

MEGHAN: When I was 14, I planned my wedding. Not my actual wedding. *That* would have been a bit harder to imagine. *This* wedding was an assignment for my Religion 2 class in Catholic school.

[MUSIC IN]

MEGHAN: I remember every little thing about it. I wanted it to be at The Bel-Air Hotel. And there was a swan lake, and I wanted the cake to be from Hanson's Bakery. And the dress - oh my goodness, the dress was strapless and poofy and I'd seen it in a bridal magazine ... and, and I bought it, I mean not, not the dress - I bought the bridal magazine because I took this project seriously. I wanted to get an "A." And I did, maybe I got an A-. *laughs*

[MUSIC SHIFT/DEVELOP]

MEGHAN: But my grade on this project is actually neither here nor there. Because what strikes me now - from my 40-something vantage point - is *the fact that this project was even graded at all!* The fact that this project even existed! At no point could you say, "Nope. *My* dream for the future is to be single." The message, even at my feminist All-Girls school, was as traditional as it gets: first comes love, then comes marriage.

By and large, this is a message that many kids all over the world are still receiving. Like 5-year-old Goldie Gordon, for example, the kid of one of our producer's friends. Who's got *alllll* sorts of ideas about how a wedding should be...

GOLDIE: Usually a white gown, sometimes sleeveless, fancy hairdo, makeup, earrings, sometimes necklace and bracelet. Um, sometimes it's outside, sometimes it's in, like, a ballroom, a church, but outside it has to be a pretty place, like a meadow. And then one person walks out first and the other person walks out. If it's a boy and the girl, the boy needs to think how beautiful the girl looks. And then, but before the lady comes out, a little girl called the flower girl, fl- throws flowers.

MEGHAN: [laughter] Oh! I mean... So it's no wonder that, in some circles, the single woman - this idea of being unmarried - *still* carries a stigma. She goes by many names... the old maid, we heard that - you remember that growing up... the singleton, that I remember hearing from Bridget Jones' Diary... and this idea of the spinster. The origin of this one is fascinating...

REBECCA: The history of the term spinster begins as a reference to spinners of textiles. And if those women worked, it meant they needed income and therefore must be unmarried because she was living outside of the institution in which she would have been financially provided for by a wage earning man.

MEGHAN: Rebecca Traister is a writer for New York Magazine. She wrote a book not too long ago called *All the Single Ladies: Unmarried Women and the Rise of an Independent Nation*. And so, of course, we had to talk to her, to get the low-down on these words, especially spinster.

[MUSIC IN]

REBECCA: ...But then in the new world, spinster began to refer very precisely to an unmarried woman who was over the age of 23, but under the age of 26. And at 26, women who were not married became known as Thornbacks, which was a reference to a kind of skate, like an ocean skate that had spiny spikes on its back. The Thornback is, really reflects the ugliness or unwantedness.

MEGHAN: Have you guys even heard of that word? Thornback! I mean... talk about a label that's bad for women – it's horrible! You really can't get much nastier than *thornback*. But why all the names in the first place? What *was* – and what *is* – so threatening about women who live outside of marriage?

[MUSIC OUT]

REBECCA: So marriage as an institution, in its traditional form, right - is one that did a really important job, which was organizing power and responsibility and labor along gendered lines. It arranged economic power, so that men were earners outside the home. Women both became dependent on them. And also the domestic laborers within that home. It organized sexual power. It organized social power. That is, in traditional hetero marriage in which a woman's name is changed to that of her husband. And so, we have made enormous revisions to the role that marriage plays. We have, um, in many cases, made it a more equitable institution. We have made it a more expansive institution. But power structures persist because they're really powerful, right. If it was centuries in the building, it's centuries in the dismantling.

[INTRO THEME BEGINS]

MEGHAN: I'm Meghan. Welcome to ARCHETYPES – my podcast about the labels and tropes that try to hold women back.

The associations our society makes around unmarried women feels *so* outdated. And I wanted to give them a refresh. I couldn't be more thrilled to do *just that* with *this* woman...

MINDY: I'm Mindy. I am a mom who lives in Hancock Park in Los Angeles. I identify as a writer. A sometimes-cook. And I'm just a wrangler of children.

MEGHAN: By Mindy... that's Mindy Kaling!

Coming up – Mindy and I are talking about how her decision to have children as a single, unmarried woman showed her the importance of forging your own path.

That's right after the break. See you there.

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ACT 1
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MINDY: You know, I don't do podcasts.

MEGHAN: Me neither.

MINDY: Yeah. So this will be nice for both of us. I was really nervous about it, I don't not do them because I'm like, I'm above it. I just don't do them because of anxiety.

MEGHAN: Really?

MINDY: Yeah

MEGHAN: Oh my god. Thanks for doing this.

MINDY: Yeah, you know, I'm at an age where I just, like, want to be really honest when I speak and sometimes when you're honest, it can piss people off.

