



# the Mindy project

## MEDIA STUDY GUIDE

Created for the Summer 2015 ETEC530 course by:

**ANDREA WYNESS, PARM GILL,  
AND CATHERINE STEEVES.**

This media study guide is intended to accompany specific episodes of *The Mindy Project*. It is designed to encourage media literacy and to develop critical thinking skills for students in grade 10.

### Introduction

The Mindy Project is romantic comedy television series which premiered on Fox in 2012. The series is produced and written by Mindy Kaling who is also the series star. Mindy Kaling based her character, Mindy Lahiri, on her own mother who was an obstetrician/gynecologist (OB/GYN). Mindy Kaling is the first Indian-American to create and star in an American TV sitcom.

It is co-produced by Universal Television and 3 Arts Entertainment. Unfortunately, the series was canceled on FOX after three seasons. However, Hulu picked it up for a fourth season. Over its four seasons the program has been nominated for many awards. It has won awards such as:

- Most Exciting New Series,
- Outstanding Producer,
- Outstanding Female Actor,
- and TV couple of the year.

Mindy Lahiri (Mindy Kaling) is an OB/GYN who has many quirky co-workers in a small medical practice in New York City. The series follows the doctor as she explores single life in the city while balancing her professional and personal life. On the show, Lahiri is a woman who does not attempt to hide, excuse or explain away her body. Her co-workers include; Danny Castellano, an Italian-American with mommy/daddy issues, Jeremy Reed, an English doctor, Peter Prentice a notorious frat boy who is also a doctor, Morgan Tookers, who is a ex-con, and an unconventional nurse. Kaling embraces the notion that more women could benefit from spending less time preoccupied with body transformation and more time enjoying and accepting themselves.

### Learning Objectives

Using this media study guides students will:

- examine how television can challenge and/or solidify body image issues.
- recognize the difference between the media relationship portrayals and real life healthy romantic relationships.
- examine media stereotypes about race and gender.
- discuss/show how the key concepts and themes in The Mindy Project effect their own lives.



This media study guide uses *The Mindy Project* to help students examine three main themes: body positivity/confidence, healthy relationships, and media stereotypes. There is also a component where students have the opportunity to find public role models who promote these themes.

# KEY CONCEPTS

## Stereotypes and Media Bias

Stereotypes are widely oversimplified images or ideas of a particular type of people or things. Biases are prejudices in favor of or against people, groups of people, or things and are usually in a way considered to be unfair. Stereotyping and biases are very common in the mainstream media. Historically, the American media has been ruled by white males, therefore the media biases would be based on their perceptions.

Media control is gradually shifting to more diverse groups. While female comics and comedy writers are becoming more common compared to the past, they still face challenges. Of the 145 writers working across ten late-night shows, only 16 are women, and only 4 out of 16 performers on the Saturday Night live show are woman (Warren, 2013). Typically in sitcoms, women are either funny or they are sexy. If they are funny and sexy, then they are a size 2 and are white (Schweitzer, 2015). In that regard, Mindy Kaling is the exception, as she does not fit the media "norm". and she has been successful in produce, write and star in her own show.

## Body Image and the Media

Although most girls are aware of the alterations (make-up/Photoshop) made to images of women in the media they continue to judge themselves to those ideals in their own photos (Coleman, 2008). In Coleman's 2008 study, it was noticed that "candid" shots of stars helped the girls to reinforce that the images were not natural. The character Mindy is portrayed as real, allowing her to be identified with by girls and women watching the show (Duits & van Romondt Vis, 2009). According to the participants in Coleman's (2008) study being able to relate to a celebrity makes them feel better about themselves (Coleman, 2008).

## Romantic Relationships

New research suggests that as well as sexual health information students should also be receiving information on how to form and maintain a healthy romantic relationship (Weissbourd, Peterson, & Weinstein, 2013). Other research indicates the media, and the relationships depicted, showcase the gender norms and expectations for romantic relationships (Hartley, Wight, & Hunt, 2014). The study completed by Hartley, Wight and Hunt (2014) has indicated that teenage girls are influenced by romantic comedies and TV shows with sweeping romantic gestures, and therefore can be disappointed in their real life relationships with no happily-ever-after.

Similarly, Mindy's search for a partner and relationship expectations are influenced by romantic comedies. This gently ridiculed in the show for comedic effect. Throughout the series elements of cinematic romantic comedy reappropriation are used to demonstrate the ongoing theme that real life is not like the movies (Schweitzer, 2015). As the series progresses, Mindy grows to understand herself and is able to identify and take part in a healthy relationship.

