences – they could see themselves represented in these types of shows and laugh at them, identifying with non-threatening characters and plotlines. This gave more females the opportunity to portray funny and witty characters on-screen, even if they were in secondary or supporting roles. As the popularity and amount of sitcoms increased, especially into the 1990’s, it was only natural that more women wanted more screen time, more representation, and more creative control (Kohen, 2012). The rise of the sitcom was one of the most critical driving forces in affecting change
during the transition period because it provided the tool and platform that women in the industry needed to make an impact.

Changes in media consumption habits continued to be one of the most crucial factors for change transition during the 2000’s and through today – most notably, the rise of the internet and digital media have completely changed the way audiences watch television and interact with content. In the 2000’s, rapidly developing technologies increased the number of choices audiences had in how they would consume entertainment such as television and movies. First, there came a diverse range of channels, programming, and cable packages for consumers to choose from, in which there were television shows suited for what seemed like every topic or interest imaginable, and then there was the ability to digitally record content via DVRs to watch it later at more convenient times. The additional platforms helped provide more opportunities to women in entertainment, as shows did not need to be on primetime network television in order to be successful anymore—success could also be found on smaller, more niche cable networks. By the late 2000’s, it was commonplace for television programming to be housed on the internet, with audiences being able to access their favorite shows on their computers at almost any time (Papathanassopoulos, Coen, Curran, & Aalberg, 2013). During this decade, the internet became a key change agent, especially useful in entertainment and comedy because of the ease of access and limitless scope of content.

In 2000, according to a study by the Pew Research Center, less than half of surveyed adults used the internet regularly and had a cell phone. Only 28% said they would go online to “have fun” or “kill time” (in other words, for entertainment purposes) and only 5% had a broadband internet connection at home. By 2010, however, over 80% of adults said they used the internet regularly and owned a cell phone, with nearly two-thirds of respondents saying they used the internet daily for entertainment purposes (Rainie, 2010). The rise in the number of users of the internet increases the volume, variety, velocity, and venue of information and content exchange, and therefore the accessibility of media experiences increased drastically with the prevalence of the internet. Today, this ease of connectivity
expands far beyond computers and now includes mobile usage and consumption, whether via smartphones or tablets, further increasing the number of platforms available for entertainment.

Because of the diversity in digital media, the entertainment world shifted from mass-appeal content to content that specifically catered to different segments. Since the internet has become one of the primary means of information and entertainment consumption for average Americans, people can access content in almost any place at any time. The amount of choices consumers have also means that more content must be created, and the freedom of these digital platforms mean that entertainers no longer need to rely on traditional methods to build brands or careers. This is not just limited to comedians – for example, singers no longer need record deals to be famous because they could display their music on social sites like YouTube, and this shift towards digital media dominance continues to have industry-driving impact on news media, journalism, education, and many other industries.

In terms of television, which for so long had been a primary medium for comedy, the internet both gives more viewers access to content and also takes away control from traditional big-business networks because it allows new media entities like Netflix and Amazon to distribute their own digitally native programming. The greater amount of mediums again plays the most important role in affecting change in comedy, as more viewers (especially younger audiences) can be reached through digital content. In addition, more segmentation of audiences meant more women could consume television that was highly appealing or relevant to them, and this applies strongly to comedy. Finally, the higher volume and diversity of content desired by consumers and necessary for media entities to create provided more jobs and opportunities for women to take on in the media and entertainment industry.

The digital age has also highly affected the marketing of media experiences, changing the landscape of brand-building and the giving rise to integrated marketing communications. The popularization of highly integrated branding campaigns becoming the norm is another critical driving force in affecting change during the transition period, as it allowed audiences to connect with their favorite television shows or celebrity personas through more touchpoints and gave consumers greater
accessibility. In the late 20th century, many firms took a mass-marketing approach with their marketing strategies until the development of segmentation, targeting, and positioning strategies (Belch & Belch, 2014). When companies realized that needs and desires varied greatly among consumers, this translated to the development of integrated communications because of the need to appeal to differing segments while maintaining a consistent brand message.

This concept applies greatly in entertainment marketing, and became equally relevant in the development of personal brands as well. For television and media brands, the growth in digital mediums meant that messaging needed to be integrated across all of them, though the platforms chosen to conduct their marketing activities depended on the segments and targets they wanted to reach. For the outward-facing personas of celebrities and other public figures (e.g. politicians), the building of an integrated personal brand also became important in order to achieve career success. The presence of public figures on social media promotes an interactive relationship with audiences and adds a powerful element of higher accessibility. For entertainers and comedians in particular, integrated communications across digital mediums provide more platforms for creativity, more touchpoints for fans to connect with them, and more visibility leading to higher chances of success. Audiences can become a part of curating and interacting with (and even helping to develop) content when digital and social media are part of a marketing mix, rather than just consuming it. As a result, the rise of integrated branding across channels and the development of strategic marketing among public personas is a highly influential driver in affecting change in the comedy industry because it allows female comedians to build strong relationships with fans and cultivate their work in non-traditional ways.
Because change is such a non-concrete process, many of the factors that affected the transition period will continue to impact the progression of change even as it is in a stage of reinforcement. While the largest effects of the resistance forces occurred during the transition period, like the segregation of comedy clubs, other factors like stereotypical and static female characters represented in media and the antiquated ideologies of some men in the industry can still continue to exist during the reinforcement stage. However, they are not actively resisting the change process anymore because the reinforcements have become strong enough where regression to the original state will not occur, which is something that is not guaranteed during the transition period.
Likewise, the strongest impacts of the driving forces occurred during transition, such as the birth of the sitcom, the shift from mass-marketing approaches to strategic branding, and the development of the internet. However, the internet is only the means for new mediums of communication which continue to be created, so therefore the habits of media consumption will continue to change as technology progresses. This factor will still exist and play an important role even though the reinforcement stage has been reached, showing how fluid and complex the change process can be.
Chapter 4: Reinforcement Stage

The “Law of the Few” as a Model for How Change Occurs

After looking at why certain factors have caused change in the comedy industry, how these changes occurred and have been maintained must also be considered. To analyze the reinforcements of change, a framework adapted from Malcolm Gladwell’s book on social epidemics and societal change, *The Tipping Point*, will be used. His “Law of the Few” model will be applied to analyze selected cases of female comedians who are integral to the industry shift and how they have made change happen, and their relative successes will be measured as evidence to the idea that success reinforces the change that is in the process of occurring.

The “Law of the Few” explains how a select group of people are responsible for the majority of a change or epidemic (the “tipping” of it) based on higher-level abilities to communicate, teach, and persuade others. Gladwell states that 80% of the work required to create change is done by only 20% of the participants, otherwise known as the 80/20 Principle, and that “the success of any kind of social epidemic is heavily dependent on the involvement of people with a particular and rare set of social gifts” (Gladwell, 2000). This principle can be applied to the collective shift in comedy from industry-wide male dominance to increased female representation at all levels of the field, as there is a specific subset of female comedians who have generated the most change.