MEGHAN: I happen to think Mindy Kaling's honesty is what makes her – and her work – so powerful. She's candid, she's genuine... and she's *really* funny. Qualities that shine through in the characters she's created as a TV writer, showrunner, and producer. And of course, in the characters she's portrayed herself...

MEGHAN:...like Kelly Kapoor from *The Office*:

[CLIP: THE OFFICE]

KELLY: Well, I manage my department and I've been doing that for several years now. And, god, I've learned a lot of life lessons along the way.

JIM: Your department is just you, right?

KELLY: Yes, Jim, but I am not easy to manage.

MEGHAN:... or Dr. Mindy Lahiri from *The Mindy Project*:

[CLIP: THE MINDY PROJECT]

MINDY: "Oh my god, Danny, I was so worried about you. You can't die, you have so much to live for. My birthday's coming up, we haven't even talked about what you're going to get me!"

[MUSIC IN]

MEGHAN: But there are some key differences. While the characters Mindy has written for and played have gotten married, then divorced, then sometimes married again... in real life, Mindy's never been married. And at the moment, she doesn't have a partner.

She did decide, though, to start a family. On her own. So far, she has two kids – her daughter, Kit, who she had in 2017 and her son, Spencer, in 2020. And you know Mindy's a really private

person – and despite pressure from the public and the media, she’s worked especially hard to maintain that privacy around her kids, ignoring all the speculation around details of their lives and even of their conception. Which by the way, how is that anyone’s business?

But when I see Mindy, what I see is a woman who goes after exactly what she wants. Even if she jokingly concedes to being archetyped as the spinster, the perpetually single woman, or in her own words, the “old maid”...

[MUSIC FADE OUT]

MINDY: I think I’m straight up an old maid though, I think...

MEGHAN: You are not an old maid.

MINDY: Doesn’t old maid like, exist in, because you know you have little kids. It’s like, I picture a preschool book like a woman in a big dress with like, a big, dirty apron, like milking cows.

MEGHAN: Like Old Mother Hubbard.

MINDY: Yes, I’m Old Mother Hubbard. But I think I am an old maid.

MEGHAN: You’re not though.

MINDY: But, do you know what’s funny about spinster and old maid? Is it conjures this vision to me of a woman who sits in her house upstairs by her window with her like little binoculars, looking out at everyone having their sexy lives, and just like, calling the police on them. And like, ‘ooh, how dare they? Oh, they’re having sex. Oh, they’re trying this position tonight. Well, I’m going to write this down in my journal,’ um and I got to tell you, I’m not that far away from that person. My God, when I think of it like that, I’m like, well, you know, of all the things I could do. I could see myself doing that, sitting in...

MEGHAN: Sat looking out your window going, Ha ha! What are they up to now?

MEGHAN: Mindy is so much more than any archetype could ever touch upon. She’s layered, she’s multifaceted, she’s real. And unlike some of the TV shows of our youth, Mindy makes shows that feel... they feel fresh with characters that defy society’s expectations, and I just, I love that. Like Devi in *Never Have I Ever*. Such a great show. And it exposes kids and people today to different ways of being in this world... which is actually pretty funny, because it turns out, Mindy didn’t really grow up watching much TV...

MINDY: You know, I was that typical latchkey kid because my parents...

MEGHAN: Me too.

MINDY: ...both worked and they're immigrants. And there was, I think, it's all just like your personality, right? Like my personality loved freedom. And so for me, I loved just being able to read. You know, when I was a kid, it was like 'establish roots in this country, make money,' you know? And so, we were just at home, we weren't allowed to watch TV, so we just had to read. And so, that's, I really enjoyed that; I think that's why I became a writer is because of that, like just like, the profound boredom that I had as a child where the, my only access point was, you know, was watching, was reading books and reading magazines if we had them.

MEGHAN: Do you remember what your favorite book was when you were growing up?

MINDY: Harriet the Spy.

MEGHAN: Oh, wow.

MINDY: Yeah. What about you?

MEGHAN: I loved Harriet the Spy. I was also, well I was, I was alone so much as a child, right. And also a latchkey kid. And I would think, gosh, I read a lot of Archie comic books, ironically.

MINDY: Me too!

MEGHAN: Really? That is not, my son is not named after Archie comic books, but I loved them.

[MUSIC IN]

MEGHAN: I collected them.

MINDY: That's so funny. So, and I used to — because sometimes you could go to the drugstore and they would have like one or two and then there'd be like, the Betty and Veronicas.

MEGHAN: Completely. And then the Jughead spinoff and the Reggie spinoff. I mean, all of them, yeah.

MINDY: That's so funny. I wonder... in India, the Archie comics are really big too.

MEGHAN: Oh I didn't know that.

MINDY: ...In foreign countries. When we would go to India, that's where I learned about Archie Comics.

MEGHAN: Oh, how funny.

MINDY: But did you... was it just because... it's something... Oh I'm so curious about why you're interested because I was the same way.

