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# **NEGOTIATING POWER THROUGH LAUGHTER: WOMEN STAND-UP COMEDIANS IN BRAZIL**

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Submitted to  
Central European University  
Department of Gender Studies

*In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts*

First supervisor: Professor Erzsébet Barát  
Second supervisor: Anne-Marie Korte

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## **Abstract**

Humor is customarily defined as masculine in academic and popular discourses. A long standing stereotype that posits women as humorless or unfunny, or joking as something unfeminine, has been consistently studied by feminist humor scholars. This study evaluates the effects of this stereotype on the professional lives and creative processes of five prominent Brazilian women stand-up comedians. While many feminist studies on humor posit that joking as a woman is potentially threatening to the patriarchal *status quo*, this study proposes that this subversion is done within a context of negotiation of power and space. This research has verified that such negotiation of space is reflected on women's stand-up routines, as well as in the ways they conceptualize their own art and career trajectories. The data was collected using a three-folded methodology comprised of semi-structured interviewing, participant observation and content analysis. I have watched live stand-up shows of four of these five comedians, and conducted semi-structured interviews with all of them. This thesis then analyzes how the negotiation of space is apparent in their comic styles, which are analyzed in detail, and in their recollections of professional experiences.

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## Introduction

In this thesis – based on a research conducted in São Paulo, Brazil, on April 2013 – I analyze how the construction of humor as a masculine domain (Auslander, 1993; Gray, 1994) and the consequent stereotype that states that women are humorless or unfunny affect the professional lives and the creative processes of five prominent women stand-up comedians. This research, therefore, has a double interest: (1) Brazilian comedians' self-evaluation of everyday experiences as a minority within a male-dominated art; (2) how being a minority influences their choices when it comes to writing and behaving onstage.

My work is informed by feminist humor scholarship (Barreca 1988; Judy Little, 1983; Gagnier, 1988; Merrill, 1988; Gray, 1994; Gilbert, 2003) which argues that joking is a potentially subversive act against patriarchy, as long as women use it to talk about their specific experiences and to criticize instances of oppression. I was then interested in verifying the extent to which the work of Brazilian women stand-up comedians is indeed subversive, and how much of this subversiveness derives from an intentional adherence to feminism. In order to conduct this verification, I have applied a three-folded methodology comprised of participant observation, (watching live stand-up performances of the five research subjects), semi-structured interviewing and content analysis. The main features of their comic style and the main elements of their discourse regarding their own work are reunited and analyzed in the following pages.

This research fills a gap in scholarship in that feminist humor studies are still a scattered field. While theoretical observations are plentiful, empirical research with women comedians is scarce. There are some studies about American women stand-up comedians (Gilbert, 2004; Hertz, 2010), but this is the first one dedicated to the Brazilian context, in which stand-up comedy has recently become a trending genre and a big business.

The thesis is structured as follows: on Chapter 1, I will provide a brief analysis of humor

studies, and how feminist scholars have addressed the gendered aspects of it. Then, on Chapter 2, I will discuss the particularities of stand-up comedy that make the genre useful for a research on gender and provide readers with a brief history of the genre's popularity in Brazil. Chapter 3 discusses the methodology of the research, while Chapter 4 introduces the comic styles of the five research subjects and how these styles relate to the theoretical framework disclosed on Chapter 1. Finally, Chapter 5 will make sense of the commonalities in the informants' interviews, again under the light of feminist humor studies.

## **Chapter 1: Humor Studies and Feminism**

This chapter will present a brief summary of the most important theories in humor studies and discuss the main ideas present in all of them. Then, I will discuss how feminist scholars have delved into the topic of humor, contributing to gendering the academic discussion. The issues discussed by feminist scholars formed the theoretical framework for the conduction of this research.

### ***1.2 Some of the main theories and perspectives of humor***

Humor has long been a topic of scholarly interest. Why human beings laugh, what makes them laugh and how to make others laugh are matters that have been intriguing minds since the Ancient times: Aristotle, Plato , Cicero and Quintilian are credited for laying the foundations of humor scholarship. Later on, renowned authors like Hobbes, Kant, Freud and Bergson delved into the subject (Critchley, 2002; Perks, 2012; Popescu, 2010). These studies are traditionally classified into three branches of theories or approaches, according to the most prevalent argument in each work. They are the superiority theory, the incongruity theory and the relief theory.

The superiority theory states that human beings laugh at what they feel superior to. Plato and Aristotle are commonly named the “fathers” of this theory, since they discussed the pleasure of jesting about other people’s flaws and classified this behavior as non-virtuous. The best known superiority theory is found, however, in the work of Thomas Hobbes, to whom “the passion of laughter is nothing else but sudden glory arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly” (Hobbes, 1984, p.46).

The superiority theory dominated the academic discussion of humor until the nineteenth century (Critchley, 2002, p. 3), when Herbert Spencer and Sigmund Freud proposed that humor is a



safety valve for the discharge of energy. That is the relief theory. Spencer's basic argument is that the joke teller builds up energy in the joke listeners. The punch line is, then, a moment of release. Freud, whose work on humor has become very influential, highlights the relationship between jokes and taboos, arguing that the psychic energy dispensed when laughing provides a relief of tensions caused by the repression of sex and aggression. Although Quintilian had already mentioned this distinction (Perks, 2012, p. 128), Freud's work is also recognized for differentiating between jokes one makes about oneself (which he calls non-tendentious) and jokes made at the expense of others (tendentious). Freud classifies non-tendentious jokes as a more elevated form of joking, for it involves the superego recognizing the childlike limitations of the ego (Critchley, 2002, p. 94).

The incongruity theory states that human beings laugh when an expectation is elicited and then broken, when something is out of place or seems absurd. Kant and Schopenhauer are the authors known for developing it, since their works highlighted the element of surprise involved in humor (Critchley, 2002, p. 3; Perks, 2012, p. 122). Schopenhauer goes as far as to say that, the greater the surprise, the greater the laugh (1977, p.13). Although incongruity does encompass a great deal of the jokes we hear everyday, there are some gaps in the theory. Aaron Smuts (2006), for example, highlights that "there are many kinds of things that are incongruous which do not produce amusement".

Henri Bergson's *Laughter: an Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, published in 1980, is an influential work that combines incongruity and superiority arguments to defend that laughter results from a perceived rigidity or inelasticity of character (Bergson, 2005, p.6a). According to him, since society demands us to be flexible and adaptable, any repetitive acts that make a human body look like a machine will elicit laughter (p. 11b). Humor is thus a form of social control and correction (p.42a), which requires people to not be emotionally involved with the topic being joked about. In his own words, "laughter is incompatible with emotion. Depict some fault, however trifling, in such a way as to arouse sympathy, fear, or pity; the mischief is done, it is impossible for us to laugh"

(p.43b). Therefore, humor is a form of objectification.

Although this classification of humor theories is the most widely adopted system, it has been questioned. One of the most common criticisms is that it is an over-simplification and it may give the impression that the theories contest or deny one another, when actually they are complimentary (Smuts, 2006). As Popescu (2010, p. 37) argues, it must also be stressed that none of these approaches can be fitted into a single academic discipline. Each of the theories highlights a different aspect of humor, but some arguments appear in all of them. The first commonality is the idea that humor is a distinctive mark of humanness. This argument was first posed by Aristotle, who said: “no animal laughs save Man” (Aristotle, *The Parts of Animals*, Chapter X, p. 129, as cited by Critchley, 2002, p. 25). Although this has been questioned by studies on dogs and chimpanzees (Critchley, 2002, p.27), when it comes to humor theory, most of the widely recognized writings build up on the Aristotelian idea. Bergson, for example, starts his book by saying: “the first point to which attention should be called is that the comic does not exist outside the pale of what is strictly HUMAN” (2005, p. 4a, capitals in the original). Simon Critchley, reflecting on the pervasiveness of the idea that laughter is what distinguishes human from nature (animals), jumps to a logical conclusion: “if laughter is proper to the human, then the human being who does not laugh invites the charge of inhumanity, or at least makes us somewhat suspicious” (2002, p.25). This is a point that feminist scholars have pushed further, when arguing that the stereotype of the unfunny or humorless woman is related to the traditional association of femininity with nature. I will discuss this point further in section 1.3.

The second idea in common is the assumption that humor is a form of communication that re/produces common sense: it is inherently a collective practice, based upon local values and shared experiences. For example, the superiority theory is based on the premise that some groups are superior to others, and that inferiority (difference) should be pointed out and ridiculed. The incongruity argument that humor is the result of a perceived mismatch between elements indicates

that the joke's funniness depends on a body of knowledge that is shared between the joke teller and listeners. This makes humor a local phenomenon. As Critchley puts it, "sense of humor is usually highly context-specific. Anyone who has tried to render what they believe to be a hugely funny joke into a foreign language only to be met by polite incomprehension will have realized that humor is terribly difficult to translate" (2002, p. 67-68). The relief theory also takes humor as a communal experience, since taboos are collectively constructed and reinforced, and the building up of energy (and subsequent release) in the joke listener is aroused by the joke teller. Bergson also follows this line of reasoning. "Our laughter is always the laughter of a group (...). However spontaneous it seems, laughter always implies a kind of secret freemasonry, or even complicity, with other laughers, real or imaginary" (2005, p.5a). Bergson's main argument, that the function of humor is the correction of social deviance, stresses even more the collective nature of joking. According to Critchley, humor gives us a sense of *thereness*, of belonging to a specific time and place. "Jokes are reminders of who 'we' are, who 'we' have been, and of who 'we' might become (...) either reinforcing our sense of cultural distinctiveness and superiority, as in much ethnic humor, or by placing those shared practices in question" (2002, p.87).

This quote highlights an important face of humor: although social norms are humor's raw material, it is not necessarily normative. Humor can also be used to mock the norms and demand changes in "who 'we' are". This subversive potential is what feminist scholars decided to explore.

## ***1.2 The humorless woman: feminist humor studies***

As far as the dominant theories of humor are concerned, it is a salient characteristic that they are authored by men and their arguments are genderless. In the late 1980's and early 1990's, feminist scholars such as Regina Barreca (1988, 1991), Judy Little (1983), Regenia Gagnier (1988) and Lisa Merrill (1988) have stepped in to offer analyses that would not be so gender blind.

Although feminist scholarship on humor has not produced a vast quantity of works ever since, the available studies have consistently discussed the use of sexist humor in popular culture to point out how it is employed to reinforce patriarchal norms. One specific concern of these studies has been to deconstruct the stereotype of the humorless/unfunny woman, which is present in Western literature at least since the seventeenth century (Gray, 1994, p.3). It posits that women are “naturally” less funny than men or not funny at all – and, when engaged in joking, they are “unfeminine”. To exemplify how pervasive and long standing this stereotype is both in scholarship and popular culture, I mention Reginald Blyth’s book *Humor in English Literature*, that asserted in 1959 that “women have not only no humor in themselves but are the cause of the extinction of it in others” (Blyth, 1959, p. 14). Forty-one years later, American comedian Jerry Lewis declared that, as a viewer, he had “trouble” with female comedians (Day, 2010). In 2007, an article by Christopher Hitchens, titled “Why Women Aren’t Funny”, was published by *Vanity Fair* magazine.

Some of the most widely accepted ideas about humor are informed by sexist stereotypes. Firstly, the thought that humor is what sets humans apart from animals. As Simone De Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949) points out, traditional western thinking has long identified men as representing humanity, whereas woman is defined only consequentially, in relation to man, as his Other. Women are associated with nature, emotion, cyclical time, while men are associated with the opposite and (more) valuable side of the binary, i.e. humanness, reason, linear evolution. The logic behind the stereotype is then simple: if humor is proper to the human; men represent the human and women represent nature; and human is opposed to nature, then it follows that women cannot do humor. In the words of Frances Gray, “only when laughter is the sign of the civilized man (...) do women appear to suffer from a mysterious frigidity of the funny bone” (1994, p.7). Also, if one follows Bergson’s argument that one laughs at repetitive acts or “mechanical inelasticity” (2005, p.6a), the cyclical characteristic of women’s reproductive system, in comparison with the (imagined) linearity of men’s, can be used to justify why they are laughed at but are not seen as

capable of eliciting laughter. In fact, the reduction of women to their reproductive organs is at the core of the three examples of arguments against the funniness of women that I have selected. Blyth said that “in every way women correspond to and are representative of nature. Is there any humor in nature?” (Blyth, 1959, p.15). Jerry Lewis stated that his “trouble” with female comedians is that he sees a woman as “a producing machine that brings babies into the world” (Day, 2010). Finally, Hitchens argued that “for women, reproduction is, if not the only thing, certainly the main thing... For women the question of funniness is essentially a secondary one. They are innately aware of a higher calling that is no laughing matter” (Hitchens, 2007). Another of Bergson’s allegedly “neutral” ideas that can help explain the pervasiveness of the stereotype is that humor is conceptualized to appeal to intelligence alone, requiring us to strip down of all emotion (2005, p. 4b). According to this argumentation, women should by definition be disassociated with humor, since they are regarded as being too emotional and lack intelligence (Gray, 1994, p. 7; Merrill, 1988, p.278)

Secondly, there is the idea that humor is related to body and sexuality. Feminist scholars argue that the repression of women’s comic endeavors is related to the repression of their sexuality. According to Critchley, humor is a bodily affair because telling a joke involves a mastery of pauses, postures and hesitations (2002, p. 6). Also, “jokes invite a corporeal response” (p. 7). Comedians use their bodies in order to cause a bodily reaction in other people. The desired reaction – laughter – is a spasmodic display of pleasure, a definition that could also be used to describe an orgasm. Mahadev Apte highlights that “in many cultures, norms of modesty cause women who laugh freely and openly in public to be viewed as loose, sexually promiscuous, and lacking in self-discipline” (1985, p. 75). One also cannot help but be reminded of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his *Letter to M. D’Alembert on the Theatre*, in which he condemns the profession of actor in general, but considers it especially immoral for a woman, because she is displaying her body in public, just as a prostitute does. His views can be extended to women comics. Another element that contributes to the

reinforcement of the bodily aspect of the stereotype is women's "obligation" to be concerned with working on their "beautiful" appearance and fulfill the role of looking like a desirable sexual object in the (imaginary) eye of the male observer. "Comedy plays with the distortion of the body, and grimaces distort the face. All this was incompatible with a societal politics of femininity, which required women to be pretty, modest and decent" (Kotthoff, 2006, p. 5)

As humor was historically constructed as a masculine domain, values attributed to the ideal form of manhood, called hegemonic masculinity by R.W. Connell (2005) are consequently attributed to the exercise of humor. One of them is aggressiveness. It is common for superiority and relief arguments to be used as a means to define humor as a socially accepted aggression. Comedian George Carlin, as cited by Gilbert (2004, p. 10) has a quote whose metaphors (in italics added by me) exemplify this well. "[Stand-up comedy] is a socially accepted form of aggression. You get to name the *targets*; you get to *fire the bullet*. And the wonderful part is, after you've finished, you then say: 'hey, can't you *take a joke*? That's humor, Sir! What's the matter with you?'" Besides aggressiveness, humor has been equated with dominance, even though a comedian depends on the audience's approval to survive. Jerry Seinfeld (as cited in Borns, 1987, p.20), says: "To laugh is to be dominated". Nielsen argues that "when a person tells a joke he is in a position of control; but when he hears a joke, it is the other person who is in control" (1993, p. 289). Perhaps the words of Frances Gray are the best ones to summarize this idea: "in a culture which truly believes that humor is what separates us from the beasts, to define a joke, to be the class who decides *what is funny*, is to make a massive assumption of power" (1994, p. 8).

For all these reasons, feminist scholars have been arguing that women comedians are potentially threatening to the patriarchal *status quo*. They defend writing and performing jokes as an empowering act. According to Regina Barreca (1988; 1991), Judy Little (1983) and Mahadev Apte (1985), among others, women doing comedy are taking in their hands the power to comment on societal norms. They are taking control over their bodies and giving themselves a voice. To these

scholars, the stereotype of the unfunny woman in fact is a patriarchal mechanism that reflects men's fear of losing the monopoly of word and critique. Comedian Anne Beatts, as cited by Philip Auslander, says: "they [men] unconsciously are afraid that the ultimate joke will be the size of their sexual apparatus" (1993, p. 317). Of course jokes about small penises have already been made. What Beatts is saying is that, since humor is about societal norms, marginalized groups can use it to ridicule what oppresses them.

Feminist scholars also argue that doing humor as a woman means changing the traditional ways comedy is made and what is defined as good comedy. To put it shortly, women's comedy is "women's writing", in the sense defined by Helene Cixous (1976). Lisa Merrill develops this argument, saying that "perhaps, women's so-called 'lack of humor' is, in fact, a refusal to comply with the *premise* of a joke" (1988, p.273). According to her, since men are the ones who hold the monopoly of humor, thus defining what is funny, the jokes that allude to women's experiences do not appeal to men and get easily dismissed as "unfunny".

## **Chapter 2: Stand-up comedy's relevance and presence in Brazil**

This chapter will define what stand-up comedy is and discuss how this genre has been often classified as masculine. Then, I will briefly summarize the history of stand-up comedy in Brazil, the country where the research was conducted. The reader will also be introduced to prominent women stand-up comedians in Brazil. Lastly, I will talk about the heated debate on political incorrectness that has been surrounding Brazilian stand-up comedy.