The people in the aforementioned 20% fall into three different categories: connectors, mavens, and salespeople. Connectors contribute to change by the influence of wide personal networks and the communication skills to bring people together, leading to the spread of ideas and the development of creative capital. Mavens are focused on information-gathering and the development of expertise and unparalleled knowledge in a certain area, which creates intellectual capital as a result of the mavens’
affinity for sharing and trading information and knowledge. Finally, salespeople are the charismatic “persuaders,” who create social capital by bringing others into their way of thinking, which therefore leads to change in perspectives of certain ideas or phenomena, affecting peoples’ following thoughts and actions. The possession of any combination of these attributes is what enables someone to be a change-maker, and these are the characteristics in which the women analyzed in the following cases embody. A visual representation of this model is below:

![Figure 5: The Law of the Few Model (Livingston, 2009)](image)

The cases analyzed fall into not only one but multiple categories of this framework, explaining how they have been able to achieve high levels of success in the field of comedy that no one else has before, propelled by the factors that facilitated this and enabled these changes to be feasible (Gladwell, 2000).
Methodology: Definition of “Success” and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

First, the idea of “success” must be clearly defined in order to create a basis of comparison among the cases. To quantitatively measure success, each case analysis will have an accompanying list of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), found in the appendices, to provide context and scope for the analysis. In addition, these KPIs serve as evidence that success and therefore considerable change has been achieved. The KPIs will be:

1) Estimated total net worth of each case
2) Statistics of television shows in which they have a stake in ownership (creator, writer, producer, director) – Seasons of show, salary per episode, etc.
3) Total revenue of movies in which they have a stake in ownership (If applicable)
4) Dollar value of book publishing deals (If applicable)
5) List of industry accolades
6) Social Media Statistics and Impact (Twitter and Instagram only, if applicable) – Based on Twitter analytics and Klout score, a measure of social influence
7) Miscellaneous projects of note (social/humanitarian recognition, endorsement deals, other business ventures)

Case Selection Criteria

For this research, four isolated cases were selected for analysis to represent the highest-achieving women today in the field of comedy. The women selected have arguably achieved the most mainstream success of female comedians, and each selection’s body of work, persona, method, brand, means to success, and point at which they are perceivably on in their individual career paths vary greatly, covering a diverse range of females in the field. The goal in selecting these specific cases was to cover as broad
and balanced of a range as possible while only choosing among the few women who have achieved similarly elite levels of success in the industry.

The first case, Tina Fey, is an established star and household name, and has achieved success across many different platforms in a variety of functions; the second case is Lena Dunham, who represents the newcomer to the industry and the one with the longest journey ahead; the third case is Mindy Kaling, who is still upwardly mobile on her path to success and one of the few non-white mainstream comediennes; and finally, the fourth case is Ellen DeGeneres, who is highly globally visible, has been in the industry the longest, and is the only non-heteronormative case selected.

The categorization of these women as connectors, mavens, and salespeople is below, and the way they exemplify the characteristics of each will be explored in their individual analyses. Most notably, each case analyzed is considered to have the attributes of a superior salesperson, which indicates that the ability to engage and persuade is the most important element one needs to possess in order to create change within the field of comedy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Connector</th>
<th>Maven</th>
<th>Salesperson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tina Fey</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lena Dunham</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindy Kaling</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellen DeGeneres</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6: Categorization of Cases
Chapter 5 : Case Analyses

Case #1: Tina Fey

Background and Overview

Tina Fey is a 44-year-old comedian, writer, actress, and producer best known for her work on NBC’s *Saturday Night Live (SNL)* and comedy series *30 Rock*, as well as films such as *Mean Girls*. From outside of Philadelphia, Fey studied drama at the University of Virginia and began studying improvisational comedy in Chicago at the start of her career. Fey worked at the well-known improv school Second City until she was hired as a writer for *SNL* in 1997, eventually becoming the first female head writer in 1999 (“Tina Fey”).

In 2004, Fey wrote and costarred in her first feature film, *Mean Girls*, achieving mainstream success for the first time and creating a pop-culture phenomenon. In 2003, Fey signed a deal to develop a comedy series for NBC, eventually leaving *SNL* when the project, which became *30 Rock*, went to air. The show received widespread critical acclaim and several industry accolades, went on for seven seasons and is consistently cited as one of the greatest television series of all time (“101 Best Written TV Series List”). During *30 Rock*, Fey starred and participated in a variety of projects, including starring in 2008’s *Baby Mama* alongside fellow comedian Amy Poehler and 2010’s *Date Night*, as well as her famous portrayal of Sarah Palin during the 2008 presidential election on *SNL*. Post-*30 Rock*, Fey created and executive produced the comedy series *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* for Netflix in early 2015, which has been renewed for a second season (“Tina Fey”).

As a book author, Fey released her first memoir, the humorous autobiography *Bossypants*, in 2011, topping the New York Times Best Seller list for five weeks and selling over one million copies in the six months following its release (Lee, 2011). Fey has also hosted the Golden Globe Awards twice, received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, frequently been named an “Entertainer of the Year” by *Entertainment Weekly*, one of the most influential people in the world in *Time*, one of the most powerful
celebrities by *Forbes*, and one of the most beautiful people by *People Magazine*. Additionally, in 2010, Fey was the youngest person to ever receive the Mark Twain Award for American Humor by the Kennedy Center (Levy, 2010). A list of Fey’s KPIs are found in Appendix A.

**Fey as a Connector and Salesperson**

In Gladwell’s model, a connector is someone who is able to leverage superior communication skills to bring people together and spread ideas. The most notable example of Fey as a connector is her parodies of vice-presidential nominee Sarah Palin leading up to the 2008 presidential election on *Saturday Night Live*. The impersonation drew vast amounts of public attention with millions of views on the video clips that went viral and thousands of mentions in the press, and created essential water-cooler conversation for millions of Americans. Noted for their striking similarities in resemblance, Fey’s multiple appearances as Palin throughout the remainder of the election became more than just a late-night spoof. The parodies are often credited with negatively affecting Palin’s reputation, credibility, and popularity with the public, which some argue ultimately led to McCain/Palin’s defeat in the election because of the narratives *SNL* was able to construct (Young, 2011). Many of the jokes remain culturally pervasive, such as the lines “I can see Russia from my house!” and, as Fey breaks out a flute during a skit about the vice presidential debate, “Are we not doing the talent portion?” (Kurtzman, 2015).

The critical acclaims that Fey received for her impersonation being so accurate and spot-on helped fuel public interest, and *SNL* achieved the highest ratings it had seen in 14 years as a result (see Appendix E). The ratings for *SNL* in the run-up to the 2008 election saw a 76% increase over the same time period the previous year, reaching a high of 17 million viewers on the episode that Fey and Palin herself made a joint appearance (Holmwood, 2008). The Palin skits continued to blur the line between the political and entertainment worlds as a result of the media sphere surrounding both, as the reactions brought up the question of which one drives the other. Fey’s comedic skills engaged a public audience that might have paid less attention to Palin otherwise (and arguably impacted election results), enabled
SNL to serve as a medium for political commentary, and resulted in the creation of significant cultural capital.