MEGHAN: I think for me, especially, my parents split up when I was around two, three years old. And I always wanted this sort of cookie-cutter looking perfect life. And you looked at that and, you know, there was like a boy in a letterman jacket and it just was so, I romanticized that. It's all part of the things that make you have this idea of what you want your life to be like when you grow up. But I always thought well I'm way more Betty than Veronica, and am I going to get the guy one day? And I was the smart one, not the pretty one. So all this stuff was wrapped up in reading Archie comic books and just, I think it was aspirational in some ways.

MINDY: And it was, you could kiss boys, but it never got too, you know, sexy. So you... wouldn't be intimidating, you know...

MEGHAN: It's all very PG.

MINDY: And you could go steady and there's, you know. Well you like redheads.

MEGHAN: *laughs* I do. I do, and I like the name Archie.

MINDY: I guess it all started...

MEGHAN: Full circle.

MINDY: Yeah.

MEGHAN: But do you think that's why you liked them too? Was it something that in your childhood, was it a lot like the environment that you grew up with in Cambridge?

MINDY: No. No. Definitely not. Thanks for even suggesting that it could have been. What if I was like, yeah, that was...

MEGHAN: ... That was my life.

MINDY: After high school, we went to the like, we went to hang out at the diner.

MEGHAN: Then had a milkshake.

MINDY: And had a milkshake and I shared one with my boyfriend. Two straws, one shake. No, we um... nothing like that. I think everything that I was into was very highly curated by my parents, um even though they were very busy. And I wasn't into computer games, we didn't have cable TV, so it wasn't like I was watching Nickelodeon or MTV.

MEGHAN: Right.

MINDY: And so I think they thought this is something that she can do that isn't hurting anyone and you know...

MEGHAN: Completely. So I think one of the things it would be really interesting to talk about with you, especially as we're talking about being a mom, is what that experience has been like for you. I didn't know that you had had two kids and that you made the choice to have kids without having a husband, which is also a choice that one of my closest girlfriends had done. She said, "When I turn 40, if I haven't found my partner, I'm having my baby." And did you feel surprised there was any public reaction to that?

MINDY: You know, I'm always the harshest critic of myself. You know, I'm a highly traditional person. I came from a really happy sort of nuclear family. Mom, dad. And I wanted that for myself, plus more. Growing up, I used to write in journals like, I'm going to be married to a guy named Josh and we're going to have five children and I'm gonna start having kids when I'm 24.

MEGHAN: Wow.

MINDY: But 24 came and went. No Josh. No marriage. No four kids. And, you know, obviously, as I got older, I... you know, I started as a writer on The Office when I was 24. And the idea of starting children at that same time, you know how all consuming it is when you get that first job.

MEGHAN: Of course.

MINDY: I was just happy to be in SAG and you know, and have health insurance.

MEGHAN: Have union!

MINDY: Right.

MEGHAN: Me too!

MINDY: And then this idea that you would jeopardize any of that with something personal. You know, I was just so focused on keeping that job and earning money and earning a good reputation professionally. And so it just happened. And I would be in these relationships and in the cold light of day when I looked at them and was like, would this be a person who I could share a life with? And the answer would be no. Often, I'd be in relationships because I wanted someone to go to the Arclight with on a Saturday night, so I didn't have to go see a movie by myself. If I'm really being honest.

MEGHAN: Yeah.

MINDY: ...and uh, companionship is really important. I'm not judging the decisions I made when I was 26 and 27 years old, but I knew on some level that's not what you sort of build a life, a family on. With my mom and my dad, like when my mom got sick, it was

like they had this strong, strong relationship and bond so that, you know, when things got tough it was like, you know, we, we've had such a great foundation. All this, I had, I had a lot of reasons for thinking like, okay, I haven't met the person and I don't want to rush it. You probably know the friends... the desperation in your friends when they're in their late thirties and they're like, "I don't know, I don't know." And they're just like, "whoever I'm with, I just, that's the person I want to marry." And I didn't want to do that.

MEGHAN: It's amazing. It's amazing to not compromise that because there's a lot of pressure.

MINDY: There's a lot of pressure

MEGHAN: Self-imposed pressure.

MINDY: Yeah.

MEGHAN: Yeah.

MINDY: But it, I am often amazed at how different my life looks now. I'm 43, I have two kids. I live with a nanny whom I love, she's like my great friend. And my dad and my step mom are, you know, my immediate family. It's funny how, how it's, how different it is than what I was... imagined it when I was 13, 14 years old. I'm sure you feel the same way.

MEGHAN: Well, of course. I mean... there are some things you just can't imagine.

MINDY: Yeah.

MEGHAN: And then there are certain things that I think you have an idea of what it's supposed to be.

MINDY: Yeah.

MEGHAN: Most people, especially women, I think are willing to compromise to try to not play into what one of these archetypes will be. I think there's such a fear about being single. There's a fear perhaps of not being able to have kids if it's something that you want to do.

MINDY: Yeah.

MEGHAN: And then there's a greater fear, I would imagine, of what it would be like to find your partner too late and then not be able to have the kids.