### ***2.1 Some considerations about the genre***

Stand-up comedy consists basically of a comedian alone onstage, with nothing but a microphone. There is no scenario, no costume, no props. The text, which has to be original and authorial, features comments about society, popular culture and daily events. Stand-up is, therefore, a kind of comedy centered on opinion and that blurs the distinction between the performer and his/her stage persona. It is usually done in bars, which allows the audience to sit up close to the comedian and talk back if they want to. The comic effect arises from the close interaction between the comedian and the audience. "Your laughter is the single end of stand-up", says John Limon (2000, p.12). For this reason, it is a "self-correcting genre": if a particular joke does not seem to amuse the audience, the comedian can change it in the course of the performance. Joanne Gilbert argues that this highly interactional character of stand-up comedy makes it a dialogue, rather than a monologue (2004, p. 55). Another defining characteristic of stand-up comedy is speed. Since many comedy bars feature a number of comedians every night, time limits are usually set – therefore, the more frequently and harder a comedian is able to make the audience laugh during the assigned time, the more successful he or she will become in the genre in the business.



All humor has been traditionally considered a male realm. But stand-up might be the most *macho* of all comedy genres. It is common for comedians and scholars to classify stand-up comedy as male-defined, male-centered and male-oriented. John Limon argues that stand-up was invented and popularized by heterosexual male comedians.. When comedy nightclubs started to appear in the United States, heterosexual men comprised the vast majority of the audience. According to Limon, the affirmation of male heterosexuality (and values associated with it) therefore became frequent in the genre, through sexist and homophobic puns. Limon mentions a psychological study made in 1975 that states that none of the 75 stand-up comedians interviewed was homosexual, “which cannot mean more than none was willing to be taken as homosexual, despite the high visibility of homosexuals elsewhere in the show business” (Limon, 2000, p. 32).

Although nowadays women and LGBTQIA people also do stand-up comedy, with varying levels of success, the idea of stand-up as being “masculine” is still widespread. Some scholars even interpret the microphone as a symbolic phallus.

A performance genre that apparently depends on the dominance of the audience by the performer through phallic assertion does not seem a promising candidate as a medium for women’s expression. (...) Women comics who choose to remain within the conventional form and performance contexts of stand-up comedy are essentially appropriating a cultural form traditionally associated with, and still dominated by, male practitioners. Undoubtedly, they are offering themselves to ‘the oppressor’s forbidding or disapproving gaze’ and run all the risks attendant on doing so. (Auslander, 1993, p. 318-320).

Since women comedians are subjected to the “oppressors’ forbidding or disapproving gaze”, feminist scholars have discussed the issue of them having to act “male” to earn recognition. Joanne Gilbert argues that women comedians suffer from a paradoxical pressure. They have to make ends meet, which many times requires “playing it safe” accordingly to “male-identified standards”, and are at the same time required to put those standards into question (2004, p. 23).

Most feminist studies argue that, when women refuse to follow the male established patterns in comedy and bring their experiences and perspectives to the table, they give the female members of the audience something to identify with. They are thus building a community – a feminine arena within the traditionally masculine space.

In the hands of the most skilled practitioners this community becomes a strategic community, a moment at which a shared subjectivity that excludes men is created under our very noses, again placing the men in the audience in the position women have traditionally occupied as comedy spectators. (Auslander, 1993, p. 320-321)

Lisa Merrill has a similar argument. She says that, when a man jokes, women have to put themselves into his shoes in order to find it funny – even if that requires denying her own perspective (Merrill, 1988, p. 279). Stand-up comedy addressed to women, on the contrary, not only provoke women’s amusement but also their empathy. According to Merrill, this can make them become more aware of patriarchy.

## ***2.2 Stand-up comedy in Brazil: A brief history***

The first stand-up comedy show in Brazil was performed in 1958 by José Vasconcellos, a radio comedian that also made it big on TV. He starred *A Toca do Zé*<sup>1</sup>, the first ever comic show on Brazilian TV, in which he performed sketches dressed as different characters. Vasconcellos toured on theaters, making jokes alone onstage. At the time, the format was not called “stand-up comedy”. The performance rendered a floppy disk, *Eu Sou o Espetáculo*<sup>2</sup>, released in 1960. The album sold over 100,000 copies, a record for the time (Plasse, 2012).

One of Brazil’s most iconic comedians, Chico Anysio, is also considered to have performed stand-up comedy during the 1970’s even though the show did not receive this name (Sou Paz, 2012). Jô Soares, another prominent comedian, does the same. Since 1988, Jô hosts a talk show

similar to David Letterman's. The interviews and musical guests are the central part of the show, so Jô's jokes are restricted to the opening, when he appears at the center of the studio making comments about daily events.

Considering these endeavors, it can be said that stand-up comedy in Brazil is almost as old as it is in the United States – however, only recently this kind of performance started to be called “stand-up comedy” and perceived as a genre. This happened in 2004, when the first self-titled stand-up comedy groups were formed in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. The first group in São Paulo was *Clube da Comédia*, founded by actors Marcelo Mansfield, Rafinha Bastos, Marcela Leal, Oscar Filho, Márcio Ribeiro and Henrique Pantarotto, most of whom were part of the play *Terça Insana*<sup>3</sup> (Clube da Comédia, 2013). They started performing weekly at the bars Beverly Hills and Mr. Blues (Leal, first interview), both in the fancy neighborhood of Moema, initially to very small audiences<sup>4</sup>. In 2006, Ribeiro and Pantarotto were replaced by Danilo Gentili and Diogo Portugal, who were not graduated actors, but admirers of the genre. Little by little, the bars became too small, and they moved the show to Frei Caneca theater, where they stayed for seven years. The group no longer exists, but its members continue to meet in other endeavors. *Comédia em Pé* was the first group in Rio de Janeiro. Founded by actors Fabio Porchat, Fernando Caruso, Paulo Carvalho, Cláudio Torres Gonzaga and Léo Lins (Comédia em Pé, 2013), it followed a similar route: first performing in small bars, the group made it to the theaters when the venues started getting too packed. The main cast is nowadays comprised of four comedians, none of them from the original members, except for Gonzaga.

After *Clube da Comédia* and *Comédia em Pé* became well known, other groups were formed in the two cities, as well as in other urban centers. Two of the best known stand-up comedy groups elsewhere are *Queijo, Comédia e Cachaça*, in Minas Gerais, and *Comédia Capital*, in Brasília. These smaller groups are known informally among comedians as the “second generation” (Paiva, second interview). The main difference between the first and second generation groups is

that the latter is usually not composed by professional actors. Rather, they were formed by people from varying professional backgrounds, who got interested in the genre thanks to American shows aired by Brazilian cable TV or after watching performances by the two first groups. Online forums about stand-up comedy, mainly on Google's social network, Orkut, also helped to form groups. The first generation supported the second. It was common for members of the two pioneer groups to appear as guests or masters of ceremonies on the second generation's shows, as a means to attract audiences.

It did not take long for television networks to become interested in stand-up comedians. In 2008, Jô Soares' talk show on the largest Brazilian network, TV Globo, featured a stand-up performance every night. Another show by Globo, *Altas Horas*, also started to invite stand-up comedians to the stage. But the first channel to bet on the stand-up comedians' potential for stardom was Band, which released *Custe o que Custar (CQC)*<sup>5</sup> in 2008 (CQC, 2013). The show is a version of the Argentinean production *Caiga quien Caiga*. The format, which resembles the news, features three anchors: a main one, sitting in the center, who makes most of the comments, and two others by his side. In Brazil, the main one is veteran comedian Marcelo Tas, who participated in a number of Brazilian TV shows in the 1980's and early 1990's, but had been away from TV since then. The others were fresh names from the stand-up scene (which was then unknown to most of the general public, especially the people who did not live in big cities): Marco Luque, from stand-up comedy group *Comédia ao Cubo*, and Rafinha Bastos, from *Clube da Comédia*. The reports and interviews were made by four men: Danilo Gentili and Oscar Filho, from *Clube da Comédia*; and the journalists Rafael Cortez and Felipe Andreoli. The *CQC* comedians became celebrities. In 2011, Danilo Gentili was given his own talk show on the same channel, called *Agora é Tarde*<sup>6</sup>, and included other prominent stand-up comedians (Marcelo Mansfield, Léo Lins and Murilo Couto) in the show.

Thanks to *CQC*'s success, stand-up comedians from both generations started to be hired by

TV networks, as stars or screenwriters, even though what they do there is not stand-up comedy. They do acting, interviews, pranks, impersonations, journalistic endeavors and satire of other TV shows. After *CQC*, the most famous TV show to feature stand-up comedians is *Comédia MTV*. Investing in comedians was part of MTV's strategy to maintain popularity among young audiences, at a time of high competition with You Tube and music on portable devices (Motta, 2009). The network started this strategy timidly in 2009, by giving a stand-up comedian from Rio, Marcelo Adnet, a show that lasted mere 15 minutes. The show was practically a stand-up performance, since Adnet appeared sitting in a room talking to the camera about random topics. Adnet's success made comedy obtain more and more space on the channel's programming. In 2009, Adnet's stand-up counterpart and then fiancée, Dani Calabresa, was hired to star *Furo MTV*, a show that mocked the daily news, alongside actor Bento Ribeiro (MTV,2013). The comedy group *Deznecessários*, who had become famous on theaters for their performances of stand-up comedy and improvisation, was hired the following year (MTV, 2013). In 2010, all of them were reunited for *Comédia MTV*. The show, which mixed live sketches and pre-recorded comic videos, pleased audiences and critics. During the two years of its existence, rumors of contract offers from bigger TV networks (especially for Adnet and Calabresa) were frequent (Rolim, 2013). In the beginning of 2013, the cast give in. Adnet and Tatá Werneck, from *Deznecessários*, were hired by Globo. Calabresa joined the team of *CQC*'s reporters (Oliveira, 2012). Other shows that have hired stand-up comedians as stars or screenwriters include: *Legendários*, on network Record; *Piadaría*, Mix TV; *Zorra Total* and *Casseta&Planeta*, TV Globo; *Mundo Canibal*, on Multishow.

Stand-up comedy became a big business in Brazil as well. Companies started to hire comedians for corporate events. According to the comedians I interviewed, the most famous ones, such as *CQC*'s members, charge up to R\$40,000 (approximately US\$20,000) to perform in such events, while the second generation charges between R\$ 3,000 (US\$1,500) and R\$8,000 (US\$4,000). Companies also started to sponsor stand-up comedy festivals, such as *Risadaria*, which

happens in São Paulo since 2010 and has been supported by brands as large as Sadia, Lange Rover and Unilever (Risadaria, 2013). At this point, actors and comedians who were famous for other genres (such as Marcelo Madureira, famous for the TV show *Casseta & Planeta Urgente*, aired by TV Globo on the 1990's; and Nany People, a drag queen who has participated of a number of plays and TV shows) started their own stand-up solos to take advantage of the hype. Although stand-up comedians do not call them that way, for the sake of categorizing I will call them the third generation of Brazilian stand-up comedy, even though they engage with the genre only occasionally. In 2010, Rafinha Bastos and Danilo Gentili opened in São Paulo the first comedy bar entirely dedicated to stand-up comedy. It is called *Comedians* (in English, instead of the Portuguese word “comediantes”) and the description on its press release says it is “the first bar in the country to function as a legitimate American comedy club” (Comedians, 2013). Free schools such as *Casa do Saber* and SESC, in São Paulo, which offer crash courses and workshops for the general public, also started to offer workshops on how to perform stand-up comedy at the end of the 2000's.

With the proliferation of stand-up workshops, a fourth generation of stand-up comedians is coming about. But it is much harder to become famous now, as there are more people to compete with and the second generation is not willing to support the late boomers. Criss Paiva, from the second generation, exemplifies this attitude: “these kids think just because they are funny among their friends, they can become stand-up comedians. I hope there will be a natural selection. They have been doing corporate events for R\$500 (US\$250)”<sup>7</sup>

### ***2.3 Women among Brazilian stand-up comedians***

Women have always been a minority among professional comedians in Brazil. On television, the situation is especially grave: apart from a few actresses who managed to show their comic talents, such as Nair Bello and Derci Gonçalves, as a general rule the function of women in

TV shows is decorative: they are the silent “hotties” or stage assistants, dressed in provocative attire or a bathing suit. In those shows, such as *A Praca e Nossa* and *Zorra Total*, women rarely make jokes: they are mostly the ladder for a man’s joke or the butt of his joke. A woman has never starred her own comic TV show, such as José Vasconcellos or Jô Soares.

The rise of stand-up comedy has been helping to change this situation. Although they are still a minority, the new generations of stand-up comedians have a handful of successful women. Four of them were hired by television: Dani Calabresa (*Comédia MTV*), Marcela Leal (*Saturday Night Live Brasil*), Carol Zoccoli (*Saturday Night Live Brasil*) and Mhel Marrer (as a screenwriter for *Legendários* and *Piadarria*). Women from improvisation groups, a trend after stand-up comedy, also caught the attention of TV producers. They are Tatá Werneck (*Comédia MTV*) and Miá Mello (*Legendários, Casseta&Planeta*). Female stand-up comedians have thus widened the space for women to appear in humoristic TV shows for their comic abilities instead of their sex appeal. Although none of them has her own TV show (usually, they are the only woman, or one of two women, in an all-male cast), this marks a positive advancement.

The most successful women in Brazilian stand-up comedy are the following: from the first generation, there are actresses **Marcela Leal** and **Dani Calabresa**. Leal is a founder of *Clube da Comédia* and known as “the first lady of stand-up comedy”. She has done a series of solo performances around the country and worked as screenwriter for cable TV channels. In 2012, she participated of the Brazilian version of *Saturday Night Live*, on Rede TV, as one of the two women in the cast. Calabresa performed as a guest of *Clube da Comédia* for many years. She became famous nationwide on MTV with shows such as *Furo*, *Furfles MTV* and *Comédia MTV*. She is now part of *CQC*’s cast.

From the second generation, there is **Carol Zoccoli**, **Mhel Marrer**, **Micheli Machado** and **Criss Paiva**. Zoccoli has a master’s degree in Philosophy and started performing alone in bars in 2007. She then formed the group *Comédia na Cara* and, in 2009, was one of the finalists of a

contest to become a member of *CQC*. The contest has paved the way for her to have her own radio show the following year, and to work as a screenwriter. Nowadays, Zoccoli teaches on a stand-up comedy workshop in São Paulo. She was also part of the cast of *Saturday Night Life Brasil*. **Mhel Marrer** is an English translator who won a contest of amateur stand-up comedy on You Tube promoted by Rafinha Bastos in 2009. After that, she joined a series of open mics until being selected for *Seleção do Humor Stand-up*. She worked as a screenwriter for the TV shows *Legendários*, on Record, and *Piadaria*, on Mix TV. **Micheli Machado** is a former child actress who has been in a number of TV shows in the 1980's, but became unknown again when reaching adolescence. She is married to the owner of Beverly Hills bar, one of the first places to open space for stand-up comedians in Sao Paulo. In 2010, when Carol Zoccoli wanted to form a weekly show with mostly women comedians at that bar, she convinced Machado to join the group. Since then, she is a professional comedian. The show, called *Humor de Salto Alto*<sup>8</sup>, is still happening, but only Machado remains from the original formation. **Criss Paiva** used to be a school teacher. She started her stand-up career in 2008 in Sorocaba, in the countryside of São Paulo's state, where she founded the first stand-up comedy group of the town. She then joined comedy shows as a guest in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Although she was never hired by a TV network, she has appeared in a number of humoristic shows. She has been part of *Humor de Salto Alto* for over two years.

From the third generation, there is **Angela Dip**, actress and ballerina, who acted in a number of plays, soap operas and series on TV Globo. She started doing stand-up comedy in 2009 with a solo called *La Putanesca*. In 2012, at the age of 50, she started another solo, called *Angela Dip Só para Mulheres*<sup>9</sup>, in which men were not allowed in the audience. **Maira Dvorek** is a well known actress in the theater. In 2008, she joined the first stand-up comedy festival in Belo Horizonte, and was invited to perform on Jô Soares' talk show. In 2011, she joined Marcelo Madureira and Marcelo Mansfield on the stand-up show spectacle *Desaforados*<sup>10</sup>. She has not done any stand-up comedy since. Among the fourth generation, there are no female names that have made it big.