## Mindy as a Role Model

Dr. Mindy Lahiri is a useful and relatable role model. Many of the episodes revolve around her weaknesses and flaws, yet, that is what makes her character seem authentic and likable (Schweitzer, 2015). In addition, women can relate to her desire to have a both a successful career and well as finding love, as this is a real life balancing act for many women in contemporary society (Schweitzer, 2015).

Mindy Lahiri is a successful gynecologist and a senior partner in her practice. However, research is showing that female students can be discouraged from entering into STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) because they are intimidated by other females in those fields (Betz & Sekaquaptewa, 2012). In that respect, Mindy, is not intimidating. She is good at her job, and demonstrates that she cares for her patients and her "work family". Even though she has her career in order, other aspects of her life are in disarray. She overcomes obstacles and continues to challenge herself and pursues her dreams.

In her recent book, Mindy Kaling has been very open about discussing body issues. In an article for Teen Vogue, she advises young girls to love themselves as they are. She mentions that she has been able "to have a fun career and be an on-camera talent and be someone who has boyfriends and love interests and wears nice clothes and those kinds of things without having to be an emaciated stick".(Miller, 2015)

# PREVIEWING

Complete the Discussion Questions and Previewing Activity, before students watch the following *Mindy Project* clips:

- Season 1 Episode 1 - Pilot
- Season 1 Episode 7 - Teen Patient
- Season 2 Episode 9 - Mindy Lahiri is a Racist (Only need to watch the 3 clips from this link: <http://bit.ly/1JjAiiI>)

## Discussion Questions

The episodes and clips you will watch deal with the following themes:

- healthy sexual relationships,
- body confidence,
- media based expectations of romance verse real-life romantic relationships,
- and race and gender stereotyping.

Before you watch the clips, consider and discuss the following questions.

- What does a healthy romantic relationship look like?
- Is there a difference between romantic relationships when you are a teenager and when you are an adult?
- How much are your ideas about romantic relationships influenced by what you see in the media?
- Do people on television look like normal people?
- Do you compare yourself with people on TV?
- Does the media reinforces racial and gender stereotypes, or does it work to reduce them?

"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?'"

— Mindy Kaling

## Previewing Activity

Body Image is the mental picture you have of your own body. It includes attitudes and feelings about how you look and how you think others see you. People of many shapes and sizes can have body confidence when they accept there are good things about their bodies, and they are comfortable with their own bodies. They are critical of the 'ideal' body seen in the media.

People with unhealthy body images may think a lot about how they see themselves or how they think others see them, may be uncomfortable with their bodies. They often aspire to have the 'ideal' body type portrayed in the media.

Complete this **Body Image Quiz** to understand your body image better.

YES	NO	
		Do you find yourself obsessing about your body?
		Do you ever put off activities or relationships until you are a certain size?
		Would losing or gaining weight make you feel like you were a better person?
		Do you feel guilty after you eat?
		Do you feel uncomfortable in your body?
		Have you used unhealthy ways to gain or lose weight?
		Do you feel like you can only be happy if you are a certain size?
		Do you find yourself thinking negatively about your body?
		Do you think changing part of your body would make parts of your life better?

Adapted from The Body Image Project Tool Kit [www.edag.ca](http://www.edag.ca)  
Answers on next page.





# POST VIEWING

## How did you score on the Body Image Quiz ?

If you answered "yes" to less than 4 questions, congratulations! You have a healthy body image. Keep up the good work!

If you answered "yes" to more than 4 questions, you know you don't totally accept and respect your body already...so how could you change that?

## Discussion Questions

### Healthy Romantic Relationships

Read this information about healthy relationships from the University of Washington website and discuss the following questions.

<https://depts.washington.edu/livewell/saris/healthy-relationships>

- Do Mindy and Josh have a healthy relationship? Does Sophia and Henry? Why or why not?
- Mindy is a mentor for Sophia, acting like an older sister. Do you think Mindy was right to insist on meeting Henry? Do you think the advice she gave was valid?
- What is Mindy's stance on birth control? Do you think her speech to the girls had a good effect?
- What do you think about the concept of "forever"? Is wanting to be together forever enough or does a long lasting relationship need something else? Is so what do you think it is?

### Body Confidence and Professional (Work/School) Behaviour

- In the pilot, Mindy rants to a patient: "Do you know how hard it is for a chubby 31-year-old woman to go on a legit date with a guy who majored in economics at Duke?" And, later in the episode, while exchanging insults with her co-worker, Danny about his failed marriage, he tells her, "You know what would really look great? If you lost 15 pounds." Why do you think he said that?
- Do you think Danny handled the HR complaint about the sexual harassment well? What could he have done differently?
- Why does Betsy feel badly about herself? What stereotypes is she judging herself against? Find a picture of Jessica Rabbit. What stereotypes does Jessica Rabbit conform to that Betsy does not?