MINDY: Meghan I think I'm probably a lot more judgmental than you. So I can say this even though you can't. The, what you're saying is so true because I don't know if you feel this way and you probably can't say even if you do. My life is filled with women who are, late thirties, early forties, who are so successful. And they have partners who aren't. And I'm often amazed and I, I think to myself, "I'm such an ambitious person. I know this

about myself. I like people who are driven by, sometimes even fanatical passion, and they need to be around that person.” Do I think that that always makes like, healthy marriages? No, but I don't think that I could be in a relationship with someone who wasn't the same way. And I see a lot of women who are fine doing it. And I'm sitting there being like, I don't know what you see in this guy, but they clearly provide something for them...

MEGHAN: Yeah.

MINDY: ...that allows them to be their best self. Um...

MEGHAN: But do you think that it allows them to be their best self?

MINDY: I think different people, it's different ...for some, I think that. You know, I'll, I'll have an actress friend who's incredibly successful and it just makes them feel good that they can do their job knowing that their husband is in their trailer the whole day with them. And then there's other people where I think they just wanted to get into a relationship and they, they don't want to go to weddings and public events without their plus one, who, who.... And the ring on the finger is really important to them, their family. And so...

MEGHAN: Yeah, and I think probably, a lot of women would, perhaps sadly, rather be with the person that is not right for them than to be alone.

MINDY: Oh yes. By the way, I've been that person.

MEGHAN: Really?

MINDY: I've been that person. I've been in relationships where I'm like, that should have been a six month relationship. And instead, it dragged on for two and a half years.

MEGHAN: Why do you think that is?

MINDY: I grew up dark-skinned Indian girl, overweight, glasses, in lily-white suburbs of Boston, never thinking I was attractive. And I think a feeling of belonging was if a man deigns to make you their girlfriend.

MEGHAN: Yeah.

MINDY: And so for me, you can't shake that stuff, right? You can be into comedy and go to school and, like, learn from smart professors, but, like, you can't shake that if that's your wound, that you don't feel attractive unless you have a boyfriend. So I went through high school. No boyfriends. Heard about my friends kissing, falling in love, losing their virginity. College. Same. Nothing. Always a spectator. Watching things. By the way, I learned a lot from that. I learned how to, you know, so many of my shows right now are about young women and longing and feeling horny and feeling rejected. And I've learned

a lot from that. I would even say I probably made my... all my fortune off of this, off of being this outsider, but it's not a good feeling as yourself. So my twenties, it's like I'm in these relationships with guys that I'm like, if someone were to take a photo of us, would the photo look good? Like, would they, would they think like, "oh, he's like, handsome and like, or he's like, 6'1 and he," and you know, this stupidest shit. And now, then looking back on it, I, you know... these relationships that made me unhappy. Yeah, but I, you know, I was not as smart then, you know, I was more insecure then. I, I am stronger now and more confident. So all I can do is look back and, yeah, that thing of, like, 'why did I stand that for so long?' But...

MEGHAN: I hear you. I hear you completely. Well, especially if you don't fit in, right? Especially if you feel othered. And I think what's so funny is to get to a certain place in your life. And even I can't remember which one... ah it's this, in 'Why Not Me?'

MINDY: Mm hmm.

MEGHAN: In the memoir that you wrote, your second one, right? In 2015. And I think there's a double entendre, which I would love for you to talk about with the title, but just my own experience of that. When I started dating my husband, we became engaged and everyone was just like, "Oh my God, you're so lucky he chose you."

[CLIP: MEGHAN AND HARRY'S WEDDING COVERAGE]

"The happy couple has enchanted the world with their real life fairy tale"

MEGHAN: And at a certain point, after you hear it a million times over, you're like, "Well, I chose him too," But thankfully, I have a partner who was countering that narrative for me and going, "They've got it all wrong." I'm the lucky one 'cause you chose me.

But it's, it is gendered and it's archetyped and it's stereotyped that... you're so lucky. And it just feeds into this idea that you're waiting for someone to tell you that you're good enough, as opposed to knowing that you're good enough on your own.

So maybe, I think you tap on a lot, tap into a lot of that in *Why Not Me?* Can you talk about it?

MINDY: The title, *Why Not Me*, means two different things. One is this idea of sort of ambitiously in my professional life, like, why not me? Why can't I go from number 12 on the call list on *The Office* to being number one in my own show? Right. Why not? We get to live life one time. Right? And many people have overcome odds bigger than that. So, like, why not at least try? So that's the first part which sort of deals with like, my ambition professionally. And the other, is this, a little bit more vulnerable to talk about, which is the idea why not me? Like, why am I not the person that got married? You know, and I think that's, I think harder to talk about. I'm still examining it. Um, it makes me emotional. Um, I would love for my, I have such a great relationship with my dad. You know, he is, we're so different from each other. But he is just like, he is everything to me. And I, I do know

that that would be so valuable for my kids, you know, that they have a dad. It wasn't our lot, you know, our family's lot in life. And I do think about it with wistfulness and then also fear like will, what will they think when they get older about that? And so that's sort of like, the, the other meaning of *Why Not Me?* But it's funny because when we talk about spinster, I don't know if you feel this way, but like, sometimes I... because I'm at home and I'm so, I'm so private and I... sort of like a shut-in. And I think like oh people, people probably, you know, don't think about me or think about me that much, but it's like, they do. And they do think of you in those terms and uh...