## 2.4 The “politically correct” debate in Brazil

Brazilian stand-up comedy has been marked by a debate concerning “politically correctness”. Some comedians have been accused of racism, sexism and homophobia. For example, the first slutwalk<sup>11</sup> made in São Paulo had Rafinha Bastos as its main target. The march ended in front of the *Comedians* bar. Back in that time, Bastos included the following joke in his routine: “every woman I see whining that she was raped is fucking ugly. What is she complaining about? She should thank God. This, to you, was not a crime, but an opportunity. Men who do this do not deserve jail, they deserve a hug”<sup>12</sup> (Rodrigues, 2011). The following year, further accusations of offending minorities cost Bastos his job on *CQC*. When the three hosts of the show, which was aired live, commented how pretty singer Wanessa Camargo looked as a pregnant woman, Bastos said: “I would fuck her and the baby”<sup>13</sup> (Correa, 2011). The singer and her husband sued the comedian, and network Band dismissed him. Months after his dismissal, a judge ordered Bastos’ first DVD, *A Arte do Insulto*<sup>14</sup>, to be removed from stores, because of a joke that mentioned APAE, the Brazilian Association of Parents and Friends of Disabled People. Despite these controversies, Bastos was hired by a smaller network, Rede TV, in 2012. There, he starred *Saturday Night Live Brasil*, along with other stand-up comedians. After receiving mixed reviews and getting poor audience rates (“Após baixa audiência, Rede TV cancela reprises do SNL aos domingos”, 2012), the show was cancelled in 2013.

As organizations representing minorities increase their public condemnation of such jokes, mainstream comedians and their fans complain about a “politically correct patrol”. Jô Soares said: “enough with the politically correct control. (...) I think humor has no limits, but rudeness does. If it is funny, then humor is forgiven. Nobody can censor it”<sup>15</sup> (Pereira, 2011). Marcelo Tas said: “The limit of humor is funniness. The politically correct is a plague that came to make a hell out of people’s lives. I am totally against it. I find it disgusting to be obligated to say ‘afro-Brazilian’. Not

being able to joke about jews? What's that? Humor has to be funny<sup>16</sup>” (Moratelli, 2011). “The politically correct is the biggest threat to humor in Brazil today”, said Diogo Portugal during a press conference for the stand-up comedy festival *Risadaria*. “It is a problem bigger than the ozone layer. Not just for humor, for humanity”, complemented Marcelo Madureira, on the same occasion (Bergamo, 2010). Some comedians among the new stand-up generation have adopted the expression “politically incorrect” as a label, as if it was a sign of resistance. Danilo Gentili, for example, detains the domain [www.politicamenteincorreto.com](http://www.politicamenteincorreto.com) (“politically incorrect”, in Portuguese) and has released a book and a DVD with the same title.

The controversy has inspired a documentary by filmmaker Pedro Arantes. *O Riso dos Outros*<sup>17</sup>, released in 2012, displays the two sides of the debate. Scholars, politicians and activists defend a responsible approach to humor, one that does not perpetuate the negative stereotypes that have been historically used to justify discrimination against minorities. “There are other ways of doing humor. There are ways to make people laugh without humiliating others”<sup>18</sup>, says congressman Jean Wylis, the first openly gay man to be elected for Brazil’s chamber of deputies, in the film. On the other side, stand-up comedians claim that they are being censored and that jokes are not to be taken seriously. “It is hard to reach out to people and make them think when you are being gagged, when you are afraid to speak”<sup>19</sup>, says Alyson Vilela. “People have to stop interpreting jokes as if they were the comedian’s opinion 100% of the time”, says stand-up comedian Mauricio Meirelles<sup>20</sup>. The movie also features famous comedians who are critic of their counterparts in stand-up comedy. Cartoonist Andre Dahmer says: “If humor always has a target, let us make the right victims. There are so many people who deserve a beat. Why beating up women and black people, who have already been beaten up a lot?”<sup>21</sup>.

The debate is heated among the public as well. Dozens of comments are made on the documentary’s You Tube page every day. The majority accuses the people who want to discuss humor as being “stressed out”, “tedious” and “annoying”. “Going to a psychiatric sometimes is

good for you. I prefer to laugh! And to make others laugh!”<sup>22</sup>, says one commentator. These YouTube comments reflect how “society puts a high premium on humor” (Gray, 1994, p. 4). Humor is considered to be therapeutic, healthy. However, laughter has not always been seen this way. Frances Gray argues that there is a “fetishization of humor” (p. 5) and, in such a context, being accused of humorlessness equals being accused of being inferior (p. 4-5).

One can identify three main tendencies in opinions/behaviors towards the politically correct debate in Brazilian stand-up comedy, namely: a) the responsibility approach, which views justice to historically marginalized people a priority to be taken when doing art; b) the freedom of speech approach, which acknowledges and defends minorities’ rights, but considers that art should not be restricted in any way; and c) the “funny’s funny” approach, which argues that humor is not meant to be taken seriously. Therefore, when a comedian uses a term criticized for being derogative, that does not constitute discrimination.

In her book *Verbal Hygiene*, Deborah Cameron discusses the issue of “politically correctness” at length. She presents interesting arguments that help us understanding the issues at stake in the debate and make sense of the three dominant positions mentioned above. Cameron says that it is common, among general public discourse, to argue that there is a “correct” usage of language which must be “defended”. But why are people so protective of language? According to her, it’s because language is an element that defines identity: how we speak defines who we are. Also, it presupposes communal agreement. “There is no language without normativity” (1995, p. 163). Disagreements about how to name things thus indicate a breach in the group’s (imagined) uniform identity, and in the possibility of communication (p. 121). There is, therefore, a *politics of naming*: being the one who gets to define the norm is a position of power.

Cameron thus proposes that the reason why the debate on “politically correctness” is so heated might not be just bigotry or opposition to minorities’ rights. She argues that many people engage in this debate because it is about how language should be used (p. 121). To her, what the

defenders of language change have done is efface the illusion of language as being neutral. They have shown that speaking is about political positioning. People now have to take a closer look at words they always took for granted. This, of course, generates anxiety.

What many people dislike, specifically, is the politicizing of their words against their will. By calling traditional usage into question, reformers have in effect forced everyone (...) to declare a position in respect of gender, race or whatever. There is a choice of possible positions: you can say ‘Ms. A is the chair (person)’ and convey approval of feminism, or you can say ‘Miss A. is the chairman’ and convey a more conservative attitude. What you cannot do anymore is to select either alternative and convey by it nothing more than ‘a certain woman holds a particular office. (p.119)

An aspect of the debate that can be used as an example of the politics of naming is that defenders of minorities do not label themselves “politically correct”. Cameron points out that this term is only used by the conservative side, to qualify their opponents. The fact that the term “politically correct” has stuck in the meaning given by the conservatives demonstrates a victory of the right-wing side in the politics of naming (p. 123). This process can be exemplified with a quote featured on *O Riso dos Outros*. Ana Maria Goncalves, writer and black civil rights activist, says:

The person that wants to contest all of this is nowadays defined as being ‘square’ and conservative when, actually, it is the other way around. I think we should reflect on this inversion of meanings. When one makes a ‘politically incorrect’ joke, say, when one is racist, this person is not doing anything subversive.<sup>23</sup>

As said earlier, a common rhetorical strategy of those who complain about “politically correctness” is to dismiss the criticism as useless, frivolous and boring. On the documentary, comedian Mauricio Meirelles has a quote that exemplifies this way of thinking. “I think this is about defending causes that don’t exist. The politically correct guy is the one that defends someone else without this person actually needing defense”<sup>24</sup>. At the same time, comedians say that the

“politically correct” is a serious threat to freedom of speech. Remember that Soares, Tas, Madureira and Portugal called it “a plague”, “a problem bigger than the ozone layer” and “a threat to humanity”. Cameron points out this contradiction:

How can intervening in language be both a trivial diversion from politics and a threat to our most fundamental liberties? How can it be at the same time such useless, superficial tinkering (...) and (...) an attack on language and communication so serious that it has got to be challenged? (p.140)

Cameron’s book is useful for stressing that language is normative by definition – there are always conventions and limits. For this very reason, “it is nonsensical to suppose we could ever have, or for that matter want, absolute freedom of speech” (p. 163). It is not freedom that is at stake, for freedom never existed. What is at stake is the power to name and define. It is the power to establish common sense around *your* values. Under this light, one can understand why “politically correctness” has become such a lively debate when it comes to humor. As humor’s main function is argued to be re/producing common sense, comedians are struggling to maintain the illusion that they detain and master such common sense. Breaches in the audience’s perception or acceptance of the jokes put into question their own validity as social commentators – and, thereby, their own value in the business of stand-up comedy as well.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter, I will disclose the methods that were chosen for this research and justify their usefulness according to my research questions and aims. I will also present details about how the data was gathered.

### *3.1 Rationale for methods*

My aim was to find out how the unfunny woman stereotype affects Brazilian women stand-up comedians in two instances: (1) their daily professional interactions with other agents in the stand up scene, such as fellow male comedians and bar owners; (2) their creative process, i.e how they write and perform their texts onstage in a context of interaction with the audience. For this reason, the field research has combined semi-structured interviews (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007), participant observation (Jorgensen, 1989) and content analysis (Reinharz and Kulick, 2007). I have interviewed comedians, then watched their live stand-up comedy performances, recording them in audio, and finally analyzed the routines according to what I heard in the interviews. The combination of these methods allowed me to see the comedians put into practice the routines whose creation they had described me.

I was not a stranger to the work of my research subjects. I already had notions about their style of joking thanks to You Tube. Watching videos, however, does not compare to engaging with those performances personally, as part of the audience. As the close interaction between comedian and audience is one of the key elements of the genre, I consider participant observation to be a crucial method in a research of this type. Audio recordings were preferred to guarantee the effectiveness of participant observation, since a recorder would not catch attention from other people in the audience. I would also not be distracted by having to frame a video, as this is *not* the experience a regular audience member has. As soon as I left each show, I took notes. I must stress

that this field research was my first time ever attending stand-up comedy shows. I take this to be an advantage as I had no previous ideas of what being in such a show feels like.

### ***3.2 The research subjects***

I aimed for a pool of five prominent comedians and ended up with Marcela Leal, Mhel Marrer, Carol Zoccoli, Criss Paiva and Angela Dip. Here is how this configuration came about: two months ahead of the field research, I contacted all of the comedians mentioned in the previous chapter by e-mail, prioritizing the ones that would have shows scheduled for the month I would be there, i.e. April, 2013. On the e-mail, I explained who I was, what my master's programme consisted of, and what my research was about. Zoccoli, Leal and Mahrer were the first ones to reply positively, followed by Dip. Unfortunately, I did not get a reply from Dani Calabresa or her press office, despite my many attempts. As Calabresa is the most famous of them, I considered her participation extremely important. I assume she did not reply because April was precisely the month of her debut on *CQC*, so she must have had many requests at the time. Her absence, however, does not affect the findings, as the rest of the research subjects also have successful careers, however on smaller scale. Paiva and Machado, from *Humor de Salto Alto*, also did not reply me at first. I only reached Paiva in Brazil, thanks to Angela Dip's mediation.

### ***3.3 Details about the shows attended and a disclaimer about Angela Dip***

I have attended the following shows: Marcela Leal and Mhel Marrer performed at *Seleção do Humor Stand-up*, a show that features a rotating cast of fourteen stand-up comedians, out of which Leal and Marrer are the only women. It has been happening since 2008 in two theaters: Teatro Folha, in São Paulo, and Teatro Amil, in Campinas, a city around one-hour drive away from

São Paulo. Both theaters are inside shopping malls in upper class neighborhoods. In April 2013, the ticket for this show cost R\$40 (approximately US\$20), a price that might be prohibitive for the lower classes (the minimum wage in Brazil is R\$775, around US\$386). According to the producers, more than 260,000 people have attended the show since its debut (*Seleção do Humor Stand-Up*, 2013). In the last season, which wrapped up in mid-April 2013, there were two weekly shows, on Friday and Saturday nights, each one comprised of three comedians performing fifteen minutes each, and a master of ceremonies. I have attended the show in São Paulo, on a Friday, the 12<sup>th</sup> of April, 2013. The theater was filled with approximately one third of its capacity, which is of 305 seats (Teatro Folha, 2013). Leal opened the night, followed by Ben Ludmer and then by Marrer.

Zoccoli started a solo in April 2013, titled *Não tô Aqui pra Julgar*<sup>25</sup> at Anhembi Morumbi Theater, in the eastern zone of the city of São Paulo, which is lower-middle-class. The theater, however, is inside a private university and the ticket also cost R\$40. The show, which lasted for one hour, had one weekly performance for a month. I attended the second of these performances, on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April, 2013. The theater looked almost empty: it has 758 seats (Teatro Anhembi Morumbi, 2013) but around 80 people were there. This solo was Zoccoli's first stand-up comedy work after *Saturday Night Live Brasil* was canceled.

As mentioned, Criss Paiva performed at Beverly Hills Bar, in the fancy neighborhood of Moema. The show *Humor de Salto Alto* was created by Zoccoli and Micheli Machado in 2010. Zoccoli said in the interviews that the premise was inverting the usual configuration of stand-up groups and shows, in which women are the minority. It started with four comedians: Machado, Zoccoli, Wanessa Morgado and Andréia Barreto. Each night would have a different male master of ceremonies. Morgado and Barreto soon left the spectacle, so Mhel Marrer and Criss Paiva were invited. Marrer did not stay long in the show either (during our interview, she preferred not to disclose her reasons for leaving) and, in 2011, Zoccoli moved to Canada for a year. Machado and Paiva then decided that they would no longer incorporate other women in the permanent cast.



Therefore, on most nights, *Humor de Salto Alto* has two women and a man. The bar, which charges an entrance fee of R\$20, has 150 seats. On the night I attended (27<sup>th</sup> of April, 2013) around 100 people showed up.

As for Angela Dip, she was not performing any stand-up show in the month of April, as she is not a full-time stand-up comedian. At the time of my field research, she had just finished a soap opera and was working on a play for children. Even though her interviews were a little bit shorter than the others, and I could not attend her stand-up performance, I find her inclusion important for two reasons: first, because she is the only member of the third generation in my pool and this group should be represented, even though it is smaller and does not consider stand-up comedy a full time occupation. Second and most importantly, Dip had a solo that did not allow men in the audience. I was then interested in exploring the ways in which this show could be subversive to the idea of stand-up comedy as a male genre, as well as hearing her experiences of community building with the women in the audience. In order to make up for the lack of a live stand-up performance, I will use the videos from both of Dip's spectacles, *La Putanesca* and *Angela Dip só para Mulheres*, to analyze her comic style. Unfortunately, the use of videos does not allow me to obtain full insight about her interaction with the audience. I advise readers to bear this in mind.

## **Chapter 4: Tendencies in Brazilian women's stand-up comedy**

In this chapter, I will introduce the comic styles of my research subjects. Their performances will be evaluated according to three categories of analysis, namely: (1) the way they occupy the stage and their tone of voice; (2) the way they dress and display their sexuality; (3) Joke themes and text structure. The analysis of these features demonstrates some of the ways in which the comedians perform their marginality, i.e. how they have to deal with the stereotype of the humorless/unfunny woman and how they must position themselves as women in a genre of comedy traditionally classified as masculine.

### ***4.1 Entering and occupying the stage, tone of voice***

I have observed that all my research subjects have a moderate way of entering the stage. Except for one of the available videos of *La Putanesca*, in which Dip enters the stage dancing, they all get onstage walking at a regular pace. They then present themselves, ask the audience how they are doing and proceed to the routine. In the course of the performance, the five stand-up comedians remain in one spot most of the time.

The tone of voice is also moderate, the same they use in the regular conversations they had with me. Occasionally, Carol Zoccoli and Criss Paiva raise their voice as a strategy to achieve incongruity. Zoccoli's solo has what she calls "a crescendo of rage": in the second half of the show, she mentions things that enrage her and her voice raises up continuously until the point of explosion. She finishes the solo with a set of jokes expressing indignation for the unattainable look of supermodels, and directs her fury at the Brazilian model Gisele Bündchen:

She [Bündchen] just had a baby now. Two weeks later, she made a photo shoot in a bikini!

That's not normal, that's not human! So what happens when a normal woman looks at that

kid? You cannot help but hating that kid! I feel like taking that kid by its little neck and shoving him back up her pussy! Because that kid came to this world with a mission: destroying that body. Now it's a soul without function! (...) Let me tell you something: all the models are whores!<sup>26</sup> (Zoccoli, *Não tô Aqui pra Julgar*)

Zoccoli shouts the lines above and then suddenly comes back to a calm, low tune, saying: “but I’m not here to judge”, which is a common expression in Brazil. This sudden break in the tone of voice, as well as the contradiction between calling someone a whore and then saying you are not judging them, brings the audience to burst in laughter. The ending line, “I’m not here to judge”, is also the show’s title. This closure and choice of title are very ironic for another reason: what Zoccoli does in the routine is nothing but being judgmental. The title can be also read as an ironic stance regarding humor: insofar as humor is a form of social commentary, it will always be judgmental in some way.

Criss Paiva, on *Humor de Salto Alto*, also uses screaming as a means to achieve incongruity, but the effect is contained within particular jokes. She starts her routine saying that some Olympic sports that are popular among male audiences seem stupid to her, such as weight lifting. “‘What do you do for a living?’ ‘I lift weights’. Wow... Years and years of training just to lift something up... BUT LIFTING UP THE TOILET SEAT YOU CAN’T DO, RIGHT YOU SON OF A BITCH?”<sup>27</sup>. The theme of the joke itself, namely how women dislike when men forget to lift the toilet seat, is cliché. But the comic effect derives more from the unexpected screaming in the middle of what seemed to be just a general mundane comment. This technique, however, has to be used with parsimony, as repetition would eliminate the element of surprise. Loudness is therefore present in a short portion of Paiva’s performance.

