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One tattoo at a time.

## BLINDSPOT



## FIRST PERSON

*The Mindy Project* Brings TV's First Awesome Arranged Marriage

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Sonu (left) and Tarun Lahiri. Photo: NBC/Hulu

Mindy Lahiri beat the odds and came back into our lives for a fourth season (thanks, [Hulu](#)), and with her, arrived two new Lahiris to love: her parents.

Okay, Mindy and Danny Castellano's lovechild is the addition everyone's anticipating this year on *The Mindy Project*, but from a very personal place, I must celebrate the elders. Mindy's parents, Tarun and Sonu Lahiri (played by Ajay Mehta and Sakina Jaffrey, respectively), we learn, are funny and successful, the progenitors of Mindy's sillier sensibilities. Together, Tarun and Sonu are also pioneers of a sort: They're among American pop-culture's few positive keepers of arranged marriages, in the company of more tragic couplings, from *Game of Thrones'* Khal Drogo and Daenerys Targaryen to *The Americans'* Philip and Elizabeth Jennings.

Make no mistake: This is big. Any American child of an arranged marriage discovers early on not to bring up said fact in polite company without an hour to spare. It remains a guaranteed mic-drop trigger. The questions that follow always encircle the same premise: How can they possibly be in love?

I submit that my parents' method works just as well as any modern romantic's, only at a quicker pace. What transpired between them on their first and only date has become the stuff of family legend. My mom, the story goes, based her decision on two seemingly innocuous but ultimately pivotal moves by my dad: One, he stood up from his seat the first time he saw her; and two, along with his family, he took no interest in a dowry.

As a newlywed, I appreciate the efficiency of the calculation. With very little to go on, my mom made predictions about her future husband and in-laws, all of whom delivered. The dowry issue should be obvious: To demand one was commonplace, and not to, a signal of extraordinary liberation from unquestioned societal norms. As for the standing, that was an equally unusual sight in 1970s India, tantamount to a double-kiss in suburban America. Off it wafted a certain exotic promise, indicating not only a journeyer, but one capable of adopting the finest customs of his new land. Not all learned behavior is equal, after all. Had my dad been smacking gum, surely my mom wouldn't have seen the promise of a cosmopolitan partnership.

We all have our stories of intuition made meaningful in hindsight. A friend talks about her now-husband's woeful decision to wear a wrinkled shirt the first time he met her proper Cuban mom, who took years to fully thaw. (Warmed over the years by a series of intensely pressed apology shirting, her love for him now runs white-hot.) My own fifth-generation Texan husband charmed me within a week by insisting I stop mispronouncing my name for the ease of non-Indians. For months, even during the most casual of conversations, he took pains to say my name just right until, finally, he sounded like a natural. Swoon, am I right?

In practice, we may rely on the trial of time, but making a quick job of it actually upholds the American mythology of true love. The fictional Lahiris met on their wedding day, fated at first sight to spend their lives together. Remove the *shaadi* backdrop, and the condition is the very one that defines romantic comedy. From Shakespeare to Nora Ephron, the West has come to know this trajectory well. Cupid sites his arrow by the first act, and there's no dodging it. Just look at Mindy and Danny.