Fey is also a salesperson, using humor to create social capital that influences her audience’s viewpoints and thinking, notably in her personal essays in Bossypants and the commentary that underlies much of the writing in 30 Rock. Some examples are her quotes on appearance and self-actualization that she writes in Bossypants: “If you retain nothing else, always remember the most important rule of beauty, which is: who cares?”; and “When faced with sexism or ageism or lookism or even really aggressive Buddhism, ask yourself the following question: "Is this person in between me and what I want to do?" If the answer is no, ignore it and move on. Your energy is better used doing your work and outpacing people that way. Then, when you’re in charge, don’t hire the people who were jerky to you” (Fey, 2011).

Fey’s ability to balance motivational advice with humor for her readers indicates her salesperson prowess because it persuades the audience to have a similar line of thinking.

The themes of 30 Rock also serve as platforms for Fey’s beliefs. Many plotlines from 30 Rock double as social commentary in a satirical way, commenting on everything from modern-day feminism to capitalism to socioeconomic inequity. Since the show is about a fictional NBC show (which was at the time owned by GE Corporation), there are many references to the need for advertisement dollars in order to keep the show-within-a-show running. There was resistance of hyper-obvious product placement (such as for Snapple and even GE themselves) as minor plotlines, which in turn became actual advertisements for the products (see Appendix F). When NBC was in the process of being bought out by Comcast, this was similarly parodied in the show by using the fictional company Kabletown.

30 Rock also serves as commentary for some of the conflicts and challenges that women face today, such as when Liz Lemon (the titular character played by Fey) has to get married in order to make it easier to adopt a child when the agency won’t let a single woman adopt, and later in the series when Liz has to choose between her job and having more time to take care of her children. These acknowledge the
concept that women today are unrealistically expected to be able to “do it all and have it all,” yet face considerable societally-constructed obstacles. Another theme is the show’s commentary on race relations and socioeconomic structure, referenced often by the character Tracy Jordan. In one episode, Jordan brings up his repressed memories of growing up poor before he became a big movie-star (a parody of the upbringing of the actual actor, Tracy Morgan): “A pack of wild dogs took over and successfully ran a Wendy’s. The sewer people stole my skateboard. The projects I lived in was named after Zachary Taylor, generally considered to be one of the worst presidents of all time. I once saw a baby give another baby a tattoo” (Krantz, 2013). The absurdity of Jordan’s recollections are meant to show the lack of understanding much of the public has in terms of evaluating socioeconomic inequality, as well as critiques the ignorance that many have in regard to race relations. Additionally, the questioning of gender norms and representation of realistic challenges faced by women help draw attention to the existence of these issues and show how Fey aspires to raise awareness and provide a social critique through her work, persuading viewers to educate themselves, understand, and impact change.
Case #2: Lena Dunham

Background and Overview

Lena Dunham is a 28-year-old American actress, screenwriter, producer, director, and author best known for the HBO television comedy Girls. She attended Oberlin College, studying creative writing, and produced her first short films during her college years. In 2009, Dunham created a satirical web series called Delusional Downtown Divas and her first film titled Creative Nonfiction, which was screened at the 2009 South by Southwest Film Festival (SXSW) (Jervis, 2014). The following year, her first full-length feature film as writer, director, editor, and lead actress, Tiny Furniture, screened at the same conference and won Best Narrative Feature at the festival as well as Best First Screenplay at the Independent Spirit Awards ("Lena Dunham"). This success earned Dunham a script deal with HBO and a profile in the New York Times in 2011, and Girls was greenlit by the network in 2012 after a positive screening response at the 2012 SXSW festival (Koblin, 2013). The show, in which Dunham serves as the creator, director, writer, executive producer, and main character, has earned Dunham multiple industry awards, including the first female Directors Guild Award for Outstanding Director in Comedy, and is in production on its fifth season as of 2015 ("Lena Dunham").

Apart from Dunham’s work in television and film, Dunham’s first book, a collection of personal essays titled Not That Kind of Girl: A Young Woman Tells You What She’s “Learned”, was released in September 2014 and has reached #2 on the New York Times Best-Seller list as of October 2014 ("Best Sellers: Combined Print & E-Book Nonfiction", 2014). Dunham has also starred in videos promoting Barack Obama’s 2012 re-election, hosted Saturday Night Live, guest-starred on various television shows, been listed as one of Time’s Most Influential People in the World, and been recognized by an LGBT advocacy organization for her support to the gay community. A list of Dunham’s KPIs can be found below in Appendix B.
Dunham as a Salesperson

The Law of the Few category that Dunham most strongly embodies is the role of the salesperson, in which Dunham uses her prolific skills as a writer to express her beliefs and perspectives and persuades her audience to have the same line of thinking. Many of the issues and themes that Dunham desires to draw attention to is evident in the subject matter and plotlines of Girls, creating commentary on modern, millennial femininity through the lenses of the characters she creates and the depictions of the world they live in. As the show follows the lives of four fictional twenty-something females living in New York City, Dunham has stated that she intended to portray this generation’s young females facing adulthood for the first time in a realistic way, the population that isn’t represented in shows like Sex and the City, Gossip Girl, or other sitcoms about young people (Goldberg, 2012). Some of the plotlines involve Dunham’s own character, Hannah, being cut off financially from her parents, all of the characters finding their first “adult” jobs and subsequently having to face the realities of losing those jobs, attempting to discover their passions and parlaying those talents into careers, and, of course, navigating the gray areas and unknown worlds of romantic relationships, family troubles, and true friendships.

Beyond just the plotlines of Girls, another way that Dunham’s viewpoints come across in her work is the way the show integrates modern feminist themes and discourse on issues that young women face today that are not often discussed in mainstream media. The show has been praised for its unfiltered, honest representation of body image pressures, discussions of abortion and sexually transmitted diseases, and street harassment, an everyday norm for many girls that is too infrequently recognized as a problem. For example, Dunham works to normalize realistic portrayals of bodies by not being afraid to frequently show off her own commercially non-traditional (by Hollywood standards) figure, both clothed and unclothed. In doing so, Dunham attempts to increase the representation of real bodies and ordinary women on television (see Appendix G), taking a stand against the unattainable beauty standards that have become a norm in society. Another theme is the show’s encouragement of acceptance of others’ choices and individuality within themselves, such as when the character Jessa proclaims that “I don’t like women
telling other women what to do or how to do it or when to do it” or when Dunham’s own character, Hannah, states that “I’m an individual and I feel how I feel when I feel it” (Neelis, 2013).