MEGHAN You think they think of you as a spinster?

MINDY: I think so, I think they must. I think many people must. I, I had this thing, too, 'cause there's a whole like, Indian angle on it, too, right? To choose to have your own children by yourself. I haven't been to India since 14, but you start thinking like, "okay, what are like my relatives in India think about this, you know? Is this causing like tremendous shame upon our family that I made this decision?" And um, I think I can make myself go crazy if I think too much about those things eventually, it's just the thing of like, oh, I, I will this will be maddening. I can't think about this anymore. I have to just, like, live my life to make it myself and the people in my immediate family happy.

MEGHAN: Yes. And you. Well, and also you made the choice.

MINDY: Yeah, well I, I think I have to and I want to acknowledge that, you know, I mentioned my father and my stepmother. You know, they're picking my daughter up from camp today, and they do that every single day. And I have a nanny who lives with me. So I have my community that allows me to have that decision. And also, I waited until I was in my late thirties to have children because I knew I needed the resources to be able to do it comfortably. And not everyone has that, those abilities. But I happened to. And so, that is, you know, I can't even put a value on being able to feel financial comfort to be able to do it, because it allows me to have my two kids and live my life, you know?

MEGHAN: Even though we know your origin story and we know it wasn't all gorgeous, hot pink shirt dresses and you know, being award winning and having the shows and creating the life exactly the way that you may have not envisioned it. But it is perfect for you with your two kids the way it is. It is hard for people culturally, I think, to celebrate a woman's success in that right for whatever reason. Most of the time it can happen. But in the underbelly of social media, so much jealousy comes out.

MINDY: I think that's true. But do you know what it is – when you're a certain age and you're a single woman, and if you go to a party, it bums people out. You get this feeling from people that they're like, "Oh man." Like, they just are like ugh, even your existence as a single woman in a party where it's married people or just a regular party with single guys or something, it just, you get this feeling that you're like, "Oh, I'm like changing the vibe here" because everyone's like, worried about me or sad for me.

MEGHAN: Right? Everything shifts to ‘ohhh, what should we do?’

[MUSIC IN]

MINDY: Ohh, what should we do? And you're like, and they want to set me up with some loser they know. And I'm like, I'm okay. I'm a, I'm a rich, successful woman with great clothes and a nice family. I'm okay. But that seems like, ‘Oh, you doth protest too much. There's no happiness greater than lying in the bed with a man who loves you.’ And I think that could be great. But I'm also like, I promise you, I'm happy. And I'm not just saying that.

MEGHAN: This part of the conversation really reminds me of a scene in the movie *Bridget Jones' Diary*... the 2001 romantic comedy about a woman, who, at 32 years old, is “still single”...

[CLIP: BRIDGET JONES' DIARY]

Bridget: Every year, she tries to fix me up with some bushy-haired, middle-aged boar and I feared this year would be no exception.

Mom: There you are, dumpling!

Bridget: My mum.

Mom: By the way, the Darcy's are here. They brought Mark with them.

Bridget: Ah, here we go.

Mom: You remember Mark? You used to play in his paddling pool. He's a barrister, very well off.

Bridget: No, I don't remember.

Mom: He's divorced apparently. Now, what are you going to put on?

Bridget: This.

Mom: Oh don't be silly, Bridget.

MEGHAN: *Oh man...* poor Bridget... (haha)

Coming up – Mindy defines her own success and happiness. And tells us about how she tried to find her place on one of fashion's biggest nights.

MINDY: I didn't know you're supposed to stay uptown near the Met. You're supposed to get in a standing van so your dress didn't wrinkle. I was just like in a cab, in my dress, sitting in the back seat of a car.

That and more, after the break. Stay with me.

[MUSIC OUT]

MEGHAN: If you've ever watched *The Mindy Project*, you might know that the show's protagonist – Gynecologist, Dr. Mindy Lahiri – is *incredibly* fashionable.

[MUSIC IN]

MEGHAN: On any given episode, when she's not wearing scrubs, you can find the doctor dressed up in bright, unique, color-coordinated ensembles... like the time she wore a Madeline-like yellow dress, paired with a pink Chanel purse, and a floral coat. Or, the episode where she rocked a pink skirt suit with pearl and crystal trim.¹

Now, while the show's main character was partly inspired by Kaling's own mother, who herself was an OB/GYN... the love for *fashion*, well that came from the show's creator herself...

[MUSIC FADE OUT]

MEGHAN: I love how much you love fashion.

MINDY: I do. I love it. And uh...

MEGHAN: No one can see this but Mindy's wearing the most gorgeous, hot, hot pink dress on the hottest day in L.A. With, gosh... like, you look fantastic.

