There was a consensus among the comedians I interviewed that the field of comedy has become more diverse and inclusive over the last decade. From writers rooms to stand-up line-ups, an increasing number of women are making their mark. However, female comedians are still pressured to perform according to traditionally male comedy standards in order to be successful. In his 2007 essay "Why Women Aren’t Funny," socio-political critic Christopher Haynes claimed that women have no biological need to be funny because they can already attract men. This assumes that comedy is meant to serve the opposite sex. One comedian I spoke with, Jamee Larson, asserted that comedy serves itself and its audience. According to Larson, "You’re either funny or you’re not!" And audiences are eager to bestow praise or criticism.

Comedy is one of the most effective tools in bolstering communication and fostering connection between different people. Throughout history, the intersection of comedy and political commentary has played an important role in shaping the American socio-political landscape. During the 1950s, comedians like Moms Mabley and Phyllis Diller carved a greater space for women in comedy, Still, the gender gap in comedy, specifically stand-up comedy, continues to negatively affect women’s performance opportunities. American society continues to perpetuate the myth that women aren’t funny, making it more difficult for female comedians to achieve success within their field.

*The term ‘female comedian’ is used for throughout my research, but I want to underscore that these performers do not belong to a separate category of comedy. They are simply comedians.

Out of the ten highest-paid comedians in 2019-2020, only one was female. This reflects the estimation that roughly 10% of comedians identify as women. Not only are there fewer opportunities available, but also, prevailing negative sentiments regarding women in comedy deter women from entering the field. Additionally, female comedians are more likely to be heckled, sexually harassed, and assaulted while working.

REFERENCES:

Although there are more female comedians revolutionizing comedy, there remains a significant lack of performance opportunities for them (Lockyer 2020). Men are booked more consistently than female comedians and often are paid more for their time.

Comedy consumers and audience members have to challenge their conceptions of gender and comedy. Part of the lack of exposure of female comedians is a consequence of a perceived preference for male comedians. When audiences actively seek out female comedians, they will quickly discover that women are, and have always been, funny.