

Women Aren't Funny

Sophie Bishop

Picture me, 20 years old, ignoring the phones whilst managing the box office at an exploitative theatre at the Edinburgh Festival in 2010. I remember I had a conversation with a male friend - let's call him Matt, because that's his name. We both nursed dreams of doing stand up comedy, and made a pact to have each performed our first stand up set by the end of the year. When Matt got back to Manchester he got stuck in; he trialled stand up at open mic nights, got a job in a comedy venue, started gigging at said comedy venue, got an agent, moved to London, and now is being funded to take his one man show to Edinburgh. A true rags-to-riches story - well definitely not riches, but it is at least a rags-to-gigging-regularly story. I, however, put my stand up dreams firmly to one side and carried on hiding my wit behind Facebook statuses.

The open mic nights and the comedy clubs weren't for me; I'm a confident person in any pub garden, but there was something about these comedy clubs that was so unappealing and scary. Something macho and jock-ish about stand up comedy environments. The documentary *Women Aren't Funny*, directed by Bonnie McFarlane

showcased some of the world's biggest male comedians telling the (hidden) camera straight-out that they don't think women are funny. Women still have to tread a line of performing acceptable femininity, and being comfortable making the kind of crude gross-out jokes synonymous with comedy clubs. Talking about periods or farting isn't ladylike. Furthermore, backstage laddy banter between laddy bros is taken for granted as "no homo", however add a vagina into the mix (attached to a female comedian, obviously) and it will almost certainly be taken for saucy flirtations.

I believe that mine and Matt's story is the dream social science experiment. It is as close to a fair scientific test as possible, the only variable being gender in measuring the ability to succeed on the comedy circuit. It's harder for women to become comedians: case closed. OK, maybe that is a tiny bit reductive. But the situation is bad. The Guardian celebrated the fact that women accounted for 17% of the comedy at Edinburgh Festival 2014 - I know what you're thinking, that's great, why aren't I on the parade float waving my flag about, it's sunny

outside! But just hear me out for one second; I just don't think it's good enough really. Why is the fact that less than a fifth of comedy professionals are women something to jump on? If women made up less than a fifth of other culturally important jobs that they can definitely do, like being surgeons or engineers there would be uproar - oh wait. Anyhow, I did actually decide to do something about it, so this article isn't going nowhere.

I thought to myself, what would a feminist comedy night look like? There are actually some really good feminist comedy nights already - What The Frock in Bristol for example. But what about for people like me? What about for those who have the talent but want to find their feet somewhere, who want to be eased in gently, dip their toe in the pool, ride on stabilisers for a couple of years before they get their big girl bike. Comedy requires guts, for sure. If you actually want to gig around the country, and have your own show, then you need to be able to walk out in a front of a dead crowd who reject your material



MAKE
ME
LAUGH