MINDY: I have to tell you. This, that compliment, the fact that... I'm glad it's recorded, I hope it stays on the podcast because that is something that will make me...

MEGHAN: We'll keep it. It's staying in.

MINDY: ...happy for life to know that Meghan Markle complimented my outfit today.

MEGHAN: Love the look.

MINDY: But I love getting dolled up. I love like re-, I would read about the Met Gala for years. Like who wore what? Like, you know, just sitting on my computer and looking to see, like, what everyone wore.

MEGHAN: Have you been?

MINDY: I've been.

MEGHAN: Okay, so wait. Let's just stop there for one second. What was it like if you've been reading about it for all those years to finally go?

*[CLIP: FADE IN MET GALA SOUNDS - CAMERA SHUTTERS,
PHOTOGRAPHERS]*

MINDY: I, it was I, I did feel like fraudulent the first year that I went...

[CLIP: MINDY AT THE MET GALA]

MINDY: Do I take this seriously? Oh yeah, completely seriously. 'Cause uh ultimately I just want to look hot in photos as my like life long goal and if I have to do it by being amusing then I'll do that.

FADE UNDER

MINDY: ...you know, I, I did feel like... and you don't know the secret things that you're supposed to do. Like, when I went I was like, staying downtown with a friend. I didn't know you're supposed to stay uptown near The Met. You're supposed to get in a standing van so your dress didn't wrinkle. I was just like, in a cab, in my dress, sitting in the back seat of a car, you know, driving for 45 minutes.

MEGHAN: Oh my gosh. What dress were you in?

MINDY: I think I was wearing, the first one I went to was in 2012. I went with my friend B.J., who's my dear, dear friend, godfather of my children. And I wore Lela Rose. They were so generous to dress me. And um, I didn't realize until I got there, like, oh, this isn't how...

MEGHAN: ...how you do it.

MINDY: This isn't how like, Cate Blanchett and Rihanna are coming to The Met. You know, like they're, they're doing it a very different way. But at that point, I was so honored as someone who loved the things that I loved. You know, I was so honored to be able to go. And that's how I feel every year, pretty much.

MEGHAN: Yeah, but it, but it feeds into, as you're saying, sort of, you said fraudulent. You know, when you've always tried to fit in or find the place or and you get the thing, the thing that you've wanted to have for so long. It can feel like imposter syndrome. Does that ever come up for you?

MINDY: I think imposter syndrome is um, because I'm asked all the time if I have imposter syndrome in interviews about my work. And I don't know if you feel this way, but I'm always wondering... and I, and by the way, in the world of fashion, like high fashion, sitting on, going to... you know, Milan Fashion Week or whatever, I 100% have it. But in my professional life, I often feel when I'm asked by a certain kind of interviewer about imposter syndrome, where I just want to say, I think I'm supposed to say yes, but the answer is no.

MEGHAN: Great.

MINDY: Because I, I just think, like, I am this Indian nerd who has, I'm always like the first person to show up, the last person to leave. I am so prepared in such a um, child of immigrant, kind of effortful way that, for my books and my career, like I'm like, no, I do. Like, I remember when I started on The Mindy Project, someone had asked me, 'do you have imposter syndrome?' And I would say, no, because I was at The Office for 8 years.

If I didn't think I could do this job at this point, I have to be like, clinically unconfident. Who would be the person who would be like, yeah she did eight years of a show that did 22 episodes a year, like how could she feel like, I'm nervous about doing this at this point. I don't know if I can do this. I need help. So I, you know, I do. That's my sort of complicated relationship with imposter syndrome.

MEGHAN: I mean, it's funny. What I appreciate the most is that you were just like, I often get asked this and I say, 'Am I supposed to say, yes?' But now it's yeah, just tell the truth: No. Because you earned it. But a lot of women wouldn't be able to say that.

MINDY: Because you're expressing confidence as a woman. That you're confident in your decision and people aren't used to that. I wrote about this in *Why Not Me?* But I feel like when I do read Twitter, I do think I see people are like, 'oh, I don't like Mindy Kaling. I hate how she thinks she's so great.'

MEGHAN: Why do you read that?

MINDY: I know, it's because people, you know, and they think I'm so confident and it's like... it's not that I think I'm so great. It's just that I don't hate myself.

MEGHAN: You're allowed to think that you're so great.

MINDY: Listen, I, I just. I don't have those feelings about myself, and I think that makes people uncomfortable sometimes.

[MUSIC IN]

A woman who isn't apologizing for herself makes people uncomfortable.

MEGHAN: Mindy's had to push against a lot of labels in her life and career. But she's also had some incredible role models to show her how to live life on her own terms.

One of them? Her late mother, the OB/GYN – Dr. Swati Chokalingam. She passed away in 2012, after a battle with pancreatic cancer... five years before Mindy had her first child.