The same ideas are even more prevalent in Dunham’s content written as herself, notably through her social media presence and her published work, the autobiographical essay collection *Not That Kind of Girl*. Dunham is an established presence on the social media network Twitter, with many of her most popular tweets focusing on her political views, current social issues, and endorsements of fellow entertainers (see Appendix H). For example, two of her most shared tweets read “Part of being a feminist is giving other women the space to make choices you don’t necessarily agree with” and “Women's access to birth control should not be denied because of their employer's religious beliefs” (Dunham, 2014). Dunham’s emphasis on individuality, empowerment, and courage also permeates her writing in *Not That Kind of Girl*. Some notable quotes include:

“There is nothing gutsier to me than a person announcing that their story is one that deserves to be told, especially if that person is a woman. As hard as we have worked and as far as we have come, there are still so many forces conspiring to tell women that our concerns are petty, our opinions aren’t needed, that we lack the gravitas necessary for our stories to matter,”

“It's not brave to do something that doesn't scare you,” and “Respect isn’t something you command through intimidation and intellectual bullying. It’s something you build through a long life of treating people how you want to be treated” (Dunham, Not That Kind of Girl: A Young Woman Tells You What She's "Learned", 2014). The stories in her essays reflect the lessons Dunham has learned and the many things she is still trying to figure out, reinforcing her ideals to her audience, while her social media reach exemplifies how she is able to engage others to spread her words and beliefs, influencing people’s perspectives on certain topics. Dunham’s power as a salesperson enables her to have strong influence across several mediums and persuades viewers and audiences to see her way of thinking.
Case #3: Mindy Kaling

Background and Overview

Mindy Kaling is a 35-year-old writer, actress, comedian, and producer best known for creating the series *The Mindy Project*, and co-executive producing, directing, and writing *The Office*. Kaling graduated from Dartmouth University, studying playwriting, and interned for *Late Night with Conan O'Brien* (Kaling, 2012). Following college, Kaling did stand-up comedy after moving to New York City and co-wrote and starred as Ben Affleck in the 2002 comedic play *Matt & Ben*, which earned rave reviews in the theater industry. In 2004, Kaling was hired as only female writer for *The Office*, writing over 22 episodes and eventually moving into directing, being promoted to executive producer, and portraying the character Kelly Kapoor throughout the show’s run (Sittenfeld, 2011). Towards the end of the show, Kaling also was developing her own comedy series, which later became *The Mindy Project* in 2012, in which she serves as executive producer, writer, and lead actress.

In addition to her two main television projects, Kaling has guest-starred in various television shows and movies, and published her first memoir, *Is Everyone Hanging Out Without Me? (And Other Concerns)* in 2011, while her second book, titled “*Why Not Me*”, will be published in 2015. Kaling has also been named one of *Time*’s Most Influential People in the World and, apart from her comedic work, is known for her fashion blogging ("Mindy Kaling"). A list Kaling’s KPIs can be found in Appendix C.

Kaling as a Maven and Salesperson

One of the characteristics that set Kaling apart from both Fey and Dunham is her role as a maven, as her expertise and knowledge in the world of fashion, plus her enthusiastic advocacy for her favorite products, are factors that have helped Kaling build her sphere of influence. Her interest in the industry leads her to weave it into the characters and plotlines she writes, as well as integrate it into her social media presence. The premise for her first memoir, *Is Everyone Hanging Out Without Me (And Other Concerns)*, came from a blog that Kaling ran for several years called “The Concerns of Mindy Kaling.”
within which she often posted a series titled “Things I Bought that I Love” (Kaling, "The Concerns of Mindy Kaling", 2012). Her posts were endorsements of various products (often articles of clothing), as well as home décor, food, book, movie, and television recommendations. In addition, Kaling provides commentary and insights into her life while explaining why she loves an product and how she uses it (see Appendix I). Specifically, Kaling often presented her expert-level of knowledge of fashion brands and clothing items for her fans and viewers that are part of her individual, chic sense of style, sharing her experiences and spreading positive word-of-mouth while writing her blog posts with relatable humor.

While the blog is since defunct due to its transition into her published books, her Instagram is now the medium in which Kaling remains a style maven, continuing to post about her current fashions and obsessions (see Appendix J). Kaling has built up a credible position as a fashion connoisseur and “favorite things” maven, which has enabled her to provide a certain accessibility and relatability to people that others in the industry cannot. This has helped her build her image and brand to expand beyond just a comedian or writer, as she presents more touchpoints of interaction with her fans than others have, therefore differentiating herself and expanding her areas of influence.

Kaling is also a salesperson because of her ability to engage, connect, and relate to audiences, impacting people’s thoughts and perspectives. The most prominent vehicles for Kaling’s social persuasiveness are her public Twitter feed and her book, Is Everyone Hanging Out Without Me? (And Other Concerns). Known as a high-profile and influential Twitter presence because of their level of circulation, Kaling’s tweets are marked by their relatability and proclivity for sharing while remaining witty and true to her own opinions and views. Kaling frequently tweets about pop culture and current entertainment news, the exploration and acceptance of her own femininity, sharp observations and insights, and offers glimpses into her own life. A collection of some of Kaling’s Twitter highlights is below in Appendix K.

In her book of essays, Kaling continues to reinforce her perspectives similar to her previous blog and Twitter persona, sharing her insights and observations in a longer-read format. While retaining her
brand of relatable, accessible jokes, she takes on more of social stance with her memoir. Kaling frequently acknowledges her narrative as a minority and position as a role model for multiple marginalized groups, including her Indian heritage and commercially non-traditional appearance, as well as her position as a female in entertainment. Some examples of this include the quotes, “Nothing gives you confidence like being a member of a small, weirdly specific, hard-to-find demographic,” and

“My mom’s a doctor, but because she came from India and then Africa, where childhood obesity was not a problem, she put no premium on having skinny kids. In fact, she and my dad didn’t mind having a chubby daughter. Part of me wonders if it even made them feel a little prosperous, like ‘Have you seen our overweight Indian child? Do you know how statistically rare this is?’” (Kaling, 2012).

Bringing awareness to her position as part of the “other” in society helps Kaling draw attention to the issues with lack of fair representation of gender and race in mainstream media and gives readers insights into the struggles that non-dominant groups face. Kaling has also publicly commented on this, telling Vulture, “I never want to be called the funniest Indian female comedian that exists. I feel like I can go head-to-head with the best white, male comedy writers that are out there. Why would I want to self-categorize myself into a smaller group than I’m able to compete in?” (Yuan, 2012). Kaling also told Parade Magazine in 2013, “There are little Indian girls out there who look up to me, and I never want to belittle the honor of being an inspiration to them. But while I’m talking about why I’m so different, white male show runners get to talk about their art,” and

“I always get asked, ‘Where do you get your confidence?’ I think people are well meaning, but it’s pretty insulting. Because what it means to me is, ‘You, Mindy Kaling, have all the trappings of a very marginalized person. You’re not skinny, you’re not white, you’re a woman. Why on earth would you feel like you’re worth anything?’” (Malcom, 2013).