When screaming is used in the women’s performances, it is used to convey anger. None of the five comedians use screaming in a festive, excited way, to express contentment about something, as it was common with the male comedians that performed alongside them, such as Ben Ludmer and Rogério Vilela. This difference can be interpreted as one of the ways in which women

stand-up comedians perform their marginality: they get onstage to complain. Men do complain about things that bother them as well (especially what bothers them about women). But, unlike women, they also tend to celebrate what they like and who they are. Most of all, in the three male routines I watched, they celebrated masculinity. In his performance as master of ceremonies on *Humor de Salto Alto*, Rogério Vilela made jokes whose main message was that he was a straight man, so straight that he does ridiculous things to woo women. The master of ceremonies of *Seleção do Humor Stand-up* made similar jokes. Unfortunately, I cannot recall the exact jokes they made, because I was not allowed to record the performances of comedians other than my research subjects.

Another interesting note is that men are not just louder, they occupy much more the stage's space. They moved around, while women tended to stand still. This can also be interpreted as men performing their status with confidence in a male genre and space, i.e. the comedy bar. So one line of interpretation of the space management onstage would be that women do not act like they own that space.

A more limited occupation of space onstage is also associated with modesty, a characteristic attributed to traditional femininity. Not surprisingly, when interviewed, the comedians talked about their moderate behavior onstage as a *personality trait*. "Stand-up gives you the freedom to be who you are. I'm more still. Sometimes I use a tone of voice that's a little bit louder, but nothing crazy, no hair banging, no jumping"<sup>28</sup>, says Paiva. "What you see onstage, that is me"<sup>29</sup>, says Leal. I would like to underscore that I am not trying to deny what those women define their personalities to be. I rather argue that it is telling of a gendered distribution of sharing the space that women comedians in my data, as a general rule, tend to stand still or in one spot while men move around and occupy more of the stage.

## 4.2 Clothing and sexuality

As a general rule, stand-up comedians dress casually. With the exception of Angela Dip, it was not different with my research subjects. Leal, Zoccoli and Marrer wore a pair of jeans and a T-shirt. Criss Paiva combined a T-shirt with leggings. All of them were wearing little or no make-up, and had their hair down, with a natural look. None of them had high heels on. Dip is an exception to the rule. In *La Putanesca*, she always wears the same outfit: a red dress with a big cleavage adorned by a necklace made of basil leaves. In her other show, *Angela Dip só Para Mulheres*, she is a bit more discrete, wearing a back envelope dress.

The casual clothing is part of a strategy for achieving relatability. As humor is a local, collective practice, which draws on and reproduces common sense and therefore defines who is “in” and who is “out” of that particular group engaged in joking, it is crucial for the audience to identify with the person onstage. My research subjects expressed this necessity of identification with metaphors about friendship and being at home. The invitation to the audience “make yourself at home” and “make yourself comfortable” were said by three research subjects when entering the stage: Zoccoli, Dip and Leal. “I want you feel like you’re in my living room... And, by the amount of people here today, I think you would all fit!” says Zoccoli<sup>30</sup> in *Não tô Aqui pra Julgar*. Leal, in her second interview, said that the stand-up comedian has to talk to the audience “the same way we are here, in my kitchen. You have to talk to them as you talk to a friend while having a couple beers”<sup>31</sup>. According to Criss Paiva, if the audience feels that the comedian is not relatable or not confident, it will be less receptive, and then act like they are in a combat, defying the comedian to make them laugh<sup>32</sup>.

As a general rule, comedians should not look too good: “if the comedian is too much of a good looking person, it is hard to make jokes about other people. The audience will not like it. I mean, the guy is just too handsome and then talks about the fat girl? Just doesn’t work”, says Mhel

Marrer<sup>33</sup>. “If you have the need to look beautiful, you don’t transmit credibility. I have a joke in which I say I hit on a homeless guy and got turned down. If I look too posh, this is not believable. Ok, that isn’t true anyway, but it would be less believable if I was looking preppy”<sup>34</sup>, says Paiva.

For women stand-up comedians, however, the choice of clothing is strategic not just for achieving relatability, but also for avoiding or diminishing sexual connotations evoked by their looks. The research subjects, when asked about clothing, were unanimous in saying that a stand-up comedian should dress to look as a comedian, not as a “woman”. By contrasting the professional persona and “woman”, they meant the latter would be sexually provocative or desirable. Sexual desirability is classified as a killer of funniness. It is interesting to see that their observations make a conflation of womanhood with being a sexual object and an opposition between sexual objectification and funniness. This is an indication of the pervasiveness of the assumptions behind the unfunny woman stereotype. Angela Dip, for instance, was advised to de-sexualize her image in order to succeed in stand-up comedy:

The world is sexist. So of course some people will get suspicious and think ‘oh, this won’t be funny’ when they see a woman. If it’s a beautiful woman then, forget it. She’ll never be funny. I used to perform with clothes that were a little bit sexy. Because that’s what I usually wear. But a producer came to me and said: ‘Angela, don’t do it this way, people have prejudice, they won’t find it funny’. I can’t say if it worked, but I think there’s true to what he said. Otherwise, you end up directing people’s attention to something else... Not that I can put on a jeans and a T-shirt and do the ‘sloppy lesbian’ thing. I can’t. But I understood that if I looked too... Well, honestly, I’m not too sure about that, but I think there’s truth to what he said.<sup>35</sup> (Dip, first interview)

An interesting aspect of stand-up comedy audiences in Brazil is that they are almost entirely formed by heterosexual couples. This was a surprise for me. There was a significant amount of jokes about heterosexual relations in all the performances I watched. Men joke about how women

behave in relationships and women do the same about men. So maybe the stand-up show got configured as a place where heterosexual couples can laugh about one another, in a kind of “war of sexes” manner. Considering there are much more male comedians, the male perspective is far more represented. It is left to find out, however, whether routines have always had a focus on relationships or if such jokes were included once they realized the dominance of heterosexual couples in the audience. Either way, the women comedians make decisions on their dress code with the understanding that the male gaze is appealed to by the female members of the audience. When deciding what to wear, women comedians have to negotiate their acceptance within the heterosexual couples. The interviewees said that a lot of women in the audience regard female comedians as a threat. Therefore, they must dress in the less sexual way possible in order to make the women side with them instead of seeing them as a competition for their partner’s gaze.

I felt that, when I was too well dressed, the women got kinda... Because there are a lot of couples. So the girls feel threatened. And the guy gets a little uncomfortable too. Like ‘holy shit, I’ll laugh about this woman and then my girlfriend will think this and that’<sup>36</sup> (Marrer, first interview)

Men generally have a posture like: ‘fine, make me laugh’. Women are like: ‘who does that bitch think she is?’. It’s a pity women still have this confrontation when they see another woman there. It’s like a challenge, it’s like you’ll steal their husband’s attention. (...) I once noticed in the audience a woman poking a man all the time, saying: ‘shhh, stop laughing.’<sup>37</sup> (Cris Paiva, first interview)

Paiva drew attention to another interesting point: the simplicity in dressing can also be a sign of disidentification with the role women have traditionally occupied in Brazilian humor:

It seems like women can only do humor if they belong to an extreme. Either they have to be extremely fat and loud and ugly and messy and sloppy, like *escrache* humor... Or they have to be extremely hot and sexy and wear a bikini. But those ones don’t make humor, they’re

there to raise audience rates... But shit, there are normal women going through normal situations! I shouldn't have to look extremely ugly nor extremely beautiful to go through funny situations that women can identify with.<sup>38</sup> (Paiva, first interview)

Despite declaring that there is prejudice against women comedians, all research subjects spontaneously mentioned “the need to look beautiful” as the main reason why there is only a handful of successful women in stand-up comedy. According to them, many women are indeed unfunny because they want to be “women” more than they want to be “comedians”. “If she wants to be seen as pretty, as hot, as feminine... It will be hard for her to be seen as a comedian, because she is already putting herself in a different position”, said Carol Zoccoli<sup>39</sup>. Marrer, when asked about resistance to women in stand-up comedy, declared that it is up for women to become funnier:

Resistance? There isn't any. If you're good, you can make it. There is a market for women. We, the few women who do it, end up getting the entire niche. Women's vanity is what ruins it all. Women have no guts to make fun of their stretch marks, their cellulite... They get ashamed. ‘Oh, they'll find me ugly’. Well, when you get into humor, you have to decide if what you want is to get laid or to make money as a humorist<sup>40</sup> (Marrer, first interview)

### ***4.3 Joke themes and routine structure***

Each of the research subjects will be analyzed individually, when it comes to the structure of the routine and the most common themes chosen. The reader will thus see that each of the comedians represent a different comic style.



### 4.3.1 Marcela Leal: The absurdity of daily life



[Marcela Leal in a promotional picture with the cast of *Clube da Comedia*, retrieved from their official website]

Marcela Leal's performance on *Seleção do Humor Stand-up* focuses on topics of general knowledge and mundane situations like going to the supermarket, watching TV or taking the dog for a walk. She uses these situations to surprise the audience creating absurd or extreme stories. I therefore call her style "the absurdity of daily life".

The routine can be separated into five thematic blocks: types of ex-boyfriends she has had; a "spiritual" course she attended, in which it was possible for a spirit to get out of its body; TV commercials she finds stupid; wearing braces; news she heard on the radio while heading to the theater. The topics are thus not related to each other. This at times makes Leal seem a little lost, fishing for random subjects. All themes are brought up because of some alleged personal experience. However, Leal does not talk about her personal life in detail. Rather, she uses the first person narrative as a block starter, as a means to get from the smaller, micro level, to the wider scale. She says "I dated a guy that was childish" to list situations that can happen with an exaggeratedly childish person; "I attended a spiritual course" to list absurd situations that could happen when spirits get out of their bodies; "I saw a commercial the other day" to comment on examples of advertising that treat the viewer as stupid. The strategic reduction of the life events to a single function of bringing alone a new theme leaves it ambiguous which situations have actually happened to the comedian.

A prominent feature of Leal's routine is her preference for "one liners", i.e. very short jokes, in which the set up and punch line are contained within a line of text. For example: "my neighbor

was so fat that her mom makes her smoothie in the washing machine”. The set about the fat neighbor is one of Leal’s most famous texts. She did not use it at show I watched, though. Leal is also fond of playing with ambiguous words. For example, when she starts the block about braces, she says “I had something called crossbite. I aimed for the sandwich and always bit a piece of my hand<sup>41</sup>”. During the interview, she classified this kind of jokes as “intelligent jokes”, since they reveal the comedian’s capacity of thinking language through. “My text is light and clean. It’s not my style to be dirty. I can make people laugh with elegance and intelligence. To me, being dirty is an easy way. Sometimes I do it too, I swear, but that’s not what I like most. I like intelligent jokes, word games, ‘one liners’, that sort of thing”<sup>42</sup> (Interview 2). The joke about the fat neighbor is classified by her as intelligent because of its play with words. She did not discuss the intelligence of the content, since a joke like that does nothing but reinforce stereotypes about fat people.

The reaction to Leal’s routine on *Seleção do Humor Stand-up* was mild. She was able to elicit laughter often, but nothing loud. She also received no clapping (Brazilian audiences clap when they think a joke is particularly good). As I observed, there were no significant gender differences in the reaction: men and women laughed at the same times and with similar intensity.

Let’s take a closer look at the jokes that elicited most laughter in each of the five blocks. She starts the first one by saying that she had just ended a relationship. She then mentions that the ex-boyfriend was younger than her, and that was the second younger boyfriend she has had. A series of one liner jokes about situations that can happen in a relationship between an older woman and a younger man follows and it is this series of self-ironic ageism that receives most laughter from the audience. “Once he wrote me a romantic letter. And said: ‘honey, I wrote it on size 16 so you can see it’. (pause) Another time, he showed me a video of his sixth birthday. Oh my God, a video. I then showed him how I looked when I was six too... On a xylograph. (pause) Once we were having sex, and he said: “oh, oh, oh (moans) it’s so hot to fuck you, ma’am!”<sup>43</sup>. After the younger boyfriend, she lists her exes according to types, mentioning a series of absurd situations that

happened with such a person: the one with the smelly feet (so smelly she threw alcohol and fire on them in an attempt to clean them), the childish one (“so childish that, before sex, he liked to walk around the house with a towel hanging on his dick”) and the promiscuous one (“so promiscuous if you locked him up on a tower, and he saw a hot lady passing by outside, he could cut his dick off and throw it at her”). “A is so B that C” is a common phrasal construction in Leal’s routines.

The part about the promiscuous boyfriend contains some criticism of women and an attempt of community building: “women always think they will change a promiscuous man. Right, women out there? But they won’t...”<sup>44</sup>. It is interesting to note that this block on men does not reach the point of criticizing or ridiculing them on the whole. The ex-boyfriends are listed as particular individuals, Leal does not generalize. Also, they are absurd types, exaggerations of reality – and this absurdity, this layer of fiction she applies, softens the critique contained in the joke.

The second block, about the spiritual course, makes a critique on charlatan esoteric products and services. “When I arrived at the door, a guy was coming out, so excited. And he said: ‘man! I left my body, I went all the way to the city center then strolled around Sé square!’ and I thought: ‘how excited will he get once he finds out that he can do that without leaving his body?’”<sup>45</sup>. The block on TV commercials starts with Leal saying there are professions she does not understand, one of them is advertising. “The guy spends four years in college, then goes to graduate school abroad, comes back to Brazil and is hired by a major advertising agency. Then, you’re at home, eating breakfast. You take a can of Toddy [brand of chocolate powder] and read: ‘only Toddy is Toddy’”<sup>46</sup>. The block about braces is very short. Besides the joke on crossbite, she says the worst thing about wearing braces is giving everyone a memo about what you ate during the day. “I remember once I looked in the mirror and I saw a coffee stain, some pasta and pubic hair”<sup>47</sup>. On the block about news, she comments that a posthumous album by Michael Jackson will be released. “Michael Jackson will release an album, after his death... So now you know there’s no use in killing Belo (Brazilian singer) because he will keep sending bad songs from hell”<sup>48</sup>. One notices that Leal’s

routine is indeed very light, and this lightness elicits a light response from the audience as well. The criticisms Leal makes are soft, she does not touch upon controversial matters.

A striking feature of her style is the absence of themes specifically related to women's experiences, except for the block about the boyfriends. Such themes are more common among the other four women stand-up comedians. Leal told me she deliberately chooses to avoid them.

I'm an artist, I have to be bigger than gender. Otherwise, I'll reduce myself to the language that gender is allowed to talk. I have never made a routine that only talked about women's stuff, because that is just too little and an artist is more than that. An artist has to be unlimited, crazy, beyond that. If I'm just a woman, I will close my legs so my underwear doesn't show. If I'm just a woman, I'll restrict myself to talking about menstruation.<sup>49</sup> (Leal, second interview)

#### 4.3.2 Mhel Marrer: A wart on the forehead



[Mhel Marrer in a promotional picture with the cast of *Seleção do Humor Stand-up*, from 2012]

Marrer's routine on *Seleção do Humor Stand-up* is above all confessional. She told me in the first interview that her jokes are always based on her actual experiences. Her comic style is strongly marked by self-deprecation, which, according to her, is a necessary tool for marginal comedians to win the audiences.

If you're not a white, normal man, you have to talk about what everybody sees you are not. (...) You need a little thing to break the ice. Are you Asian? A little joke about it. A woman? A little joke about it. Just break the ice and then you can talk about whatever else you want.

(...) If you're a woman, and you don't joke about that, it's like having a wart on the forehead and not commenting about it<sup>50</sup>. (Marrer, first interview)

Marrer said that self-deprecation is also useful with women in the audience, as mocking her looks makes some of them stop seeing her as a threat. "I start showing my flaws so much that the guy that's attracted to me loses his hard-on"<sup>51</sup>. She is so fond of self-deprecation that most of her routine contains jokes of that sort. She mocks her looks, the fact she has hosted a TV show that "nobody" watched, her bad driving skills and so on. So self-deprecation is not merely a tool to break the ice, as she mentioned, but the conducting wire of the whole performance. I therefore call her comic style "the wart on the forehead", for Marrer's so-called flaws are constantly pointed out. The wart is not just acknowledged, but repeatedly made the center of attention.

As for the structure, Marrer prefers the whole text to be cohesive. It is hard to separate it into definite thematic blocks, as the jokes refer to one another. "I follow a line. It's all embedded. The text is entirely connected"<sup>52</sup>, she says when asked to talk about her text structure. Her routine thus resembles a conversation, in which it is common for people to tell a story in a chronological way, but make a series of parenthesis in the middle. It goes as follows: Marrer introduces herself, mocking her looks. Then she talks about what she's done professionally, mocking her career trajectory. Then she mentions she's a mother, and a joke about forgetting her son in the car prompts her to talk about how bad her car is. Lack of money for buying a better car then prompts her to talk about a trip she made with her boyfriend, in which she crashed her car into a pole. She then makes a series of jokes about how much of a bad driver she is. The fact she has a boyfriend, which is classified by her as surprising given her ugliness, makes her go back into mocking her looks and the things she has done to look better. The routine ends with a set of jokes about daily situations between her and her boyfriend, thus getting into the "war of the sexes" tendency. This structure makes Marrer look more natural and comfortable onstage than Leal. Although Leal is the one that stressed the most in her interview that the stand-up comedian has to behave onstage as he would

with a friend, it is Marrer who looks like she's having an actual conversation with the audience. This may be one of the factors why the audience seemed to like Marrer's performance better. They laughed more and louder, and applauded her three times.