[MUSIC OUT]

MINDY: Yeah, you know, it felt especially unfair when my mom passed away. Besides the normal feelings of anguish and sadness, but losing someone because she was an OBGYN. And so, having a baby by myself... the first couple of months, it just would have been especially useful to have her there. Um the thing I take from my mom, which is unexpected to me, but I love... was that I had such a great relationship with my mom and she was not at all a baby or kid person, if that makes sense. She was no nonsense, you know, she delivered babies but didn't have this special like, oh like Googoo Gaga energy with kids. And I don't have that either, but I knew that she was a great mom. And

so that has been very helpful to me. I'm very fond of children but it took having kids for me to have that with them. And she was even less than me.

MEGHAN: Were you worried about that before your, you actually had your children? Knowing that that wasn't in your... because I was always, I love kids, right. Which is a completely different thing. Of course, a different world once you have your own. But if you know that something in your, in like your personality, just like in your mom's where it doesn't mean you're not maternal... It's just a difference of like, 'ah! baby, baby, baby.'

MINDY: I did worry about that. And I think that was the gift she gave me, was that I knew that we had a great relationship, even though she was not, you know, pulling up the nearest, you know, 18 month old and squeezing them. She loved us. She was so devoted to us. And she was very ambitious about her career. You know, she was... you know, the OBGYN schedule. You're gone in the middle of the night. You, you know, and she never missed a delivery. And we frequently... she was not there at the recitals or at, you know, Thanksgiving she'd have to leave early. And yet my bond with her was so strong. If I hadn't had that example, I think I would have been scared. I might not have even done it, to be honest. So that is a fear I had that was quelled. And then now I'm, everyday is like just the miraculous thing that my daughter will say to me or something that my son will do that is kind of what makes life worth living.

MEGHAN: You know, I wonder if for you, even as you talk about your ambition – has that ever been a double edged sword for you? Has it ever backfired? Because as a woman, to be ambitious, you know, a man can walk into the room and he can set boundaries and he can be really clear and really direct. And it's glorified to a certain extent.

MINDY: Oh. Well, the word you used is exactly right, direct. So I think when I think of people who are direct, who are decisive, these are qualities I love in people and I, as a you know, as a leader and employer and my shows like I think of myself as incredibly direct, very decisive, but also impatient, which you need to be, you know, the pace of TV and how quickly things have to work. And um those are qualities that in men you're like, 'Oh, thank you,' you're an actor on a set. You have a director or showrunner who's decisive and impatient. They want to get the shot and move on. You're like, 'what a delight.'

MEGHAN: 'he's so good at his job. Wow. He kept us on time.'

MINDY: We're not going to have a 14 hour day. We're going to make our day. And in a woman, those qualities are so ugly, you know, to certain people.

MEGHAN: But how do you think we shift out of that?

MINDY: You know, a really good example of that is women in comedy.

MEGHAN: Hmm.

MINDY: Women, remember, like even 12 years ago, it was socially acceptable for award winning journalists to ask women, 'So what do you think? Can women be funny?'

MEGHAN: She's talking about journalists who were openly saying things like this:

[CLIP]

Christopher Hitchens: "There is no question that the, that uh for women the need or ability to be funny is tremendously less than it is among men."

MINDY: ...that's not even something you ask anymore.

MEGHAN: No.

MINDY: And so I think that things do change. I mean, so much of it, too, is what we tell our kids. I mean, so I grew up always feeling ugly, overweight, other-ed. And so with my daughter, I'm always telling her that she's beautiful to the point where my friend B.J. is like you can tell her other compliments. I was never, I was always told like, oh, you're smart. I was you know, I had confidence in my studies and I was like, yes, yes, of course. And uh it's, it's funny how you're like, oh, this is like, I'm focusing too much on this. I, every morning I'm like, you're so beautiful to the point where it's like, that's not healthy either. Um but I, I do think that's how we can sort of change things.

MEGHAN: Again, If you're... not the pretty one growing up, you're just like, What can I learn? I want the A-plus.

MINDY: Were you not the pretty one growing up?

MEGHAN: No. Oh god, no.

MINDY: What?

MEGHAN: No. Nuh-uh.

MINDY: That is news to me.

MEGHAN: Ugly duckling.

MINDY: No way.

MEGHAN: Yeah, yeah, yeah... Like tons. Look, maybe not conventional beauty as it... now, maybe that would be seen as beautiful but massive frizzy curly hair and a huge gap in my teeth that...um, I was the smart one. Forever and ever and ever and ever. And, and then just sort of grew up.

MINDY: Hey, now I'm going to say this is a revelation to me because I went through life being like, okay, well, Meghan Markle was like that one nice hot girl who like has her

head screwed on right cause her mom's probably like, really cool. But knowing that you were not that, is news to me, probably news to people listening to this.

MEGHAN: No, it was really hard. And I went to I mean, I grew up in L.A and I went to Hollywood Schoolhouse right there, you know?

MINDY: Yeah, I know well. It's near me.

MEGHAN: And then I went to Immaculate Heart – all girls Catholic school for middle school and high school

MINDY: Great school.