### Media Bias and Stereotypes

Read the following 3 online articles and discuss the questions that follow.

- <http://bit.ly/1BNBAQy>
- <http://bit.ly/1JjAil>
- <http://lat.ms/1FCcZT>

- Do you think The Mindy Project reinforces race and gender stereotypes, or does it work to reduce stereotypes?
- Do you think Mindy Kaling is judged more harshly compared to other non-racialized, or male writers and producers?
- Mindy Kaling has commented that while she is talking about why she's so different, white male show runners get to talk about their art. Do you think this is a legitimate complaint?

## Activity: Magazine Collage

You will need:

- Magazines
- Scissors
- Glue

1. Make a positive collage using magazine advertisements.
2. Make a negative collage using magazine advertisements.
3. Compare and discuss the different messages in the images.
  - Do the ads include a variety of body shapes and sizes?
  - How do the people look in the advertisements?
  - Do you think people who actually use the product being advertised typically have the body type shown in the ad? How would you say the people appear in this ad? (happy, having fun, unhappy, neither happy or unhappy)



# CONCLUSION ACTIVITIES

"It's weird being my own role model. You know, I recommend it!"

— Mindy Lahiri



## Activity: Circles of Influence

**Body Image Perceptions:** Take time to think about your answers and how they affect you.

- My (parents, mentor, teacher, etc) say that overweight people are:
- My (parents, mentor, teacher, etc) say that thin people are:
- Boys say overweight girls are:
- Boys say thin girls are:
- Girls say overweight girls are:
- Girls say thin girls are:
- My friends and family affect my body image because:

## Activity Think Pair, & Share

With a partner discuss the following:

- How do Mindy's friends affect her body image?
- How do you think you would feel if someone said those things to you?
- As a result of today's activity:
  - One thing I will try to do is...
  - One thing I will try to stop doing is...

## Individual Activity

Do some research on Mindy Kaling, the creator of The Mindy Project. What messages does she want to promote with her show?

Choose another person whose work promotes healthy relationships, body positivity, or is a good role model for teenagers. Create an article that will be added to the class wiki that provides a bit of background on the person and their work. Include links to relevant websites, and an explanation about why you chose this person.

## Sources for Further Study

### Image Gap

Activities for promoting healthy body images for high school students.

(<http://www.lassencoe.org/tfree/6-8/lessons/ImageLessons.pdf>)

### Dove Self-Esteem Resources

The Dove positive body image campaigns. ([www.dove.ca](http://www.dove.ca))

### Media Smarts

Covers many topics around media literacy, including body image in the media and portrayals of visible minorities. ([www.mediasmarts.ca](http://www.mediasmarts.ca))

### Cover Girl Culture and Seeing Through the Media Matrix DVD and Study Guide

A documentary, directed by a former Elite model, exploring the impact of media on girls and women in our society. ([www.covergirlculture.com](http://www.covergirlculture.com))

## Group Activity

### Video: We are beautiful!

In a group of 3-4 you will create a video that promotes a positive body image.

Decide how you will share this message and create an outline and storyboard for your project before beginning.

### Social Media

Using Google or another search engine complete a hashtag search for social media themes such as body positivity, healthy relationships, and role models. What do you notice about the posts?

In your groups, come up with your own social media campaign for one of the themes. Decide on the mission statement for your campaign and a hashtag to use. Create 8-10 posts that support your campaign.

# TEACHER REFERENCES



## Corresponding “Planning 10 Prescribed Learning Outcomes”

C1 – analyze factors that influence health

C3 – demonstrate an understanding of skills needed to build and maintain healthy relationships

C4 – analyze factors contributing to a safe and caring school (respect for diversity, prevention of harassment, etc)

C5 – evaluate the potential effects of an individual’s health-related decisions on self, family and community