Through Kaling’s interviews, she expresses the desire for a state in which gender and race are not peoples’ defining characteristics, and makes it clear that while she acknowledges her marginalization and
consequent role as a pioneer of sorts, that should not be the focus. By bringing attention to this and encouraging thought among her audience, Kaling helps to create change and improve social, cultural, and media literacy. Through her social media presence, published memoirs, and interview sound-bites, Kaling uses her salesperson prowess, a combination of charisma, relatability, and comedic skills, to spread influence and persuade audiences to share in her perspectives.
Case #4: Ellen DeGeneres

Background and Overview

Ellen DeGeneres is a 57-year-old comedian, television host, actress, writer, and producer who has had the longest career of the cases analyzed, with over 35 years of experience working in comedy. After leaving the University of New Orleans in 1977, DeGeneres worked odd jobs while beginning her stand-up career, touring nationally by the early 1980’s. In 1986, she appeared on The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson, which at the time was considered a career breakthrough in the entertainment industry, and was the first female comedian to be interviewed by Carson following the performance ("Ellen DeGeneres", 2015). Throughout the 1980’s and 90’s, DeGeneres had a variety of small roles in comedic films and sitcom appearances on television, but DeGeneres got her big break in 1994 when she began starring in her own sitcom, titled Ellen, and critics praised her observational humor, referring to her as a female Seinfeld ("Ellen DeGeneres: Biography", 2015). When DeGeneres publicly came out in 1997, it became a critical moment in her career as her character on Ellen also came out; this marked the first time an LGBT character was the main character of a popular network television show. However, the public backlash was apparent and the network became uncomfortable with the subject matter, eventually canceling the show, resulting in a significant career setback for DeGeneres (Reed, 2005).

DeGeneres returned to the public eye in 2001 with another sitcom that only lasted a season, and instead reinvented herself as a daytime television talk show host with The Ellen DeGeneres Show in 2003, serving as host and executive producer, following the success of her voice acting as Dory from Finding Nemo. The show became a critical and commercial hit, launching DeGeneres into a position of mainstream power and awareness for the first time. She has authored three essay collection books, titled My Point...And I Do Have One (1995), The Funny Thing Is... (2003), and Seriously...I’m Kidding (2011), and all three have been New York Times Best Sellers ("Ellen DeGeneres", 2015). She has hosted the Emmy Awards twice, the Grammy Awards twice, and the Academy Awards twice, and serves as a commercial spokesperson for several brands such as CoverGirl Cosmetics and American Express ("Ellen
DeGeneres has also started a record label, “eleveneleven,” (DeGeneres, 2010) and is well-known for her animal rights and veganism advocacy as well as other humanitarian efforts, such as being named a special envoy for Global AIDS Awareness by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in 2011 and being named “Woman of the Year” by PETA in 2009 (Michaud, 2011). Today, Ellen DeGeneres is seen as one of the most influential celebrity role models in the country, balancing her power, appeal, and generosity with humor and positivity. A list of DeGeneres’s KPIs is found in Appendix D.

**DeGeneres as a Connector, Maven, and Salesperson**

Of the cases analyzed, no one possesses the attributes of all three categories in Gladwell’s framework as Ellen DeGeneres does. At the core, DeGeneres’s position in not only comedy but in the wider mainstream media sphere is as a connector, wielding the power of her talk show, *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, to bring people together not only in her personal networks within the entertainment industry, but also expanding out to complete strangers and “everyday” citizens. This reach is supplemented by her social media presence, which allows more global access to DeGeneres and the content she creates because of the lack of barriers of international broadcasting. One of the most notable examples of DeGeneres as a connector is when, while hosting the 2014 Academy Awards, she orchestrated a selfie photo of many high-profile celebrities, including Brad Pitt, Meryl Streep, Jennifer Lawrence, and several more. DeGeneres then tweeted the photo, which to date has become the most viewed and shared tweet in the platform’s nine-year existence at 37 million views, 3.4 million retweets, and 2 million favorites (see Appendix L), breaking previous record-holder Barack Obama’s post-reelection tweet. The photo shows DeGeneres’s power to not only engage her industry peers but create cultural capital that has universal, global appeal.

Beyond that, the device used to take the photo was a Samsung smartphone, and the entire 2014 Oscars broadcast that DeGeneres hosted was filled with product placement by the sponsor. The photo was
valued between $800 million and $1 billion by the advertising firm Publicis, of whom Samsung is a client, based on the high value of organic social sharing rather than the intentional placements of paid ads (Wagstaff, 2014). These economic benefits show how the tweet is also an example of DeGeneres’s skills as a maven, in which her influence can be used to spread information and knowledge about a product, brand, or company.

DeGeneres’s show itself is also a primary example of her prowess as a connector because of the blend of comedy, celebrity guests, and human-interest stories. DeGeneres frequently airs segments in which she provides exposure to everyday citizens, offering financial support or gifts to viewer-submitted friends in need, and surprises fans by introducing them to their favorite celebrities. An example of this is when she invited the child singing stars of a viral YouTube video, Sophia Grace and Rosie, onto her show in 2011. Since then, the two young girls have become a fixture on The Ellen DeGeneres Show and launched their careers in entertainment. Stories like these are not uncommon, in which DeGeneres focuses on airing human-interest success stories or providing recognition and gifts for hard-working, ordinary citizens. Another example is Penn State graduate Josh Johnson, who appeared on the show after he gained media attention for paying for his education by tap dancing on the New York City subway (Ríos, 2012). DeGeneres’s role as a connector allows her to bring visibility to the beauty of people’s stories, provide ways for viewers to relate to one another, and give everyday people the chance to be seen, appreciated, and understood.

DeGeneres’s success as a maven also comes from her position as a commercial spokesperson for several products and brands. In 2006, DeGeneres starred in an American Express commercial in which she worked with animals, winning an Emmy award for Best Commercial in 2007 (High, 2007). She has also been in several other high-profile campaigns such as JCPenney in 2012, has been a spokesperson for CoverGirl Cosmetics since 2008, and began representing her own line of home products for QVC called “E.D.” in 2014 ("Ellen DeGeneres", 2015). DeGeneres is known to have the highest pull for sponsors among daytime talk shows and the “Ellen impact” is seen as lucrative by many companies, especially
because she integrates her spokesperson duties into her show—CoverGirl reported a 55% sales increase of a new foundation after DeGeneres included it in a segment (Barnes, 2014). By endorsing these products DeGeneres spreads information and awareness about them, leading to economic benefits by these brands and showing the power her name has when attached to these products.