Marrer said that she learned that self-deprecation is a good strategy during her school times, because she was bullied a lot.

If you say about yourself what people were already thinking about saying, you disarm them. They don't have anything to say anymore. I teach that to my child and that's the first thing I do onstage. Since people look at you thinking 'ugh, there comes a woman'... I arrive there mocking myself already.<sup>53</sup> (Marrer, first interview)

Feminist scholarship on humor has consistently criticized self-deprecation. Lisa Merrill (1988), for example, argues that women who do that merely repeat the same patterns male comedians use to denigrate women and their experiences (p. 272-3). I agree with such criticism. After all, what disarms the bullies when one denigrates oneself is that the person demonstrates to *agree* that he/she is inferior or that something about her is a flaw. There is no need to bully that person to make them "accept" their inferiority, because they already do. Marrer qualifies bullying herself as a form of power, of "winning" the audience. But, according to feminist authors, that is a false power, because the audience's acceptance comes as long as the comedian positions herself as non-threatening. She confirms herself to be what they expect from her. For example, when Marrer mocks herself for not matching into standard patterns of beauty, she reinforces those patterns as the norm.

However, one cannot simply dismiss Marrer's routine as doing no service to women. The fact that her texts are always confessional is positive, for it brings female experiences to the table. So I suppose Marrer's performance has a higher potential of obtaining the identification of women in the audience than Leal's routine and, consequently, a higher potential of community building. That is, Marrer may have the women in the audience feel collectively represented by a particular

joke and identify as one of many, even if it is not the kind of community building that leads them to feminism, as Auslander (1993, p. 320-321) and Merrill (Merrill, 1988, p. 279) argue.

While Leal deliberately chooses not to talk about her personal life or “women’s stuff”, Marrer says she prefers doing so for three reasons. The first is because it is hard for her to talk about things that do not resonate with her own experiences. Secondly, because of her perceived need to mark herself as a woman.

I don’t feel comfortable saying things like ‘I don’t understand napkins’. Unless it’s with me. Men seem to do that more easily; but if you’re a woman you have to talk about being a woman. (...) Marcela is brave. She enters [the stage] on equal footing with men. I don’t have the guts to do that. It’s hard. She jokes about general stuff. She is *very* brave.<sup>54</sup> (Marrer, second interview)

Thirdly, Marrer mentions a desire to represent women’s point of view in opposition to the masculine dominance in stand-up. “I feel it’s my obligation to do that, because guys sometimes spend so much time joking about their wives. So I should get back on it, make the girls feel revenged. I scorn my boyfriend onstage a lot, I rip off his dignity. And the girls feel revenged”<sup>55</sup> (Marrer, second interview)

One of the jokes that work well on the audience in Marrer’s routine is when she mentions that she worked as a screenwriter for *Legendários*, on network Record, which is owned by the pastor of a protestant church. “People asked me: ‘Mhel, who did you fuck to work here?’ To those sexist people, all I have to say is.... To a bishop”<sup>56</sup>. This is a clear example of how the incongruity on the joke actually works to reinforce the same sexist stereotype she seems to be complaining about. Another joke that worked well is when Marrer says it is hard to be a woman comedian and also a mom. “Before coming here, I gave my son dinner, told him a bedtime story... Soon, I’ll go check if he’s still in the car”<sup>57</sup>. This joke makes reference to a series of cases of Brazilian kids dying because their parents forgot them in the car. It is an edgy joke for making reference to a tragedy, but

she is not mocking the tragedy itself. The comic effect is self-deprecation, she makes herself look like a sloppy mom. This is strengthened in the following jokes: “Of course I worry! God forbid something happens to my car! (pause) Priorities, people. My son took nine months to make, I’m paying this car in 36 installments”<sup>58</sup>.

The “war of the sexes” part, in which Marrer complains about her boyfriend, makes women laugh much harder than men. She says she does not like soccer as much as he does. “I prefer a love story. We women love watching a romantic comedy with our boyfriends... To see if the son of a bitch learns anything. Men, to you that is a movie, to us it’s a telecourse!”<sup>59</sup> She proceeds: “You have to be didactic with men. I make comments during the movie, like ‘did you see that, baby? He gave her flowers! Nice, huh?’ Now he takes revenge putting up porn movies and telling me ‘look how she swallows, baby! Nice, huh?’”<sup>60</sup> Those are cliché stances on relationships, reinforcing gender stereotypes such as women wanting romance and men being more interested in sex. However, women seem to feel represented by that. The apex of women’s laughter happens when Marrer complains about how long her boyfriend spends on Playstation. “Women, don’t allow that thing in your house, otherwise the only sexual pleasure you’ll get will be when he loses the game. The joystick vibrates, so you run and sit on it”<sup>61</sup> (Marrer in *Seleção do Humor Stand-up*)

A prominent characteristic of Marrer’s performance is speed. While being fast is a good thing on stand-up comedy, she sometimes keeps talking over the audience’s laughter. That can be a sign of insecurity – Marrer told me she does not allow “embarrassing” silences: “I make the joke. If you don’t laugh, I go to the next so fast you might even think that actually wasn’t a joke”<sup>62</sup>



### 4.3.3 Carol Zoccoli: No, I won't fit in



[Zoccoli in a promotional photo for the solo *Cheia de (des)graca*<sup>1</sup>, 2011. She is wearing fake plastic breasts and bottom in the picture]

Zoccoli's routine is also confessional. The solo, which lasts for an hour, is about her life and opinions. Commentary about popular culture and daily situations are inserted within the confessions. Her style can be therefore classified as a hybrid of Leal and Marrer. However, Zoccoli does not use self-deprecation. On the contrary:

while she does acknowledge that she does not fit into societal norms of beauty, success and behavior, her stage persona despises and mocks most of those norms. Her most common type of joke exposes how she responds to the people who criticize her for not wanting a child, not being religious, not wearing sexy underwear etc. I have thus baptized her comic style as “no, I won't fit in”. I consider Zoccoli's performance the most subversive of all research subjects, even if the comedian herself does not see her performance as a means of resistance. The comedians' relationship with feminism will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

*Não tô Aqui pra Julgar* is structured into thematic blocks which are related to each other: the last joke of a block introduces the topic of the next. There are 15 themes and 16 blocks, as Zoccoli starts the routine with jokes about being short and comes back to this topic later on. These are the blocks in order of appearance: being short; not wanting to have a child; condoms; being a Philosophy major; alcohol and drunkenness; being short; religions; being from the rural state of Mato Grosso; having depression; PMS and menstrual pads; what if women were as rude as men are; refusing to be “sexy”; differences between men and women; trying to lose weight; the “crescendo of rage” against models. The performance ends with a session of questions and answers.

Some of the themes are related to specific women's experiences, such as menstruation. Even when it is a general topic, Zoccoli tends to position herself as a woman while talking about it. She, however, said she does not consider her text to represent women more than men.

Those themes are out there, in the community. Being jealous of models is part of culture, it's not strictly feminine. PMS is part of life... Men and women deal with that. So I don't think my text is 'feminine', men laugh a lot too. Of course women can identify more... Just like if there is any short person in the audience, they will identify a lot.<sup>63</sup> (Zoccoli, second interview)

I therefore also put Zoccoli in between Leal and Marrer when it comes to choosing "feminine" themes. Another salient feature in the theme choice is that many of them mark Zoccoli as an outsider to the norm. For example, when she states that she does not want to have kids, she questions the idea of motherhood as an ideal or dream for all women. "People ask me: 'you've been married for seven years, aren't you thinking about having kids?' Well, if I think about having a kid, I'm gonna have to think about who to give the child to, 'cause I ain't keeping it!"<sup>64</sup> I consider this subversive because Zoccoli is not afraid to assume the "condemnable" disposition of not liking kids. She ends the block by reading a list of ten reasons why she does not want kids, including "I like having a life" and "I don't enjoy cleaning shit even from my own ass".

Another way in which Zoccoli puts herself outside the norm is by stating that she is not religious, in a series of jokes about her protestant mother and how she tries to convert her. That is a bold move in a country where atheism is so frowned upon that only 13% of the population would vote for an atheist politician, with the rest classifying them on the same level of trustworthiness as rapists (Petry, 2007). Zoccoli's block on religion mocks Protestantism, Catholicism, Jehovah's witnesses, Islamism and Hare Kirshna. However, the normative religions in Brazil (Christianity) are more mocked. "My mom says if I accept Jesus, I'll get the gift of life. I reply: 'mom, I already have life, can I get an iPhone instead?'"<sup>65</sup> On the same set: "my mom doesn't like that I listen to Marilyn

Manson, because he likes the devil. Well, at least he says he likes the devil only to those that go to his shows. Jehovah's witnesses knock on my door Saturday, 8 AM"<sup>66</sup> Criticisms towards Christianity are also included in other blocks, such as the one about alcohol: "when my mom criticizes me for drinking, I say 'Jesus transformed water into wine! What did he mean by that? That we have to drink wine as if it was water!'"<sup>67</sup> It also appears in the block about depression: "my mom says joy is with Jesus. And I reply: 'apparently, he's not distributing'"<sup>68</sup>. I consider the blocks about alcohol and depression another example of Zoccoli's subversion. She declares to enjoy drinking a lot, which is not considered appropriate behavior for women. When thematizing depression, she deconstructs prejudices about the disease, listing the ways that people try to "cheer her up", and how people doubt she's depressed because she's a comedian.

There were two moments when women laughed harder than men. That is when Zoccoli makes an interesting inversion: what if women harassed men on the street?

The other day, I saw a man telling a girl: 'hey, you, do you like milkshake? Then shake this!' Women would never do that. Reinaldo Gianecchini [actor] could pass by and we wouldn't go like 'Gianecchini, you are not a menstrual pad but I would have you stuck on my panties!' Or: 'Rodrigo Santoro [actor] your dick is not a shopping mall, but I would go all around it the whole day!'<sup>69</sup> (*Zoccoli, Não tô Aqui pra Julgar*)

The second moment of community building happened when Zoccoli listed differences between women and men. This part of the show turned out to be a deconstruction of femininity's supposed inferiority:

Men make such a fuss out of prostate exams. It's just a finger! In gynecological exams, they insert an instrument that looks like a monkey wrench. Its name is duck's beak but it's a lie because the whole duck gets in. They can see the womb with this instrument. What if the proctologist had to see the stomach in the prostate's exam? (...) They say 'women are the fragile sex'. And what sex is strong? Men's? I would like to see a baby come through the

men's sex, he would pee through his belly button the rest of his life.<sup>70</sup> (Zoccoli, *Não tô Aqui pra Julgar*)

Zoccoli's solo is not only subversion, though. Three jokes present the same incongruity present in Mhel Marrer's routine, in which it seems that the comedian will complain about sexism or sexist stereotypes, but ends up reinforcing the stereotype.

The other day, I was on a crowded bus and a guy started humping me. Horrible situation. If there's any woman here who has been harassed on the bus, you know how humiliating that is.... Well, sometimes it's nice. Sometimes we like it and even bend over a little. But that wasn't the case. The guy humped me and I couldn't even report him because nobody would believe somebody wanted to fuck my armpit<sup>71</sup> (Zoccoli, *Não tô Aqui pra Julgar*)

Saying that sometimes women "enjoy it" is a common and problematic rape-apologizing argument. The second time that happens is on the block on alcohol:

There's one thing I don't like about booze, though: beer commercials. There is always a hot semi-naked woman, I find it sexist. People tell me I'm jealous. I'm not! Why would I want to get R\$500,000 showing my ass on Playboy magazine if I can have a decent profession like teaching and make R\$500,000 in 45 years?<sup>72</sup>

This is a good example of how texts can be subversive in some aspects and reactionary in others. Zoccoli criticizes the fact that women make more money being objectified than in other types of job. However, the joke's construction makes it seem like she is indeed jealous, and saying that women are jealous of Playboy models when they criticize sexual objectification is also a common anti-feminist argument. The third time happens during the Q&A session, when a woman asks how Zoccoli "seduces" her husband if she does not like sexy lingerie. "Have you ever heard of drugs?", replies Zoccoli, arguing that the best thing about it is that most times his penis will not function so women can go do what they really want, which is having ice cream in front of the TV. She then says: "when I joke about women not liking sex, people say it's not true. Well, let's check

that out now: women who like sex, raise your hand!”. As the audience was shy in interactions like this (especially since the theater was so big and only three rows of seats were occupied), women just looked around at each other and nobody dared to raise the hand. “See?”, says Zoccoli, prompting a burst of laughter, especially from men. With this joke, Zoccoli manages to expose and play with women’s shame of talking about sex. Unfortunately, she does that by affirming the old stereotype of women not liking sex.

The final block, “the crescendo of rage” against models, is another example of how Zoccoli’s performance takes two steps forward then three steps back. While she expresses rage about unattainable beauty standards, her anger is directed at the models as individuals, not the establishment of their body type as the only possible form of beauty. “We all want Juliana Paes’ [actress] body. Her bulging eye nope, the body yes. But most women are normal, they don’t have that body. So I think, as a majority, we should get together and... Beat the shit out of that bitch”<sup>73</sup> This part of the routine also reinforces the idea that being desired by men is the main goal in a woman’s life.

If there’s a thing that gets on my nerves is hot, slim women. We struggle, we go to college, we find a job at a nice company, we grow in this company, we buy better clothes, we buy Arezzo [fancy brand] shoes. And then you go to a party and there’s a bitch in Havaianas [cheap brand of flip-flops] and she looks much hotter than you! (Crying voice) What to do next? What man will look at your Arezzo?<sup>74</sup> (Zoccoli, *Não tô Aqui pra Julgar*)

When Zoccoli tries to attack or diminish the models by calling them whores, she is reinforcing the meaningfulness of the Madonna vs. whore divide and supporting the idea that women should be judged by their (supposed) sexual behavior in terms of this problematic distinction.

#### 4.3.4 Criss Paiva: Mars and Venus



[Paiva (in the middle) in a promotional picture for *Humor de Salto Alto* from 2011]

Criss Paiva's routine on *Humor de Salto Alto* is heavily based on the "war of the sexes" theme. Most of her jokes talk about (supposed) differences between men and women, especially when it comes to relationships. Paiva explained this choice as a means to engage the high number of

heterosexual couples in the audience: her intention is to make them laugh at each other. Like Leal, Paiva also uses the first person as a ladder to comment on broader topics. However, while Leal does not generalize when she talks about ex-boyfriends, Paiva makes recurrent use of generalizations and oversimplifications like "you, men, love soccer" and "we, women, talk too much". I therefore call her comic style "Mars and Venus", as it reinforces the cliché that men and women are so different they could be from different planets.

"Our show is called 'Humor in High Heels'. So people think we're going to bash men a lot... And well, I don't bash men that much. I criticize the things we do more. I want to find a balance. I like to point my finger to one side, then to another"<sup>75</sup>, says Paiva. This is very telling, because, even though the show's premise was to invert the ratio of men and women in comedy bars, thus representing women's perspectives more, Paiva is careful to make her text not seem threatening to men. I suppose most male comedians would not look for such a "balance" in their routines.

The routine I attended had seven blocks, out of which four were about men and women. The others, inserted in the middle, are unrelated. In order of appearance: Olympics (ladder for talking about things men [supposedly] care about); elections (ladder for talking about things women

[supposedly] care about); how it is like to be short; movies (ladder for talking about how women are [supposedly] more talkative than men); how Asian people [supposedly] look alike; celebrities; men and women in relationships.

The reception to Paiva's performance was cold. The audience barely laughed, except during the block about Asian people. After the performance was over, I approached her to ask how she felt about it and she said "the audience was weird". When watching You Tube videos of Paiva, I noticed that sometimes her text seems to lack lapidating. This seemed worse that night. Maybe the audience's reaction got to her, as in many moments Paiva repeated the punch line several times, with different words. It was like she was insisting on the joke or explaining it. For example: Paiva says she has an annoying mother in law and then goes:

The other day I learned there's a mother in law's day. Yes, there is... Like mother's day, father's day, there is a mother in law's day. And it's not the second of November. There is a real day to celebrate *living* mothers in law. Did you know that? Did you? If you didn't know, that's ok, I always thought it was on Halloween as well. But there is, there is a mother in law's day.<sup>76</sup> (Paiva, *Humor de Salto Alto*)

This joke would be much more effective had she said only "the other day I heard there's a mother in law's day. No, it's not the second of November". Another example of wrong timing: "Valentine's Day was coming, so I told my boyfriend: 'I want you to surprise me'. Then the day came and he broke up with me. I really wasn't expecting, huh! I was caught off guard, look at that! I got fucked! Damn!"<sup>77</sup>. The audience had already laughed at the point of incongruity ("he broke up with me"). The rest seemed like she was trying to expand the funny moment, which did not work. Another backfire is when she makes a joke and then takes it back. She mocks a celebrity and then says: "Oh I'm just kidding. Poor him". Surprisingly, when asked to evaluate how her writing has changed since the beginning of her career, Paiva said that she had learned how to "read" the audience:

In the beginning, the chance of me writing a joke that would fail has higher, because I still

worked based on my own mind, what made *me* laugh – and this is not necessarily what makes the audience laugh. So today, I think ‘I find this funny, but it’s better not to include it because the audience won’t.’<sup>78</sup> (Paiva, second interview)

The differences between men and women that Paiva enumerates are mostly cliché, such as: men are not being able to lift the toilet seat; men enjoy sports so much they would watch a match of absolutely anything; men talk too little and women talk too much; men can concentrate on one thing, while women multitask; men insist on women to have anal sex, while women don’t like it, etc. The strategy, however, can backfire, as the use of such beaten tropes and overgeneralization may not surprise the audience, and thus lead to a lukewarm reception. Micheli Machado’s performance on the same night, which was also based on things partners would like to complain about the other, elicited much more laughter. The last block of Marrer’s performance, which also used this theme, was more successful as well.