# RESOURCES

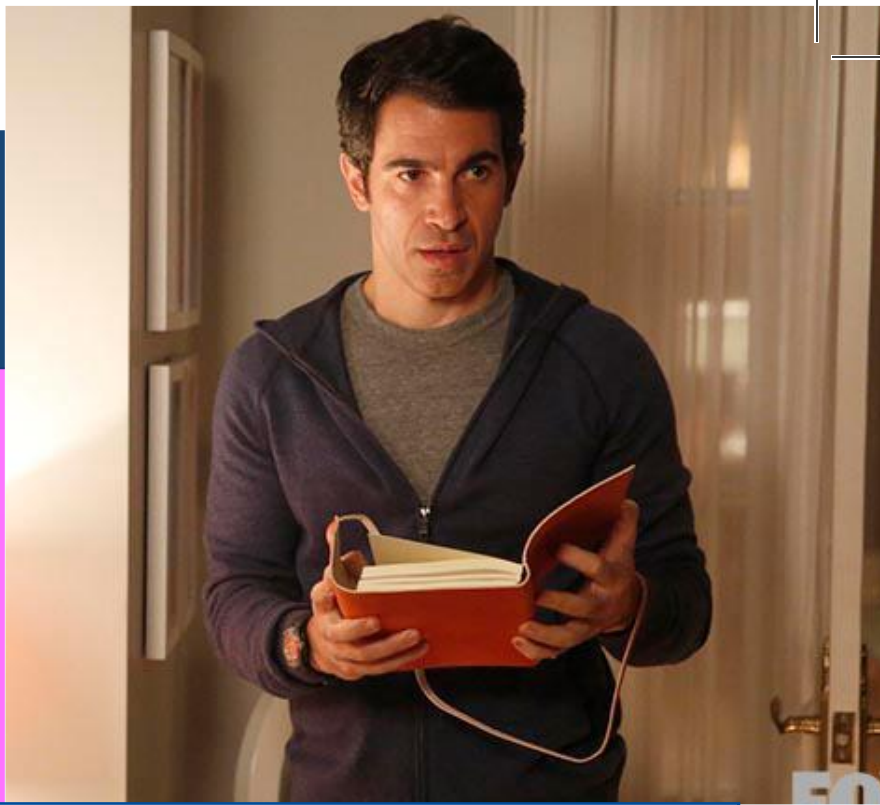
## Images Sources

Cover page image from: <http://bit.ly/1BEFLO8>

Mindy image on Page 3 from: <http://bit.ly/1BEFLO8>

Collaging image by Kate T (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

The remainder of the images are from the Fox website:  
<http://www.fox.com/the-mindy-project/pics>



## References

Body Image. (n.d.). Retrieved June 20, 2015, from <http://westernhealth.nl.ca/index.php/programs-and-services/services-a-z/sexual-and-reproductive-health/Body-Image>

Barinholtz, I. & D. Stassen (Writers). (2012). Teen Patient. [Television series episode]. In M. Kaling (Creator), *The Mindy project*.

Betz, D. & Sekaquaptewa, D. (2012). My fair physicist? Feminine math and science role models demotivate young girls. *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 3, 6.

Coleman, R. (2008). The becoming of bodies: Girls, media effects, and body image. *Feminist Media Studies*, 8, 2.

Duits, L. & P. van Romondt Vis. (2009). Girls make sense: Girls, celebrities and identities. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 12, 1.

Hartley, J., Wight, D., & Hunt, K. (2014). Presuming the influence of the media: Teenagers' constructions of gender identity through sexual/romantic relationships and alcohol consumption. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 36, 5.

Image Gap. (2002). Retrieved June 22, 2015, from [http://www.lassencoe.org/tfree/6-8/lessons/Image Lessons.pdf](http://www.lassencoe.org/tfree/6-8/lessons/Image%20Lessons.pdf)

IMDb (Ed.). (n.d.). Plot Summary. Retrieved June 14, 2015, from [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2211129/plotsummary?ref\\_=tt\\_ql\\_7](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2211129/plotsummary?ref_=tt_ql_7)

Thakore, B. K. (2014). Must-See TV: South asian characterizations in american popular media. *Sociology Compass*, 8(2), 149-156.

The Mindy Project. (n.d.). Retrieved June 14, 2015, from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Mindy\\_Project](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Mindy_Project)

The Mindy Project. (n.d.). Retrieved June 14, 2015, from <http://www.tv.com/shows/the-mindy-project/>

Schweitzer, D. (2015). The mindy project: Or why "I'm the mary, you're the rhoda" is the RomComSitCom's most revealing accusation. *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 43(2), 63-69.

University of Washington. (2014). Healthy Relationships. Retrieved from <https://depts.washington.edu/livewell/saris/healthy-relationships/>

Warren, R. (2013). Funny Then, Funny Now. *Women's Review Of Books*, 30(3), 28. Young, D. (2013). Advancing our narrative in an age of pervasive media. *Asian American Policy Review*, 23, 89.

Weissbourd, R., Peterson, A., & Weinstein, E. (2013). Preparing students for romantic relationships. *Kappan*, 95, 4. Retrieved from [www.kappanmagazine.org](http://www.kappanmagazine.org)