Finally, DeGeneres is undeniably a salesperson through the use of her humor and charisma to spread her perspectives and philosophies on how one should live life. She has built a persona and brand based on laughter, kindness, and positivity: for example, DeGeneres closes every single one of her shows by saying “Be kind to one another,” and chooses to incorporate dancing as an integral part of her program, dancing with her guests and audience members as a way to spread positive energy (see Appendix M). One of her most famous quotes came after a group called “One Million Moms” took a stand against JCPenney for choosing DeGeneres to be in their campaigns, saying it went against traditional values: “Here are the values that I stand for: honesty, equality, kindness, compassion, treating people the way you want to be treated and helping those in need. To me, those are traditional values” (Kinser, 2012). It is through widely-shared quotes like these in which DeGeneres helps advocate for anti-bullying and not just significantly improving LGBT acceptance in mainstream society but for the understanding and acceptance of all people. DeGeneres also does a show segment called “Kindness Week,” inviting ordinary people who have showed extraordinary kindness to be guests, and she reinforces these messages with nearly everything she chooses to promote or include on her show. On a broader scale, DeGeneres uses the power in her salesperson charisma for advocacy, taking part in humanitarian efforts ranging from helping animals to combating bullying to raising money for breast cancer and Hurricane Katrina (Raymond, 2014). DeGeneres’s salesperson qualities allow her to bring awareness to the causes and issues important to her, and consequently she is able to make a substantial impact because of her reach and influence.
Chapter 6 : Discussions and Conclusions

The Present and Future of Women in Comedy

The current state of female representation in the field of comedy is a period of reinforcement, marked by the high levels of success of a small, exclusive group of women. This stage indicates that there is stability to the shift and changes that have occurred in terms of the amount of females in powerful industry positions within comedy: more hold executive roles and are creators rather than participators of the content distributed in mainstream media. There has been enough reinforcement in which the present state is stabilized enough where it will not regress back to its former state, a long history of white male dominance as the only successful players in comedy—however, a period of reinforcement indicates that the change is still incomplete.

Now that there has been examination of why a gender shift as occurred (as a result of a combination of different cultural, economic, social, and technological factors driving the change process) and how it occurred (as a result of the superior abilities of specific comedians, which have enabled them to impact the highest amounts of change so far in the industry), we must look to how it will continue. The isolated cases of success analyzed in this research have all attained success through relatively traditional means such as network television, books, and, more recently, social media. However, the film industry, especially in comedy, is still vastly uncharted territory for female writers, directors, and producers—to date, there has been only one female Academy Award winner for Best Director. The success of Bridesmaids in 2011, a comedy film written by females including SNL veteran Kristen Wiig, is seen as a breakthrough for films created by women and meant for more than just a female audience, but for mass comedic appeal that results in blockbuster box-office figures (Williams, 2011). Bridesmaids accomplished just that, bringing in nearly $300 million in global box-office revenues ("Bridesmaids",...
2015) and proving that while film may be the last frontier for female comedians, it won’t be long before more women breach it.

In addition to progress in the film industry, the advancement of digital mediums will continue to facilitate more female comedians gaining recognition without the obstacles and underrepresentation in achieving success through large entertainment corporations or traditional media programming. Instead, many women in the industry today have found more creative, non-traditional means to share their work and distribute their content, paths to success that the above cases may have inspired and influenced but not embarked on themselves. For example, newcomers Ilana Glazer and Abbi Jacobson, creators of the show Broad City, in which they portray two twenty-something women, got their start by posting a web series on YouTube. Eventually, Amy Poehler (comedian, writer, producer, SNL alum, and star of Parks and Recreation) signed on to help turn their web presence into a full television series for Comedy Central (Glazer & Jacobson, 2015).

Other comedians still considered up-and-coming (based on the relative success of the case studies featured in this research) such as Amy Schumer, Chelsea Peretti, and Shelby Fero have taken similar approaches, recognizing the demand for more female voices in comedy through accessible formats. They combine a strong social media presence, particularly on Twitter, which promotes the ease of content-sharing, with the utilization of YouTube and other digital forms of distribution—for example, Schumer’s sketch comedy series, Inside Amy Schumer, relies on heavy internet integration to accompany the show, and Peretti released her most recent stand-up comedy special through Netflix. It will be up to these newcomers to continue impacting change, and while Fey, Dunham, Kaling, and DeGeneres have made significant strides for women in comedy (and continue to do so), they have only just opened the doors for a large influx of female success in the field.

This continued progress introduces the question of whether there is the possibility of a complete refreezing as the 4th stage in this model for change. Refreezing indicates that the intended change has occurred to completion, which in the case of this research would mean that equal representation of gender
in the field of comedy has been established. This would require the complete acceptance and normalization of female success in the industry, a level of concrete stability in which the same levels of success are not apparent only in select, isolated cases. When a woman’s success in comedy is no longer an exception to the norm, a comedian’s gender is not an identifying factor in their career, and there is equal representation of females as the innovators, creators, and thought-leaders in comedy, normalization will be reached. In other words, the question of “Are women funny?” would no longer exist, as it would just be understood and accepted. The achievement of this refreezing stage is absolutely possible based on the amount of change and success that has already occurred, but it is difficult to determine how long it may take to reach this stage. What is undeniable, however, is that women have always had a tremendous talent in making the world laugh, and will never stop doing so.
Appendix A

Tina Fey KPI List

1) **Estimated total net worth:** $45M as of 2014

2) **Statistics of television shows:**
   b. *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* (2015-)

3) **Total revenue of notable movies:**

4) **Dollar value of book publishing deals:**

5) **List of industry accolades:**
   e. Producers Guild of America (2008-2010) – *30 Rock*, 2 additional nominations

6) **Social Media Statistics:** N/A

7) **Miscellaneous projects or accolades of note:**
   a. 2010 recipient of the Mark Twain Award for American Humor
   b. 2009 national spokesperson for Light the Night Walk benefiting the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society
   c. Commercial spokesperson for American Express and Garnier Nutrisse

---

3. Viewership unavailable
4. [http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=meangirls.htm](http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=meangirls.htm)
5. [http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=babymama.htm](http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=babymama.htm)
9. (Levy, 2010)
Appendix B

Lena Dunham KPI List

1) **Estimated total net worth:** $12M as of June 2014\(^{12}\)
2) **Statistics of television shows:**
   a. *Girls* (2012-) – $150K salary per episode, broadcast in 23 countries\(^{13}\)
3) **Total revenue of notable movies:**
4) **Dollar value of book publishing deals:**
5) **List of industry accolades:**\(^{16}\)
   a. Directors Guild of America (2013) – Outstanding Directing in a Comedy Series;
   b. Golden Globe Awards (2013) – Best Television Series Musical or Comedy, Best Actress Television Musical or Comedy;
   c. 8 Primetime Emmy Award nominations
6) **Social Media Statistics:**
   a. Twitter – 9,500 tweets, 2.13M followers, 84 out of 100 Klout score\(^{17}\)
   b. Instagram – 1,634 posts, 1.5M followers\(^{18}\)
7) **Miscellaneous projects or accolades of note:**
   a. Received Horizon Award 2014 by the Point Foundation (LGBT advocacy)\(^{19}\)
   b. Signed deal in 2013 to create a second series for HBO\(^{20}\)

---

\(^{13}\) Ibid.
\(^{14}\) http://www.therumbers.com/movie/Tiny-Furniture#tab=summary
\(^{15}\) http://mediadecoderblogs.nytimes.com/2012/10/08/lena-dunham-sings-book-deal-for-more-than-3-5-million
\(^{16}\) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lena_Dunham#Awards_and_nominations
\(^{18}\) https://instagram.com/lenadunham
\(^{19}\) http://www.pointfoundation.org/NYHonors
\(^{20}\) http://entertainment.time.com/2013/02/01/lena-dunham-developing-a-new-comedy-series-for-hbo/
Appendix C