A joke that exemplifies Paiva’s use of the “war of the sexes” theme is:

Last year, Dilma [Rousseff, Brazil’s president] interrupted the soap opera to announce the municipal elections. I thought: ‘so you’re confirming you’re a dyke that easily?’ What kind of woman interrupts the soap opera? Come on, the first woman on the presidency, this was the time for revenge. This was the time for her to come on TV at the 47<sup>th</sup> minute of the second-half, in pairs, the last kick... That’s the moment to interrupt!<sup>79</sup>  
(Paiva in *Humor de Salto Alto*)

Paiva seems to stand on the women’s side of the “war”. However, one verifies the same “two steps forward and three steps back” effect, present on Marrer’s and Zoccoli’s performances. Upon starting the last block, Paiva says there is prejudice against women comedians. She then states that is understandable: “it is much easier to accept men joking, since the social function of talking shit belongs to men”<sup>80</sup> That is a sexist joke towards men, but it is interesting that Paiva acknowledges the bias against women comedians. What follows, however, is an anti-feminist joke.



Women don't talk shit. They play saints. They pretend they don't poop, don't swear and don't like anal sex. As if somebody believed that. After all, a person that washes, irons, cooks, takes care of children and then makes a whole revolution to have the right to WORK... Doesn't she want to be screwed in the ass? This fills my heart with hate, because I'm so lazy. Stay at home, darling! Sleep until 10 A.M!<sup>81</sup> (Paiva, *Humor de Salto Alto*)

#### 4.3.5 Angela Dip: Ultra-feminine



[Dip in a promotional picture for *La Putanesca*, in 2012]

Dip's comic style will be discussed in much less detail, since I only had access to some video excerpts from the shows *A Putanesca* and *Angela Dip Só Para Mulheres*. The following analysis will mix jokes from these two shows.

Since Dip is an established actress, both of her shows were done exclusively in theaters. This makes her, in her own words, “a bit of an outsider to the bar crew”. The age difference might also be at play. Dip is 50, while most stand-up comedians are in their 20's and 30's. Her fame, however, has given her advantages comparing to the average stand-up comedian. She already had an audience, thanks to famous comic characters interpreted on TV. This must have diminished her risk of being seen as “a woman, therefore potentially unfunny” when she enters the stage, even though she still mentions the stereotype as a problem.

In addition, Dip is not afraid of going “girly” – on the contrary: she finds it a “market niche”.

I don't like this 'girly' thing. I must confess I even had some prejudice about talking only about 'feminine' stuff. After all, I am able to talk about anything. But, at the same time, I feel that women like that. There is a market for that. I'm a person that takes interest in everything. But you have to see what the audiences want to hear the most. And the topic 'woman telling her point of view' is very recent, since men have always talked, while women stayed at home taking care of kids<sup>82</sup> (Dip, second interview)

However, her conceptualization of "the feminine point of view" follows dominant stereotypes: the jokes focus on topics such as menopause, relationships and marriage, sex, make up, cosmetic surgery, dieting. "My latest routine talks about the feminine universe. Because I'm a woman, I couldn't talk about mechanics"<sup>83</sup>, she said. I therefore call her comic style "ultra-feminine".

As mentioned, this ultra-femininity is also expressed in Dip's clothing. She wears dresses and high heels onstage, even though she has been advised to tone the "sexiness" down. As she is famous, she can't, however, de-characterize herself. Had Dip switched her usual dress for the typical jeans and T-shirt, it would look like she was wearing a costume of stand-up comedian and, therefore, she would be less credible.

The routines are confessional, but do not reveal too much of her personal life – a lot of jokes talk about experiences of older women, such as hot flashes, marriage after a few decades, sex after the 50's, being with younger men. I consider this positive, as older women's perspectives are underrepresented in popular culture and younger actresses are often invited to play the old women's parts. One of Dip's most famous jokes talks precisely about that.

For those who don't know, I was Penélope in *Castelo Rá Tim Bum* [TV show for kids aired in the 1990's]. Young people now come to me and say: 'Angela Dip! You were part of my childhood!' And I feel so... Old! To get worse, they invited me for *Maísa* [miniseries about a Brazilian singer]... To do Maísa's mom, i.e Jayme Monjardim's [Brazilian director, son of

Maísa, aged 57 in 2013] grandmother! In *Malhação* [soap opera for teens], I was invited to join the ‘seniors’ cast. But I took revenge. Those hot actors in their 20’s... All I had to do was rub against them and I didn’t have to do hormonal replacement.<sup>84</sup> (Dip, *La Putanesca*)

Dip also recurs to self-deprecation, but not on Marrer’s degree. She does acknowledge her age, and the effort she has to put up to look like she does. “If I take these stockings off, I have so many varicose veins my legs look like Google Maps”<sup>85</sup>. Another example: “just now, a little boy entered my dressing room and starred at my breasts, fascinated. Kids love plastic toys”<sup>86</sup>. Another of her famous jokes: “after the 40’s you don’t gain weight, you swell. You don’t lose weight, you shrink. You don’t tan, you grime”<sup>87</sup>. Those jokes reinforce youth as being more beautiful, but also reflect how many aging women see their bodies in a world that values youth. But Dip also flatters herself from time to time, like in the opening joke of *La Putanesca*: “*La Putanesca* is a very simple show... Like a stool and a guitar”, pointing to the stool where her water bottles are and then to her own body.

Dip also has a preference for word playing and one line jokes. Some of her one liners are: “If I drink, somebody will have to eat me”; “research reveals that women who drink distilled, liberate the other side”<sup>88</sup> and “my husband says his body is defined. It will stay this fat forever”. She also plays with the Madonna vs. whore divide: “being a woman is not easy, no matter how easy you are”<sup>89</sup>.

One can thus verify some major tendencies in these women’s performances: the first one is a need to decide upon how “girly” the performance will be, i.e. how many jokes about specific women’s experiences or themes traditionally classified as feminine will be included. Secondly, the need to demarcate the comedian’s sex – even if that looks obvious to the audience. This move is frequently accompanied by self-deprecation. Thirdly, there is a common use of incongruity in the sense of appearing to complain about sexism, but then backing out and following dominant anti-feminist discourses.

## **Chapter 5: Commonalities in the informants' discourse**

In this chapter, I will enumerate and analyze the similarities in what the five research subjects have said in the interviews, when talking about their experiences as workers in the artistic field of stand-up comedy (how they started on the profession and how they evaluate their texts to have evolved during the entirety of their careers). I will also discuss what the commonalities in the informants' discourse when it comes to feminism and community building, discussing the answers in the light of the feminist scholarship on humor disclosed previously. Finally, I will talk about the way the five research subjects position themselves in the debate about politically incorrectness, since such positions are telling of how willing they are to engage with feminism and other minority movements.

### ***5.1 Being a woman in stand-up comedy***

Similarities in the way the research subjects have started on stand-up comedy, how they felt on their first performances and how they evaluate their writing to have evolved comprise the content of this section.

#### **5.1.1 Starting on stand-up**

Zoccoli's statement "I didn't choose stand-up. Stand-up chose me" (interview 2) is exemplary of how my research subjects talk about the beginning of their careers. When asked about how they found out they had a talent for making people laugh, they all declared that they were not considered funny people in everyday life. However, they liked to write and, at some point, the opportunity to write comic texts presented itself.

For Leal, the first opportunity to write humor was around 2002, on an audition to the play *Terça Insana*, which featured actors alone onstage joking as characters. Leal created the character of

a cleaning lady. Marrer started to explore her funny side in Orkut, Google's social network which was popular in Brazil before Facebook. Orkut had thematic communities, a kind of forum, where people with similar interests could discuss different topics. Marrer used fake profiles to joke on such communities. Her winning performance on Rafinha Bastos' contest of amateur stand-up comedy was the first text she signed. Paiva also got into the genre thanks to Orkut. She participated of a community about stand-up comedy. One day, a user from Sorocaba proposed to form a group in the town. Paiva said she was interested in writing routines, but not performing them, because she was too shy. However, at the day of the premiere, the group convinced her to perform. As for Dip, in 2010 a producer asked if she had a stand-up text for a show he would organize two months ahead. She did not have anything, but said that she did. Then she wrote *La Putanesca*. For Zoccoli, writing stand-up comedy was a way to escape the loneliness of academic studies.

Joking was never a habit for me. I didn't even enjoy watching humor. But when I heard about *Clube da Comédia*, I learned that what they did was 'stand-up comedy', so I started to read more about it. You know, academic work is very lonely and depressing. At the end of the week, I just wanted to go out and do something different. So I started knocking on bars' doors in São Paulo.<sup>90</sup> (Zoccoli, first interview)

When asked about how they felt in their first presentation, all five informants said it was not easy. Surprisingly, even the professional actresses Leal and Dip felt nervous. They missed having props. "I was tense. I thought I had to copy Seinfeld, his way of walking... I missed having a crutch, a pair of glasses, an actor's thing. I wasn't comfortable being just myself"<sup>91</sup>, said Leal. "I felt naked", Dip said. "It was like a premiere, after so many years working on theater. At first, I still needed a crutch, so I had a stool and a cigarette. Little by little, I let that go until, one day, someone invited me somewhere and I went there with nothing"<sup>92</sup>. Marrer said her nervousness was so overwhelming she was shaking and walking from side to side. Paiva and Zoccoli recalled to be a little bit more at ease on the first time. Paiva because most people in the audience were friends and

family. Zoccoli because she understood the implications of lack of experience.

My first time was horrible, nobody laughed. But I didn't care! Do you know the innocence of the beginner? That was fine by me"<sup>93</sup>. Zoccoli was the only interviewee to say that she does not speed up to the next joke when the audience does not laugh. Rather, she finds the situation of a professional comedian being met with indifference funny in itself. By watching Zoccoli's videos prior to the research, I noticed that sometimes she remains silent after a joke does not work, or acknowledges the mistake, saying something like "that one was horrible, wasn't it?"

### **5.1.2 Self-evaluation of the performance over the years**

When asked in the second interview to evaluate how their writing has evolved throughout their careers, the interviewees were unanimous in saying that the biggest lessons they learned was to "read" the audience and develop "timing". Zoccoli and Leal declared to have become less focused on technique. "I used to be very technical. Like: 'text, text, joke'. A joke every two lines. I was very strict about that. Now I'm more relaxed, I try to do something funny but without a metric", said Leal<sup>94</sup>, while Zoccoli said:

When I started, I had a 'stiff' text. Text, punchline, text, punchline. Bang, bang, bang. It had this exact musicality: bang, bang, bang. Then I started to let go a bit, and see that I could be funny in other ways. For example, 'I'm not here to judge' is not a joke, it's a comment... To make it sound funny, I have to install an entire emotional load.<sup>95</sup> (Zoccoli, second interview)

By "reading the audience", the comedians not only mean making people laugh in ways that are not described in humor textbooks, but they also often imply "dumbing the text down" to give the audience "what it wants". This may mean reproducing clichés and stereotypes that they perceive the audience to expect, even if that means curbing their own wishes, in order to achieve success in the business. Dip, for example, said:

I became funnier, or what people consider funnier, thanks to the interaction with the audience. My boyfriend suggested making jokes about soccer, so I took time creating amazing things. But then you get there and what works the most is saying that Corinthians fans are poor<sup>96</sup>. I always fought with myself about that... But at some point, I gave in. That's why I make those easy jokes. The audience seems happy, whoever hired you thinks it's wonderful.<sup>97</sup>  
(Dip, second interview)

Jokes with stereotypes about soccer fans were indeed abundant in all the routines I watched by men and women. Since soccer is a national passion and it is customary to poke fun at people who root for a different team, saying that Corinthians fans are poor or São Paulo's fans are gay is a guarantee of instant laughter. Marrer at the same time pointed out that the obligation to please the audience makes her feel confined to a narrow range of topics.

I'm more and more confident making humor. I just can't joke about politics yet. But that's a problem of Brazilians. If you criticize Fernando Henrique Cardoso [ex-president, right wing] you're a fucking PT [Worker's Party] follower. If you criticize Lula [ex-president, member of PT] you are a reactionary rightist. People don't understand that everything must be criticized. I want to write about other stuff, but it's hard. So I keep mocking myself.<sup>98</sup>  
(Marrer, second interview)

This quote reveals a tendency among the interviewed comedians: classifying the Brazilian audience as less mature than the Americans. The United States is set by them as a model of good joking and acceptance, the point to which Brazilian stand-up comedy should evolve to. This became even more apparent when the interviewees were asked to list their idols. All of them cited American comedians – the most cited names were George Carlin and Ellen DeGeneres. None of them cited Brazilian names. The quote also reveals a sort of arrogance or even classist attitude towards audiences. While the business imperative does impose limitations, opting for beaten stereotypes is the easiest way out. Blaming Brazilian audiences for the “weakness” of the jokes is another easy

way out, a self-justificatory move. It is like comedians are unwilling to assume responsibility for their own artistic choices, instead putting themselves as passive victims of the audience's allegedly dumb wishes.

The interviews also mention that, in order to better give the audience "what it wants", they have been using social media to obtain advice on how to joke. "I write a lot on Twitter, I test a lot of stuff"<sup>99</sup>, said Leal. "I recently asked on Twitter: a twin suing his brother for plagiarism is the height of what? People were divided between the height of envy and the height of justice. Envy won, even though I find justice more interesting. But maybe envy is more accessible"<sup>100</sup>, recalled Dip.

### **5.1.3 Living the experience of "minority"**

When asked to tell how it is like to be the only woman or one of the few women in stand-up comedy shows or groups, the comedians have confirmed some of the observations made by feminist scholars on humor. The interviews have indicated that the existence of the unfunny woman stereotype generate a need for fighting for, and negotiating space. All interviewees classified being a minority as a blessing and a curse at the same time. A blessing because, when a woman is needed, there are few to choose from; a curse because men enjoy privileges for being the majority and access to positions of power, such as owning comedy. Women are thus accepted, but as a sort of second class.

Leal said that her experience as the only woman in *Clube da Comédia* could have been better, had she not taken gender so seriously. She even blames an "internalized stigma of inferiority" for her insecurity in the beginning of her career. According to her, little by little she relaxed and realized she could be "bigger than gender" and simply do what she wanted. Although not mentioned as a role model when explicitly asked, all other interviewees complimented Leal's "braveness" for joking about general topics. But Leal cannot be bigger than gender, as she says.



Rather, she had to develop a strategy for standing a chance before all the macho jokes: asking to be the first to perform.

I performed alongside very macho men, who made heavy, dirty jokes. So I noticed that, when I went onstage after them, with my girly voice saying ‘Hello, everyone!’, the audience rolled their eyes. Especially because my text is clean. There’s no way that can work. It’s a break.<sup>101</sup> (Leal, first interview)

In the stand-up scene, there is the unspoken rule that the “weakest” comedian is the one that starts the show. For this reason, Leal said a lot of people asked her if she did not trust her own work. “I reply that it’s a matter of intelligence. If there are only men and you’re the last one to go... There’s no way. A code has already been established”<sup>102</sup>. Zoccoli once felt forced to be the one to start. Once, before a show in which she was the only woman, the men started a discussion about who would go first. They then turned to Zoccoli: “well, you’re the girl, so we think you should open it”.

