

The Gendered Differences in Popular Satire

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Satire has become a modern staple of American entertainment over time, showing up in various types of popular media. Satire has been traditionally used as a tool for the masses, allowing the public to analyze and decipher social and/or political situations. It's usually accompanied with humor or parody in order to appeal to the general public, giving them something to laugh about, but also something to point to. Even the most humorous satire has a point to it. There can be differences among the reasons, but satire often aims to expose an issue or problem to the public, hoping to simply address it. Those differences currently revolve around gender as women have begun to use satire as a means of addressing societal issues.

As long as there have been writers and illustrators, people have been practicing humor and comedy. Along that way, satire was born. Those who practiced satire were usually educated men, dedicated to their craft and their readers. Women have also tried their hand at satire, but very few were allowed to publish their work and even then, some of those women were scorned for it. The earliest example of women using satire was during the women's suffrage movement. An illustrator named Nina Allender began to draw political cartoons for the National Woman's Party, often portraying suffragettes as strong and demanding while also highlighting their main arguments within the cartoon. Most of her illustrations celebrate the movement and its accomplishments, but many fall under the category of satire.

Since the women's suffrage movement, women have taken the opportunity in many different fashions, one being satire. It took quite some time to get to that level of popularity again as men still dominated most work forces. It wasn't really until the invention of television and stand-up comedy that women came back to satire. Even after that, it had to slowly creep in as to

not alarm the public so much. Even in comedy, women were held to different standards than men. It still remains that way today but appears to be changing ever so slightly as more women take the stage.

Women like Sarah Silverman, Amy Schumer, and Tracey Ullman are known today for their roles in their respective TV shows, as well as their numerous stand-up specials. Being comedians and actresses, they heavily rely on basic humor, wit, and use of parody to entertain their audiences. They also tend to dabble in satire, often using it to express their own feelings when it comes to gender.

Gender itself is a hot issue in the current political climate. In the 21st century, there are different ideas of gender, what it means, its limitations, etc. There's also the emergence of gender identities such as transgender and the social policies around accepting transgender people or not. For example, the U.S. is currently arguing over whether transgender women can use a woman's bathroom and vice versa. These issues are ever present in American (and international) politics and will continue to be if they are not properly addressed by the public.

Compared to their male counterparts, women comedians speak about gender more often in their performances. The comedians listed earlier have had interviews discussing their views on gender, explaining that their platforms allow for those type of conversations to occur. One of the reasons why these women are so successful with their satire is because they embrace personas. The personas they utilize can "poke fun" at themselves as characters or other well-known figures that demonstrate whatever point they are trying to make (Nussbaum, 2015).

Amy Schumer and Sarah Silverman have created their own personas for themselves, often acting in exaggerated ways in their shows and stand-ups. Each woman stereotypes

themselves as a ditzy American girl, often talking about their bodies or sex lives in a relatively open fashion. These women aren't identical, however, as Schumer tends to focus on what Hollywood wants from her whereas Silverman does the opposite. While Schumer creates satirical skits around femininity and her own appearance, Silverman contributes dirtiness and queerness to hers (Mizejewski, 2015). Both women have, of course, swapped those notions in other skits and jokes, but those are some examples of how they differentiate between one another.

Tracey Ullman embodies personas as well, but often portrays women leaders in her current HBO show. Her impression of German Chancellor Angela Merkel is spot-on with the short-cut hair squaring her face and her boxy blazer hiding her body. This is an example of parody, which points the finger at a real person or situation and exaggerates it to the point of being humorous. Ullman still manages to involve satire within her work, creating a world where Merkel acts as daring as other world leaders like Trump. Even when using other people, Ullman can illustrate her point pretty well, especially with today's politics increasing tensions among the public.

Still, women discuss gender in a different manner than men do. Plenty of men utilize satire in the same mediums as women, with TV shows, stand-up specials, and online content. The resurgence of popular satire has come from men like Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert, who both have adopted a news-like TV show on Comedy Central. While still funny and satirical, their shows focus on acting like a real news show and include real stories to demonstrate their overall message. They even have a different method in approaching stories as Stewart openly mocks

certain stories and Colbert agrees with outrageous stances to further highlight the ridiculousness of society.

Other comedians like Dave Chappelle and Daniel Tosh use satire and do include gender as a topic, but often in the opposite way that women comedians do. They don't use satire to criticize gender so much as they use it to mock women. Daniel Tosh has come off as a misogynist as he often makes fun of women in his stand-up and TV show. Chappelle, on the other hand, has also used satire to show how crazy women can be, but is more accepted by the general public. In *The Comedy of Dave Chappelle* (2009), it is pointed out that Chappelle is careful with the language he uses, choosing slang to relieve tension among female viewers. Even then, the author argues that he is still using terms that do not belong to him as a man.

Satire regarding women's issues does not have to be limited to female performers as male comedians have supported women's rights and feminism in the past. Many still contribute to the current movement today, which is incredibly important to expose the American public to issues surrounding gender. It seems as if progress is coming about with all these different TV shows involving satire and parody, but very slowly. Shows like Full Frontal with Samantha Bee are making strides for women as they break into the well-established gentlemen's club, so to speak. TV shows set up like news shows or late-night shows dominate the networks, calling for even more satirical content for the public.

The differences in performers and topics appear to help that issue of addressing gender. Men have spent a lot of time on satire, illuminating the hypocrisies of American politics and society for centuries. Women have been included in that development, but have not been recognized for their work as much as the men have. Now, people are paying attention to women

and what they have to say, in comedy or otherwise. The possibilities for satire are endless, meaning that any such issue could (and probably will) be tackled in the near future. Gender is the current focus for satirical work as women fight for equal rights and pay. Women in comedy and entertainment are creating work that emphasizes that dilemma to the vast American society that consumes that content daily. It's only a matter of time for that society to realize what they are actually watching in terms of themes and meaning.

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