Mindy Kaling KPI List

1) **Estimated total net worth:** $15M as of 2014

2) **Statistics of television shows:**

3) **Total revenue of notable movies:** N/A

4) **Dollar value of book publishing deals:** N/A (undisclosed)

5) **List of industry accolades:**
   a. Writers Guild of America (2006) – *The Office*; 5 additional nominations
   b. Screen Actors Guild Awards (2006-2007) – *The Office*; 1 additional nomination
   c. 5 Primetime Emmy Awards nominations (2007-2010) – *The Office*

6) **Social Media Statistics:**
   a. Twitter – 12,940 tweets, 3.86M followers, 85 out of 100 Klout score
   b. Instagram – 2,371 posts, 1.4M followers

7) **Miscellaneous projects or accolades of note:**
   a. Delivered speech at 2014 Harvard Law School Class Day
   b. Commercial spokesperson for Nationwide Insurance in 2015

---

22 Based on Nielsen ratings, 2005-2013
23 Based on Nielsen ratings, 2012-2014
24 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mindy_Kaling#Awards_and_nominations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mindy_Kaling#Awards_and_nominations)
26 [https://instagram.com/mindykaling](https://instagram.com/mindykaling)
27 [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/05/30/mindy-kaling-harvard-law-school-class-day-speech_n_5418984.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/05/30/mindy-kaling-harvard-law-school-class-day-speech_n_5418984.html)
Appendix D

Ellen DeGeneres KPI List

1) Estimated total net worth: $285M as of 2014

2) Statistics of television shows:
   b. The Ellen DeGeneres Show (2003) – 12 seasons, 1,965 episodes, 3.9M average viewers

3) Total revenue of notable movies: N/A

4) Dollar value of book publishing deals: N/A

5) List of industry accolades:
   a. 24 Daytime Emmy Awards (2004-2014) for The Ellen DeGeneres Show, one Primetime Emmy Award for Ellen (1997), 25 additional nominations
   b. 3 Golden Globe nominations for Ellen
   c. 2 Grammy nominations for spoken word comedy albums
   d. 2 Producers Guild of America Awards (2005-2006) for The Ellen DeGeneres Show, 3 additional nominations
   e. 3 Screen Actors Guild Awards nominations for Ellen

6) Social Media Statistics:
   a. Twitter – 10,303 tweets, 41.7M followers, 91 out of 100 Klout score
   b. Instagram – 2,559 posts, 10.5M followers

7) Miscellaneous projects or accolades of note:
   a. 2012 recipient of the Mark Twain Prize for American Humor
   b. Received star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 2012
   c. Commercial spokesperson for American Express, CoverGirl, and J.C. Penney
   d. Owns record label “eleveneleven”
   e. Named Special envoy for Global AIDS Awareness

---

30 Based on Nielsen ratings, 1994-1998
31 http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0379623/
33 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_awards_and_nominations_received_by_Ellen_DeGeneres
35 https://instagram.com/theellenshow/
36 (“Ellen DeGeneres”, 2015)
37 Ibid.
38 http://www.citizen-times.com/article/20120201/BUSINESS/302010084/Penney-hopes-Ellen-DeGeneres-can-boost-its-image
39 http://ellen.warnerbros.com/2010/05/ellen_explains_her_new_eleveneleven_record_label_0528.php
Appendix E

Screenshot of Tina Fey and Sarah Palin onscreen
(Retrieved via NBC and The Guardian)

Sarah Palin helps Saturday Night Live to best ratings in 14 years

Sarah Palin, left, and Tina Fey on Saturday Night Live. Photograph: NBC
Appendix F

Screenshot of Snapple product placement in 30 Rock, Season 1 Episode 5: ‘Jack-tor’

(Retrieved via YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b9hepxidZyo)

30 Rock Snapple Product Placement

Dialogue:

Liz Lemon: “I’m sorry, you’re saying you want us to use the show to sell stuff?
Jack Donaghy: “Look, I-I know how this sounds.”
Liz Lemon: “No, come on, Jack, we’re not doing that. We’re not compromising the integrity of the show to sell…”
Pete Hornberger: “Wow, this is Diet Snapple?”
Liz Lemon: “I know, it tastes just like regular Snapple, doesn’t it?”
Appendix G

Screenshot of HBO’s *Girls*, Season 3 Episode 7: ‘Beach House’

(Image retrieved via Google Images and DailyMail.com)
Appendix H

Collection of Dunham’s most shared tweets as of April 2015

(Retrieved via Twitonomy and Favstar analytical platforms)
Appendix I

Screenshots of Kaling’s blog that inspired her first book

(Retrieved via theconcernsofmindykaling.tumblr.com)

**THINGS I BOUGHT THAT I LOVE: MINTED STATIONERY**

NOVEMBER 17, 2011

In terms of time wasters during the day, I almost never turn to Youtube. I will on rare occasion enjoy clicking on a Youtube video link if a trusted source has sent it to me, but even then I’m wary. What I find cute and entertaining in a Youtube video is very specific, and if it’s even slightly not right, I am totally turned off of Youtube forever. For instance, I love interspecies friendships. Turtles that are friends with cats, elephants that befriend small dogs, that kind of thing.

Over the years, I’ve discovered certain items of clothes do not fit me no matter what. A greatest hits list include: Bell sleeves, peasant dresses, light colored denim, turtlenecks, and mostly, capri pants. The capri pants thing is a little sad because I love workout capri pants. Runyon Canyon is full of hot little runners zipping around in them. Unfortunately, they don’t work on me because they accentuate my thighs in an unflattering way, and also because they reveal my socks, which aren’t cute little girl bobby socks; they are bulky mens athletic socks I buy from Costco once every five years in 48 packs with my dad. No one wants to see them.

The best, most comfortable, and most flattering sports pants I have ever bought and worn are the Lucy Hatha Yoga Pant.
Appendix J

Screenshots of Kaling’s Instagram feed
Appendix K

Collection of Kaling’s Twitter highlights

Mindy Kaling (@mindykaling)

Who do I check with to make sure I’m Leaning In?
3:14 PM - 3 May 2013
628 RETWEETS 369 FAVORITES

The whole airplane rule of "put your oxygen mask on first, then help the person next to you" is a great metaphor for life.
1:19 AM - 3 Jan 2012
3,457 RETWEETS 1,181 FAVORITES

Mindy Kaling (@mindykaling)

I think I was the only person who ate food at the bbq I was at today - and I'm fine with that - I just want everyone to know that I know.
11:33 PM - 27 May 2013
691 RETWEETS 1,886 FAVORITES

red delicious apples are far from delicious. they're barely apples
8:31 PM - 6 Sep 2014
2,754 RETWEETS 5,572 FAVORITES

Mindy Kaling (@mindykaling)