MEGHAN: But I never had anyone to sit with at lunch. I, I was always a little bit of a loner and really shy and didn't know where I fit in. And, and so I just became, I was like, okay, well then I'll become the president of the Multicultural Club and the president of sophomore class and the president of this and French club. And, and by doing that, I had meetings at lunchtime.

MINDY: Right. Wow.

MEGHAN: So I didn't have to worry about who I would sit with or what I would do because I was always so busy.

MINDY: Right. Just what you said, that image is so vivid of sitting like... The, the girl that you described, sitting by herself, being like, how do I fill my day? And it'll be by trying to be a leader like that is, that is like, very um. I'm, that makes me very emotional. And that's, I'm happy that people know that because I think people see you and they're like, oh, my gosh, like the wedding, the couture fittings for that and this and that. And I think that I certainly didn't know that about you. And it's nice to know.

MEGHAN: Why does that feel emotional to you?

MINDY: I think it feels emotional because no matter how much we achieve or the access that we have to, again, these these rarified spaces, uh it's when I think of that little girl that you mentioned, it feels so, um... There's a reason Harriet the Spy is like my favorite book, right? Because here's this girl who is, like, lonely, and she has adventures, but it's because she doesn't have any friends, right? Her, her person in her life is her nanny. And I think I like that because I related to that. And um I came in here, you know, and we don't know each other, we have some people in common. But you do seem so intimidating. Your life is together, like you're so beautiful. And like, even in the Oprah thing is like, oh, my God, she has chickens. Like, who has their shit together enough to have, like raise chickens and kids, like, come on. Like, and it's nice to know that you're, were a lonely kid who didn't like necessarily being that way.

MEGHAN: Yeah.

MINDY: I'm not happy for it, but it's sitting here being like, I'm rejoicing. But that is, and I think, I don't know. I didn't know that, and I'm I'm happy I do.

MEGHAN: Yeah well, I'm glad we both get to share with each other.

And to wrap things up... we have our *Three Words* moment. So, what three words would you use to describe yourself as a little girl?

MINDY: Self-conscious. Inquisitive. And effortful, always trying so hard.

MEGHAN: Yeah. Yeah. And three words to describe yourself now?

FADE IN OUTRO MUSIC

MINDY: Oh, gosh. Um I think effortful is still, unfortunately, a big part of my personality. I'm a really bad try hard. Um, professionally and personally. Um, impatient. Adjectively-described. And content.

MEGHAN: And you look fantastic.

MINDY: Thank you. Again, you know, effortful has its plus sides, which is that I was like, 'gonna see Meghan.'

MEGHAN: It is a hot pink shirt dress. It's so good with a little collar and two little pockets. Great beltage. Looks fant... as I said, fantastic. But we're just going to memorialize this moment so that it does not get cut out.

MINDY: Yes. There's no way to edit around...

MEGHAN: Your fashion moment.

MINDY: Meghan Markle likes my clothes. Editor, please.

MEGHAN: No, it's in there. Thank you so much.

MINDY: Thank you for having me.

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OUTRO
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MEGHAN: I hadn't realized my high school would become so much of the connective tissue for me throughout this series. But it makes sense, because as with anyone I've spoken to, we all seem to go back to where we come from, where these ideas began, how we became the women that we are, from the girls that we were. I happened to go back to Immaculate Heart recently, my old high school. And so when I chatted with a few of the girls who had just graduated, I asked them about the assignment – the one in Religion Two, the one I was telling

you about at the beginning of the show, the one where you plan your wedding at what, 13, 14 years old? And they all looked at me with a blank-face. They were confused. They had no idea what I was talking about. Turns out, that assignment, it doesn't exist anymore. Turns out, the teachers and the administration removed it from the curriculum. And when talking to these recent graduates about it, it turns out that if it had still existed, they felt confident that they would have had it removed. It just didn't make sense to them. You don't have to get married, they said. If you choose to be single then you should be single. There was zero stigma. And some of the younger kids our producers spoke to, they, too had similar ideas about marriage:

BEAU: Girl, you don't have to get married. Just make it yourself. And don't be like other people who are mean. Be yourself and be confident. And for a wedding, do not do a smudging. *laughs* Smudging. Don't do a big kiss, do a little one.

ELIN: No, I don't want to get married. Boys are not my type. It's weird 'cause I love love, but I can't imagine myself being with a boy. And I'm not even close. I'm 11 years old. I want to adopt a kid though. I do.

MEGHAN: So, these kids and my experience at Immaculate Heart... it made me think when I had asked Mindy earlier, as you heard, how do we change these patterns of behavior, these limiting belief systems about singledom? Turns out, they're already changing.

I can't wait to chat with you again next time, when we get a little more specific – and dive into the complicated world of the trope known as *The Dragon Lady*...

MARGARET CHO: And it's kind of like evil queen adjacent, femme fatale adjacent. But it's also so pinned to this idea that Asianness is an inherent threat, that our foreignness is somehow um, gonna getcha!

That's with Margaret Cho and Lisa Ling. Until then – thanks for joining me! As ever, I'm Meghan. See ya soon!

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CREDITS

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