I said ‘of coourse’, thinking: ‘I am gonna screw these guys so hard. I’ll set this audience in such a fire that whoever comes after me will be fucked’. Because it’s hard when a comedian gets the audience too worked up. The one who comes next has to keep the mood up, otherwise he’s screwed. In 15 minutes, I must have gotten 15 applauses. When I was done, the master of ceremonies didn’t even want to make his own jokes. He just called the next comedian. I fucked everyone. After that, I didn’t even want to stay in the dressing room, I just said: ‘well, boys, gotta go because I have another appointment. Kisses, good luck!’ They never did that to me again. I have absolutely no problem in starting a show. I just saw what they were doing to me there<sup>103</sup> (Zoccoli, second interview)

Sometimes, the research subjects were told to their faces that women were unfunny. Zoccoli said she had never felt invalidated for being a woman – until she started to joke professionally and hear repeated references to the stereotype. She mentioned the example a member of one of the

stand-up groups she participated in, who used to constantly tell her that women lack the charisma for doing humor. According to him, Zoccoli only stood out in the business because she is a good writer. “I never understood that. So you can’t make humor because you lack a penis? It makes no sense”<sup>104</sup>, she said. Another instance in which Zoccoli recalls to confront the stereotype was during a radio interview with Emilio Surita, a famous comedian. He kept saying that women are naturally unfunny, quoting a study supposedly made in England. “I don’t remember it quite right, but from what he said the study was so flawed. The method was bullshit”<sup>105</sup>. Zoccoli created a joke in response to this event, which she incorporates in most of her performances, including *Não tô Aqui pra Julgar*. It goes like this: “You probably have heard Emilio saying that women can’t do humor. Don’t be alarmed. I hereby inform you that I have been making this entire presentation with a dick”<sup>106</sup>. She then lifts up her shirt, revealing a dildo placed underneath her pants.

For Paiva, the problem is that the stereotype does not take into consideration that the double shift of daily work can impede women from engaging with humor.

We often hear that women are humorless. The truth is that women have more daily worries than men do (...) so they take longer to shut their minds down and be playful. They have so many things to take care of. The house, the kids, work, the groceries. But women have a lot of stories to tell... A lot of funny stories precisely because they have more problems. After all, humor is the problematization of life.<sup>107</sup> (Paiva, second interview)

Problems in networking in a field dominated by men were also pointed out by the interviewees when asked about how it is like to be the minority. Even though male comedians are their friends, they say friendship ties among men are stronger. This position of half-insider-half-outsider can cost women professional opportunities. “It’s a masculine field. The owners of big venues, bars and TV shows, they are all men. So there’s this thing... The guy invites his friend with whom he fucks whores together. (...) When they come up with a show, they invite their buddies”, argued Zoccoli.<sup>108</sup> Marrer said the same:

A male comedian calls another male comedian and says ‘Hey buddy, let’s have dinner at my place tonight?’ I can’t do that because the guy will think I wanna fuck him. So women are out of many ‘crews’. Sometimes you think you’re part of the crew, but then they start commenting on who they find hot, and a men’s talk is established. You have to accept that. No matter how much you try to be the coolest girl on earth, you’ll never be one of the guys... There will always be things they’ll never tell you<sup>109</sup> (Marrer, first interview)

Dip highlighted that, while stand-up comedy is very sexist, sexism is part of the art business in general. “In the arts, in the cinema, most directors are men with movies that talk about men.”<sup>110</sup>

In addition to the lack of networking opportunities, there is the establishment of the majority of men in comic shows as a norm. Some producers guarantee this majority even when there are opportunities to include more women. Zoccoli mentioned that she used to be part of a project with three men and two women. One of the men left and, according to her, there were two women who could substitute him “perfectly”. However, the producer vetoed both candidates, saying that there shouldn’t be more women than men in the show. “It’s like there’s a quota”, she lamented. Another common practice among producers of stand-up events is to include a token woman. Many times, this woman is not a professional comedian, but a model or actress. “Then everybody says: ‘see? Women are unfunny’. But that woman is not a comedian!”<sup>111</sup>, said Zoccoli.

The interviewees have also recognized that being a woman imposes limitations on their texts. In addition to the limitations attributed to the audience’s wishes and those imposed by employers (for example, when they are hired for a corporate event), there is also a limitation deriving from the values attributed to femininity. “If a woman says what she thinks, many times she’ll be called a whore”, said Dip<sup>112</sup>. Paiva complained about the same tendency, saying that a man mocking women onstage is assumed to be a stud, while women mocking men onstage are assumed to be “in need of a good fuck”. Marrer mentioned that a man showing his butt can be considered something funny, while a woman showing her butt would be seen as a whore. Women therefore

have to careful when making sex jokes. Paiva (second interview) manifested the same:

Say, a man is performing a text about dentists and it's not working. What does he do? He can say: 'in the end, I sucked the dentist's cock'. The audience will go 'hahaha!' That's funny because he made himself look gay. If a woman says that she blew a dentist because she couldn't afford the appointment, it's not funny, it's vulgar<sup>113</sup>

Even though women comedians feel that there are limits to what they can say, they see the potential for subversion as well. Paiva, for instance, sees being onstage as an opportunity to be *listened to* and considers that an advantage.

I joke that there are few women in stand-up because women find it hard to believe that there's a profession in which they'd be paid to give their opinion. Nobody wants to know the woman's opinion... She talks, the guy doesn't give a shit. So I say: 'yes, it exists! People even pay to hear us talk, it's crazy!'"<sup>114</sup> (Paiva, second interview)

## ***5.2 Feminism and community building***

In this section, I will evaluate the research subjects' engagements with feminism, what they understand by feminism and whether there is a declared intention of forming a community of women in the audience.

### **5.2.1 Perceptions of feminism**

Some feminist humor scholars, like Lisa Merrill (1988) argue that stand-up comedy performed by women, upon representing women's experiences and points of view, can build a community in the audience. This community effect can make them more aware of patriarchy, although it does not necessarily mean that the women in the audience would identify as feminists. None of my research subjects declared to be feminists, however. Four interviewees affirm that there is bias against women in society and in the stand-up comedy scene. They disagree with the unfunny

woman stereotype and want to change it, but do not necessarily think that their routines have to serve this function. Marrer is the exception to the rule, as she declares that humor is indeed something masculine, and women have to become more masculine to succeed in this endeavor.

As we have seen on Chapter 4, the lack of a conscious intentionality of subversion does not necessarily impede the routines from being subversive, since texts are polysemic. They take steps forward, criticizing sexism in some ways, and steps back, reinforcing sexism in other ways. The routines, therefore, have to be read as representing the contradicting desires of heterosexual, able-bodied, white, middle-class Brazilian women of their time in a context of negotiation of space within a male-dominated artistic field.

In order to find out the interviewees' relationship with the women's movement, I decided not to mention the word "feminism" directly in my questions, because I did not know what the word meant to them. Feminism has itself suffered from a politics of naming since the 1990's – conservative sectors of society have used the media to criticize the movement and define it in its own terms, something Susan Faludi (1991) calls *Backlash*. So I decided to make indirect questions, such as asking the five artists to talk about prejudice against women in humor or if they want to send a message with their routines. This way, if the comedians had any relation to feminism or any intention that they perceived as feminist, the word would come up. It has appeared in two interviews: Leal's and Marrer's. Another way to find out whether they had any relation to the women's movement was asking them to position themselves regarding the debate about politically incorrectness.

What became apparent from the answers is that the comedians have a vague and scattered understanding about what feminism is. For example, Leal equated the words "feminism" and "machismo", as if a feminist was merely the female version of a male supremacist. "I'm not *machista* and I'm not feminist either. When a *machista* joke is a good joke, I will laugh. I'm not gonna raise a girly flag. I think that's boring. *Machismo* is boring, feminism is boring"<sup>115</sup>.

Marrer, who denies that there is resistance to women in stand-up comedy (rather, she agrees that men are better comedians; and blames women for being “too vain”), declared to “hate” feminists. However, her answers indicate she is not very familiar with feminist discourses.

I hate feminists so much, what’s the problem in us being different? Are you a woman who wants to do humor? There’s a market out there. Do you have a nice text? There’s a market. Now, if you don’t have a good text, don’t make excuses saying the world is sexist because that’s not true. You get a little prejudice for ten seconds. For ten seconds, the audience looks at me with that face: ‘ugh, a woman’. But the moment I start talking, the prejudice is over<sup>116</sup> (Marrer, first interview)

If those comedians were more familiar with feminist discourses, maybe they would have been able to better conceptualize their position and experiences in the stand-up comedy scene. Rather, their answers are at many times ambiguous: they claim that there is bias against women but then blame women or themselves for not acting right; or deny the need for promoting change.

### **5.2.2 Community building**

As for building a community of women in the audience, none of the interviewees declared that to be their intention although, as discussed previously, all comedians pose themselves the question of how much “girly” topics should appear in their routines. To Leal, the answer is as little as possible. To Dip, “girly” themes represent a niche to be explored. Paiva and Mhel felt a responsibility to represent women’s position in jokes about relationships. Zoccoli states that her representation of women’s perspectives is only natural because she is a woman; however she denies that her text is “girly”, instead classifying her theme choices as understandable to all audiences. Again, the women’s lack of intentionality for community building does not impede it to happen. Women laughed harder when Marrer criticized her boyfriend and when Zoccoli talked about men’s

rude come-ons. At these moments, some men looked at the women, apparently impressed or puzzled at how they found those jokes funnier.

The issue of “to be or not to be girly” can be attributed more to the way the comedians want to be perceived than to how much they want to engage women in the audience. Their answers indicate two lines of reasoning that cannot be exactly disentangled from one another: the first is that going for “girly” topics is a restriction; the second places “girly” as a minor category. These lines reflect a mix of both sexist and feminist points of view. Refusing to be “girly” can mean despising the “feminine” for classifying it as inferior and/or not wanting to perform the restricted, artificial norms arbitrarily attributed to one gender.

Self-deprecation was mentioned by Marrer and Paiva as an especially good way to engage accompanied women who feel threatened. Addressing women directly is another strategy.

I noticed that, when I made some remark about being a woman and single or being a woman and getting screwed in some way... It worked well. Because then the women look at me and think ‘ok, she’s not that great. She has also gone through rejections’. I also always try to make remarks that bring women in, such as: ‘Right, women?’, ‘Don’t you agree, women?’<sup>117</sup> (Paiva, second interview)

The quote above exemplifies how the intention of community building, when present, is not exactly guided by about how the women in the audience will make sense and use of the routine. Rather, it is a strategy for the comedian to be accepted as credible, as worth listening to.

### **5.2.3 Women-only shows**

In spite of the statements of denial, what about shows like *Humor de Salto Alto* (created by Zoccoli and where Paiva perform now), which aims to feature more women than men, and *Angela Dip só para Mulheres*, in which men were not allowed in the audience? How do they position themselves in relation to feminism and community building? The answers given by Zoccoli Paiva

and Dip point out that the intention behind those shows is far less feminist as I had supposed.

Although Dip recognizes the existence of sexism, fighting it was not mentioned by her among the main reasons for creating the show. The idea for it came when she was invited to a corporate event at a hospital. She performed to an audience of female nurses only, and noted that they women seemed much more comfortable in that all-female space than in mixed audiences. “I saw that their reaction was much stronger, they laughed more, they were more loose... Especially when I talked about sex and men”, says Dip<sup>118</sup>. Thus, when the audience is all female, the community building effect seems higher. However, one can also question how effective the criticism against men can be if they are not in the audience to hear it. As I could not take part in this show’s audience, unfortunately the question remains open.

Dip does not see the difference in women audience’s reaction as related to patriarchy. Rather, she thinks it is natural that like-minded people, or people with similar experiences, feel more comfortable together. She compared the show to a group of friends going out, and supposed that a similar effect would exist in a show for men only. When equaling her show to a hypothetical show for men only, Dip waters down the political aspect of what she did:

When you go out with your girl friends, you are much more at ease than when there’s a macho in the middle. It’s the same thing in the audience. Even I, as an interpreter, feel much more comfortable to be goofy when there are only women. If I make a joke about how it is impossible to put mascara on without opening your mouth, guys won’t get it.<sup>119</sup> (Dip, second interview)

Dip also said that the idea for *Angela Dip só para Mulheres* grew stronger once she realized that a show like this would be “easier to market”. Among so many stand-up shows to choose from, hers had an original touch which attracted attention from the press. Dip’s solo can be considered subversive as it is not usual for (straight) men to be excluded from spaces, like marginalized groups were and are. Also, it is much less common for “safe spaces” for women to exist and be promoted



within mainstream popular culture. But the narrow definition of femininity presented by the routine (grounded on the pursuit of beauty and heterosexual relationships) as well as the consumerist reasoning reinforces sexist stereotypes and thus ends up excluding alternative or non-normative femininities from the “community”. Dip’s remark about a show like this being “easier to market” also denounces its limitations – after all, a show with feminist intentions would probably be much harder to market.

*Humor de Salto Alto* cannot be classified as feminist in its approach either. According to Zoccoli, the idea was merely having a better display of women’s work. There was no intention to “critique” the practices in stand-up comedy when it comes to content, as that would be seen as “badmouthing” men (sic): “In my head, it was never a show to badmouth men. It would be a show in which there would be no limit as to how many men and how many women could get in. There could be four women, five, ten.”<sup>120</sup> The fact that Paiva and Machado relied on beaten “war of the sexes” jokes and were careful not to make men feel excluded or under-represented is indicative of the show’s lack of intention to change stand-up comedy more profoundly. It also shows that they do not intend to form a community of women in the audience.

### ***5.3 Informants’ positioning in the “politically correct” debate***

The research subjects tend to side with the dominant position of stand-up comedians in the debate about political correctness, which is to oppose legal actions taken against humorists and defend absolute freedom of speech in humor. They classify the mere act of filing a legal suit (which can or cannot be lost by the comedian) as an act of censorship in itself.

An element often present in the answers is the appeal to the figure of the audience member who “only gets out of the house to get offended”. When referring to this somewhat fictional character, the interviewees contest it by making use of discourses that equate having a sense of

humor with being mentally healthy. They also use the ambiguous discourse that posits humor as a language that avowals and disavowals itself according to convenience. Humor is described as a form of critique (for example, Paiva describes it as the “problematization of the world”, while Marrer says its function is to “educate” people), but when their routines or the routines of colleagues are criticized by audience members of civil rights groups for being offensive to minorities, their position switches and they minimize the power of humor by categorizing it as something that should not be taken seriously.

The quotes below exemplify how the comedians make use of the figure of the “troubled” audience member to escape the criticisms made to their routines:

I think there should be no limits for humor. The limit belongs to the artist. Because you can press a button and turn the TV off, you can get up and leave the theater, you can change the channel. But if you go to a humor show with the intention of... You don't need a lawyer, you need a psychiatrist. Because it's humor, we're kidding<sup>121</sup> (Dip, second interview)

Once there was a girl who sent a letter to the producers of *Clube da Comédia*, saying that she and her father left the show in the middle because of my jokes about the fat neighbor. She was fat, and the father had given her the ticket as a birthday gift, so she got very upset. And I read all that thinking ‘yadda, yadda, yadda...’ This kind of people, they want to... They go out to annoy others. They go to a theater, they pay for it, it's a closed spectacle... Maybe one of us can decide to take the clothes off onstage. There's an age limit. So, if you go there, accept it. Or just don't come back anymore. Tell your friends that you didn't like it. But don't take it personally, because it's art. A person like that would have gotten offended if I made a joke about, say, a little honey bee, because their mom was bit by a bee and died... People are crazy<sup>122</sup> (Leal, second interview)

The person woke up on the wrong side of the bed. There are people that want to complain about everything, they wake up and go ‘hmm, I think I’ll get mad today’ (...) Once a pregnant woman left the show during my set about why I don’t wanna have kids. Man, I’m not saying ‘*you* can’t have kids’. I’m saying *I* don’t want to. So do you understand when I say that sometimes the problem is in the person’s head?<sup>123</sup> (Zoccoli, second interview)

I have a series of jokes about my problem with physiognomy, how I don’t remember people’s faces. So you can imagine what happens with Asian people. They all look alike to me! Once a Japanese woman got mad. She left the bar and complained to the owner. I said “Now what?” and the owner said “I don’t give a shit”. Well, if the owner says it’s ok... Because the joke is not aggressive, it’s about me. What do they want me to say? That I do tell them apart? I don’t!<sup>124</sup> (Paiva, second interview)

While it is, to some extent, true that some people take things personally when the topic in discussion is not them (Zoccoli’s case of the pregnant woman is a good example), the quotes above fail to consider that the people getting offended are not just any people – they belong to historically ridiculed or excluded groups, such as fat women and Asians. The comedians trivialize the question, reducing it to a matter between the comedian and the audience member alone, when in fact the jokes are anything but individual or personal since they make reference to stereotypes and offenses often used as a means of social discrimination. The choice of those jokes’ butts is not innocent. Joking about a fat woman does not mean the same as joking about a honey bee because these two topics are weighted differently in society. Paiva’s set about Asians, for example, is *not* just about herself. It goes beyond the theme of her physiognomy trouble, with jokes such as “you will never see a Japanese guy asking for a paternity test. If they give you a child, raise him, he’ll look like you

anyway!”<sup>125</sup> or “they must save a lot of money with identification bracelets in Japanese maternity hospitals. Just put them on a treadmill, like baggage claim. Each couple takes one upon leaving!”<sup>126</sup>

Another commonality in the position of the five comedians is the perception of a division between “funny” and “unfunny” jokes. They argue that jokes should be assessed in terms of their funniness only, and that jokes with an intention to offend will always be bad. However, they do not see “funny” as the very issue in the center of the debate, as something that is a matter of negotiation.