The problem w being an adult is you meet all these cool new people & you're like "why can't we go back in time and go to college together?!"
12:48 AM - 10 Jun 2013
2,861 RETWEETS 2,624 FAVORITES

Mindy Kaling (@mindykaling)

leave a slice of carrot cake at my door if you love me
12:15 AM - 22 Sep 2014
3,199 RETWEETS 4,165 FAVORITES

Mindy Kaling (@mindykaling)

If I ever meet a murderer hiding in my house, I can say truthfully: "I've been expecting you," that will scare the hell out of him I bet.
1:46 AM - 17 Jun 2012
2,106 RETWEETS 1,008 FAVORITES

Mindy Kaling (@mindykaling)

Neat! A gym closed for hours in the middle of the day when I pay to use it. Oh well! Just go to writers room and eat sour patch kids I guess
11:4 AM - 19 Sep 2014
334 RETWEETS 3,458 FAVORITES
Appendix L

Screenshot of DeGeneres’s “Oscar Selfie”, the most popular tweet of all time.
Appendix M

Images of DeGeneres dancing and interacting with guests

(Retrieved via Google Images)
"101 Best Written TV Series List". (n.d.). Retrieved March 28, 2015, from Writers Guild of America:

http://www.wga.org/content/default.aspx?id=4925


"Tina Fey Net Worth". (n.d.). Retrieved March 28, 2015, from Celebrity Net Worth:


"Jerry Lewis: Not Funny". (1998, October 29). Retrieved March 21, 2015, from People:

http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,617336,00.html


"Gilda Radner Biography". (2011). Retrieved March 28, 2015, from The Biography Channel:

http://www.thebiographychannel.co.uk/biographies/gilda-radner.html

"Gender Roles in a Post-War America". (2013, April 13). (Rollins College) Retrieved February 24, 2015, from Third Sight History.


Season 2, Episode 1: "Women in Comedy" (2014). [Motion Picture]. PBS.

"Bridesmaids". (2015). Retrieved April 6, 2015, from Box Office Mojo:

http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=main&id=wiigapatow.htm
http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0001122/?ref_=nmbio_bio_nm


"Judd Apatow". (2015). Retrieved March 21, 2015, from IMDB:
http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0031976/

"Lena Dunham". (2015). Retrieved March 28, 2015, from IMDB:
http://www.imdb.com/name/nm2501633

http://www.imdb.com/name/nm1411676/


https://twitter.com/lenadunham


http://www.theguardian.com/media/2008/oct/20/ustelevision-tvratings


Kaling, M. (2014, October 14). "Mindy Kaling on Refusing to Be An Outsider and Sexism on Set". (N. Staff, Interviewer) NPR.


ACADEMIC VITA

EDUCATION

The Pennsylvania State University - Schreyer Honors College University Park, PA
Smeal College of Business, Bachelor of Science in Marketing Graduation: May 2015
Minors in Media Studies, Spanish, & International Business
- Schreyer Honors College Academic Excellence Scholarship, Dean's List Fall 2011 – Fall 2014 (7/7 semesters)
- National Merit Scholarship Recipient (2011 – Present), 2nd place winner in Deloitte's 2014 Management Consulting Case Competition
- Senior Honors Thesis: Looking at why and how the nature of women in comedy has shifted through case analyses and theories of social change

Universidad Pablo de Olavide Sevilla, Spain
Study Abroad CIEE: International Business & Culture Program August 2013 – December 2013

EXPERIENCE

Yelp University Park, PA/New York, NY
Campus Ambassador Program Intern August 2014 – Present
- Dedicate *10 hours/week to on-campus recruiting efforts for Yelp's Sales Development Program, reaching potential candidates through several marketing channels, reviewing resumes and conducting phone screens and 1-on-1s with students – efforts resulted in a 22% ratio-to-hire in Fall 2014
- Execute 1 recruiting and brand awareness events targeting students interested in full-time and internship positions, and manage a $2,000 budget

Cigna Philadelphia, PA
Global Marketing Intern – Brand Management May 2014 – August 2014
- Led a $50,000 digital video project focusing on driving search rankings, lead acquisition, and improving consumer education & engagement as part of the IFP Open Enrollment strategic marketing — was in charge of briefs, proposals, vendor selection, sourcing, meetings, and liaising between several teams
- Mediated the creative process of a CSB BRTV campaign, contributed and compiled feedback, and organized approvals and meetings
- Created briefs, edited pre-read documents, and coordinated kick-off logistics to assist on-boarding new global media/creative agencies
- Assisted in authoring a project launch framework, aided the selection of consultants, and created a team structure to guide the development of an overarching multicultural marketing strategy

The TJX Companies, Inc. Framingham, MA
Buying & Merchandising Intern May 2013 – August 2013
- Analyzed weekly sales reports to identify sales trends and help develop future merchandising strategies and initiatives
- Identified business opportunities through analyzing competitors, presenting industry trends, and monitoring company stores
- Prepared research and selling reports for internal strategy meetings and external vendor negotiations
- Created and presented a formal business development proposal to company executives alongside a team of interns

Debcor, Inc. (Tails of the Village/The Total Animal – Peddler’s Village) Lahaska, PA
Sales Associate May 2008 – August 2012
- Maintained day-to-day store operations for 2 retail locations, assisted with visual merchandising, business development, & sourcing

LEADERSHIP & ACTIVITIES

Penn State Marketing Association University Park, PA
Student Organization Liaison Chair (2012 - 2013). Member Relations Chair (Spring 2013)
- Planned and hosted 4 professional development, networking, and informational events attended by over 200 students
- Served as liaison between PSMA’s 300+ members and 40+ other Smeal College of Business student organizations
- Developed strategy and promotions for active involvement from existing members and the recruitment of new members
- Created, coordinated, and marketed events around campus such as concerts and fashion shows (Retail & Entertainment Division)

Phi Gamma Nu Professional Business Fraternity (Delta Theta Chapter) University Park, PA
Treasurer (Spring 2014), Standards Board (Spring 2014), New Member Homecoming Chair (Fall 2012)
- Developed and maintained a $12,000 chapter budget, as well as monitored all expenses and executed all reimbursement processes
- Represented over 100+ members by serving on a 7-member governance board, mediated all internal and external issues and facilitated the positive growth of the fraternity by regulating chapter bylaws, and updating existing ones
- Participate in professional development, philanthropic, and team-building activities to develop skills and prepare for the workforce

VALLEY Magazine University Park, PA
Spring 2013
- Business Division, Digital & Public Relations Team
- Planned and executed PR promotions utilizing social, print, and face-to-face marketing for a lifestyle magazine with readership of over 10,000 students

Penn State IFC/Panhellenic Dance Marathon University Park, PA
Finance Committee (2012 – 2013)
- Processed and tracked all monetary donations for THON, a 46 hour student-run dance marathon benefiting pediatric cancer, raising $31.1M in 2014

Fenghua Zi Mei Zhuhai & Dongguan, China
English & U.S Culture Teacher July 2012
- Led English workshop to build conversational skills for over 150 adults and teens through presentations and interactive activities