

Past and Present Influencers on the Television Industry

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Ever since the start of television, there have been certain people, from the past and present, who have played a large role in the contribution to the television industry. The infamous Lucille Ball is a great example of a past contributor and Shonda Rhimes is also a great example of a current contributor. These women are strong role models that have had an impact on the male dominated television industry.

This essay was written as a research paper on past and present influencers on the television industry for my Production and Direction class. As a Television-Radio major and a Women's and Gender Studies minor, I was interested in researching women influencers and their role in the television industry. I chose these two women to talk about because they both inspire me as a young woman to have confidence in myself while going into a male dominated industry. I wanted to compare and contrast their work as women in the television industry and how it impacts not only the industry, but also their audiences.

Using the Ithaca College Library as a resource, I looked into how Lucille Ball and Shonda Rhimes pushed the television industry into a progressive direction. Both of these strong-willed women started their own production companies while being a mother to their children. Ball used comedy to portray her feminist ideals at the time. In her show, *I Love Lucy*, Ball proved that women can take charge and act "Un-ladylike". Rhimes continues to create characters that are diverse and defy stereotypes. Ball and Rhimes have paved a path for young women wanting to be involved in the television industry.

Not only did Ball and Rhimes push the television industry into a progressive direction, but they also set precedents within the industry. Ball was the first woman to head a studio which later became Paramount Pictures. She and her husband were the first biracial couple aired on television. Ball was also the first woman to appear pregnant on television up until then pregnancy was hidden until the woman was released from her contract of employment before giving birth. Ball also was the first person to have their show go through syndication, which means having their show air more than once. Since

Ball kept the negatives to *I Love Lucy*, she was able to rerun her show, keeping it alive for today's audiences. Rhimes was also influential within the television industry by using hashtags to promote her shows, which would get fans to start a conversation about their favorite shows and characters. This set a precedent for other programs to start using hashtags on social media to create spaces for fans. Rhimes was also involved in producing podcasts that featured interviews with the actors and writers from her shows. The *Grey's Anatomy* podcast ran for thirty five episodes, and her *Shondaland* podcast has been running since 2012. Just recently, Rhimes' popular series *Grey's Anatomy* made history as the longest-running medical drama on American television.

Throughout my research, I found that by comparing these two women, that the television industry has become more diverse and open to new characters and ideas. I also found that comparing the television industry since the 1950's to now, has made me aware that the industry has moved in a progressive direction and continues to do so today. Television isn't as white as it once was. There are many television programs that have characters from different backgrounds that audience members can relate to. Although the Television industry isn't as diverse as it could be, I believe that Rhimes and other current open-minded influencers will continue to push the industry into that direction.

As a young woman, the research I did on Ball and Rhimes has inspired me to continue in the television industry and to even help push the industry forward by modernizing and making everyone feel welcome and included. I want to present this topic to inspire other young women interested in going into the television industry to have hope and confidence in themselves as women and to use their creativity to produce content that they feel will inspire younger generations of women.

Works Cited

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