There are two kinds of jokes – the good ones and the bad ones. The funny ones and the unfunny ones. The unfunny ones, it doesn’t matter what they’re about. The funny ones, laugh about them. That’s their only function. If I joke about cancer, the joke will not kill anyone. If I don’t make the joke, I won’t stop anyone from dying of cancer either. It’s just a topic. If the topic is part of our lives, why not talk about it?<sup>127</sup> (Paiva, second interview)

You can tell when a guy is making a good joke – be it *machista*, feminist, about fat women, whatever – but he’s doing it for the joke, or if he’s doing it because he wants to express some affliction. That’s what’s not cool, when people do it for hate, for a personal reason. It’s very subtle, but you can tell.<sup>128</sup> (Leal, second interview)

The gap in this argument is that the comedians take funniness to be a universal attribute that is easily verifiable, while it is precisely what is at stake in the politically correctness debate as different strands of humor scholarship have repeatedly demonstrated that humor is a local practice. If the most important criteria of value judgment is “funniness”, the first question to be asked is “Funny to whom?” The fact that there are groups that do not find certain jokes funny (with some getting offended to the point of filing a lawsuit) is a clear indication that the category of “funniness” is not only flawed, but insufficient. Classifying the ones who do not find certain jokes funny as people “that woke up on the wrong side of the bed” is an *ad hominem* argument.

When Marrer tries to define funniness, she runs into contradiction: “the meter has to be the

funniness. If the majority laughed, it's funny. If the majority didn't laugh, that doesn't mean you can't do it either"<sup>129</sup>, she said. She contradicts herself by using majority as a measure of a good joke, but then arguing that the majority is dumb if their response does not meet the artist's expectations. Ironically, this exposes the purely individualistic and self-justificatory nature of her excuse for refusing to see the politics of humor. Marrer explains her views on the audience's alleged dumbness in the following way:

Nobody wants to propagate hate. We want to have the right to educate people. Once people really learn how to read, this will get better. (...) The problem is: you feed the audience as you'd feed a child. First, you give them just potatoes. At some point, you give them spinach. If they make an ugly face, you go back to potatoes. This is the problem: you gotta move on to spinach sooner or later, but it's hard to make them accept it. I'd like to say everything I think, but if you can't make the audience laugh hard, they will leave the theater thinking the show was shit and not that they are limited.<sup>130</sup> (Marrer, second interview)

Zoccoli has a more balanced view on politically correctness. She uses her own routine as an example of how comedians can address "heavy" topics they want to, and argues that when there is no intention to offend, the audience will understand (except for those that take it too personally). She said she feels free to make heavy jokes such as "if nature was fair, Gisele Bündchen would be born without one leg"<sup>131</sup> because the audience sees that she means no harm neither to Gisele nor to disabled people. According to Zoccoli, "some people defend the freedom to joke and others defend the freedom to offend"<sup>132</sup>. Interestingly, Zoccoli was the only research subject to argue that, upon writing, the comedian has to question him/herself.

If I feel like making a joke about... Say, cancer... I'll evaluate. Is it more offensive than funny? Why do I want to make this joke? Do I want to do it to look cool, because I want to be an alpha male with everyone at my feet? Or do I want to do it because it's funny and I want to make them have a good time?<sup>133</sup> (Zoccoli, second interview)

In contrast to the implied self-centeredness informing the comedians' view on "funny" as "the" measure of a joke, another common explicitly voiced argument among the interviewees is that jokes do not necessarily reflect the comedian's opinion. According to them, a stand-up comedian might say something she/he does not really believe in, just because the joke "works". Leal told me, for instance: "the other day I saw a guy make a super sexist joke on Twitter. But it was so funny. Why? Because he doesn't believe that. He's not a *machista* raising a flag. He just knows that it works, so he plays with that"<sup>134</sup> (Leal, second interview)

Jokes are always absurd. The funniness lies in you *not* being that way. When I make a joke about pedophilia, I'm assuming that we all are *not* pedophiles. And that's why it's funny, because it's out of the line. (...)Other comedians can say anything they want, they are accepted because they have fictional characters. But people can't accept stand-up, they can't understand that's a persona you're creating.<sup>135</sup> (Marrer, second interview)

As for the research subjects' attitude concerning sexist jokes specifically, their discourse did not change much when their sex is the target? They maintained the "funny is funny" argument, using the artist-centered individualistic logic once again on saying that sexist jokes are valid as long as they are well constructed. For instance, Leal said:

There's nothing I can do. It's their way of thinking, they are little *machos* and find that amusing. This is something that has to change socially. As long as it doesn't change in a broader context, I can't complain. Carol [Zoccoli] likes making Philosophy jokes. I don't. So those are topics I wouldn't choose. But I don't think the fact that they make sexist jokes makes them better or worse than doing Philosophy jokes. If the jokes are good, I will laugh.<sup>136</sup> (Leal, second interview)

## Conclusions

The new generations of Brazilian women stand-up comedians have been opening more spaces for women to appear on theaters and television as writers and performers of their own comedy, instead of performing as mere stage assistants or ladders for jokes. Even though women are still a minority, comedians like my five research subjects – as well as other names such as Dani Calabresa, Tatá Werneck and Miá Mello, among others – are bringing more visibility to women’s comic writing and thus contributing to dismantle the idea that women are not capable of doing humor or not talented enough.

Since stand-up comedy is “the humor of daily life” and many of these comedians talk about their own lives and memories, their work is helping to expose women’s experiences, which have been traditionally hidden, forgotten or undervalued in the history of popular culture. As Paiva pointed out, women’s standpoint is not an easy place to be, but it surely does generate many funny stories to tell. That a handful of Brazilian women are managing to make a living out of telling these stories, is something to be celebrated. Although men’s voices are still overrepresented/dominant in humor, they are no longer the only ones.

However, these women work in a heterosexist context of negotiation of space. Such negotiation is reflected in their behavior onstage and in the way they conceptualize their careers. How these comedians greet the audience, what they wear, the way they move, the tone of voice they use, the themes they joke about, the structure of their texts and how they reflect on all that when invited to do so – all those elements contain indications of the need for them to appear less threatening in order to gain ground in the male-dominated and male-oriented field of stand-up comedy. A certain level of identification with this male-dominated, male-oriented world is necessary in the course of this negotiation, as the interviews have pointed out. The research subjects’ choice of comedy as a venue to speak has almost nothing to do with a feminist project, as

none of them intends to raise awareness about gender inequalities (in stand-up comedy and elsewhere) among the women in the audience. To put it shortly, what Brazilian women stand-up comedians want above all is to be *accepted* or *included*, not to transform the basic structures of the genre and its business. Mhel Marrer's already mentioned quote lamenting that she will never be "one of the guys", even if she is "the coolest girl on earth", is quite indicative of this tendency.

They complain of bias against women, but do not seem to stand up against it when their male counterparts make jokes that are derogative to women. Their refusal to "raise a girly flag", as Marcela Leal put it, or act "girly", as all of the research subjects said, indicates that embracing and defending femininity, in this space, is coming near risking a professional suicide. At the same time, they are pulled in conflicting directions. The acceptance they long for may simply not be possible if they perform the traditional characteristics associated with the feminine gender. After all, femininity does not belong there – unless one is already famous *before* entering stand-up comedy, which is the case of Angela Dip, who is relatively freer to go "girly" and explore this market niche by herself, as long as femininity is still defined in traditional terms, of course, otherwise it is not so marketable. While the interviewees many times justify this refusal by paradoxically arguing that they do not want to be restricted as artists, they do adopt a number of restrictions in order to make ends meet. They spontaneously restrict their texts for many purposes: getting money from corporate events, breaking through the audience's resistance (especially of other women), giving the audience what they (supposedly) want, being validated as comedians instead of "just" women, not being too "vulgar", etc. Joanne Gilbert said that women stand-up comedians are in the difficult, ambiguous position of having to follow the "male-identified standards" that do well in the business and at the same put these standards into question (2004, p. 23). Being a woman stand-up comedian is thus like walking on a tightrope, always calculating just how feminine you can be to keep moving forward.

None of my informants claim to be representing (or even wanting to represent) women. Nevertheless, they do. As there are few women in the business, repeatedly getting invited to



perform whenever a woman is “needed”, they come to represent womanhood; they come to represent what women are supposed to be and think, in the genre of stand-up comedy. This is problematic because all the successful women stand-up comedians are white, middle-class, heterosexual and able-bodied. Alternative or non-normative femininities are still invisible in this genre, much in the same way alternative masculinities are (there are no known gay stand-up comedians in Brazil, for example). This might be yet another reason why the genre has become so popular among heterosexual couples in Brazil (and I should stress that those couples were mostly white, middle-class and able bodied as well) and also why stand-up comedy could figure as a particular battlefield for the debate on political correctness. Stand-up comedians are mostly members of dominant groups mocking non-dominant groups. As there is an element of marginality in women (gender), some research subjects feel the need to use self-deprecation in order to win the audience. They have to target to themselves in order to validate their presence in that space. But being on the tightrope, as half-insiders-half-outsiders, women sometimes do make jokes that express their discontent with sexism and patriarchy. In those moments, the community building is easily verifiable, as women in the audience laugh more and louder. Carol Zoccoli’s inversion of street harassment is an example of such effect.

The routines of Brazilian women stand-up comedians thus can be classified neither as subversive nor as conservative. They are both. Those are texts on the tightrope, like their authors. One must read them taking into account the comedians’ ambiguous position of outsiders wanting to be included in a field that was constituted around what is considered to be their opposite. Those are texts produced within a power struggle in which the dominated cannot help but identify with the dominant. Such texts cannot be dismissed as doing women no service. They have contributed to bringing more visibility to women’s writing and everyday experiences, as well as opening up new professional opportunities. But one cannot fall into the mistake of thinking that a woman is automatically defying patriarchy the moment she takes a microphone to joke about the society she

lives in. She is part of that same society, shares its values, and has to survive in a business where “pleasing” the audience is a must. Therefore, this woman many times may identify and reproduce the very same norms she supposedly is there to defy.

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## Appendix

List of basic questions made to all research subjects. There were questions made specifically to each comedian, depending on their responses. The order of the questions also varied. When the interviewee, in a given answer, mentioned a topic I wanted to find out about with a later question, I brought that question in advance just to take advantage of the timing.

### Section 1:

- How did you find out that you were funny?
- When did you visualize comedy as a profession?
- How was your very first stand-up comedy performance? How did you feel?
- How was the audience's reaction on your first performance?
- What do you do when a joke does not work? How to deal with rejection, when the audience does not seem to like you?
- How do you feel being a woman in the stand-up field? What is it like being the only woman in a comedy group / a minority as women in stand-up comedy?
- Stand-up comedian Dani Calabresa once said it is common for the audience to roll their eyes and go like "aw, man" when a woman comes onstage. Have you ever felt the same?
- Do you think that there is any (other) kind of resistance to women comedians?
- To the ones that had women-only shows: what was your experience with *Humor de Salto Alto* / *Angela Dip so Para Mulheres*? What is the idea behind the show? How do you evaluate it?
- How do you evaluate stand-up comedy in terms of openness to women?
- How do you evaluate the work of your women colleagues?
- Do you notice any difference in the way men and women in the audience react to your jokes?

### Section 2:

- What inspires you to write?
- Do you carry a notepad around?
- Who are your biggest idols and influences?
- Do you test your jokes with anyone before performing them onstage?
- What kind of jokes seem to work the best with the audience?
- What kind of jokes do you like writing the most? What are your favorite topics?
- Let's talk about posture. Do you have any specific posture you adopt onstage? If so, why?
- Do you want to send any message with your jokes? If so, which ones?
- Who do you want to be as a comedian?
- How do you think people perceive you as a comedian?
- How do you evaluate your performance to have evolved throughout the years? What has changed?
- Are there any topics you try to avoid?
- Have you ever been criticized for a particular joke? If so, what happened?
- Let's talk about politically correctness. What do you think about that?
- What about sexist/machista jokes? How do you feel about them?

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> *Zé's lair*, in a free translation. Zé is a common nickname for the name José.

<sup>2</sup> *I Am the Spectacle*, in a free translation.

<sup>3</sup> *Terça Insana (Crazy Tuesday)* was a weekly play that started in 2001 on Next Theater, in São Paulo, under the direction of Greice Gianoukas. In it, a series of characters took turns alone onstage, telling a story (*Terça Insana*, 2013)

<sup>4</sup> “10 or 15 people”, according to Marcela Leal (first interview)

<sup>5</sup> *No matter what it takes*, in my free translation

<sup>6</sup> *Now it is too late*, also in a reference to the time when the show starts.

<sup>7</sup> “Essa molecada acha que sabe fazer stand-up só porque é engraçado com os amigos. Espero que haja uma seleção natural, porque você pega um evento. Rafinha Bastos, 40 mil. Eu, 6 mil. E um cara desse, 500 reais” (Paiva, second interview)

<sup>8</sup> *Humor in High Heels*, in my free translation

<sup>9</sup> *Angela Dip just for women*

<sup>10</sup> The word means “rampant” in Portuguese.

<sup>11</sup> Series of worldwide marches that started in Toronto, against the rape apologizing culture which uses the stereotype of the slut as a means to blame the victims of sexual assault (*Slutwalk*, 2013)

<sup>12</sup> “Toda mulher que eu vejo na rua reclamando que foi estuprada é feia pra caralho. Tá reclamando do quê? Deveria dar graças a deus. Isso pra você não foi um crime, e sim uma oportunidade. Homem que fez isso não merece cadeia, merece um abraço”.

<sup>13</sup> “Comeria ela e o bebê”

<sup>14</sup> *The art of Insult*, free translation

<sup>15</sup> “Chega de controle politicamente correto. Acho que o humor não tem limite, mas a grosseria tem. Se é engraçado, então o humor está perdoado. Ninguém pode censurar”

<sup>16</sup> “O politicamente correto é uma peste que veio para infernizar a vida dos seres humanos, sou totalmente contra. O humor tem que ser engraçado. Acho um nojo ter que falar ‘afro-brasileiro’ ao invés de negro. Não poder fazer piada com judeu? O humor tem que ser engraçado”

<sup>17</sup> *The Laugh of Others*



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<sup>18</sup> “Existem outras formas de fazer humor. Existem maneiras de fazer rir sem humilhar os outros. E mesmo quando você traz essas minorias para dentro da piada, não precisa ser humilhando essas pessoas” (Antonio, 2012)

<sup>19</sup> “Fica difícil você atingir as pessoas e fazer elas pensarem quando você esta sendo amordaçado e tem medo de falar. Porque as vezes a gente tem medo... A censura existe e é oficializada no Brasil. Ela só não tem esse nome”. (Antonio, 2012)

<sup>20</sup> “As pessoas tem que parar de interpretar piada como se fosse opinião 100% do tempo” (Antonio, 2012)

<sup>21</sup> “Se o humor sempre tem uma vítima, façamos então a vítima certa. Tem tanta gente que precisa apanhar. Por que bater nas mulheres e nos negros, que já apanharam bastante?” (Antonio, 2012)

<sup>22</sup> “Um bom psiquiatra de vez em quando em bom. Prefiro rir! E fazer os outros rirem!” (Antonio, 2012)

<sup>23</sup> “A pessoa que quer contestar tudo isso, ela é colocada hoje em dia como se fosse careta, quando na verdade é o contrario. Eu acho que a gente devia pensar nessa inversão de sentidos que foi aplicada a essas duas expressões: ‘politicamente correto’ e ‘politicamente incorreto’” (Antonio, 2012)

<sup>24</sup> “Eu acho que isso é ser defensor de causas que não existem. Politicamente correto é o cara que defende o outro sem que o outro precise dessa defesa.” (Antonio, 2012)

<sup>25</sup> *I'm not here to judge*

<sup>26</sup> “Ela acabou de ter o segundo filho agora. Duas semanas depois, tava fazendo foto de biquíni! Isso não é normal, isso não é humano! E aí o que acontece quando uma mulher normal olha pra essa criança? Você sente ódio dessa criança! Tenho vontade de pegar aquela criança pelo pescocinho e embucetar de novo! Porque essa criança veio no mundo com uma missão:destruir aquele corpo. Agora é uma alma sem função! (...) Vou te falar uma coisa: todas as modelos são putas. Putas!”

<sup>27</sup> “Uau, anos e anos de treino... E ele levanta peso. Mas levantar a tampa do vaso você não levanta não, né seu filho da puta?”

<sup>28</sup> “Stand-up te dá essa liberdade, de ser o que você é. Eu sou mais parada. Às vezes um tom mais alto de voz, mas nada muito enlouquecedor de cabelos batendo e pulos” (Paiva, second interview)

<sup>29</sup> “O que você vê no palco sou eu, sou aquilo ali” (Leal, first interview)

<sup>30</sup> “Quero que vocês se sintam como se estivessem na sala da minha casa. E pelo número de pessoas que estão aqui... Caberia!”

<sup>31</sup> “Você tem que falar do mesmo jeito que a gente tá aqui, na minha cozinha. Como se fosse um amigo com quem você sai pra tomar uma cerveja” (Leal, first interview)

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<sup>32</sup> “A plateia te desafia o tempo todo. Se você entra e ela sente q você ta segura, eles pensam: ”ok, ela sabe o que está fazendo”. Se eles sentem que não, já vira um confronto. A gente contra você. Eles ficam te desafiando: faz a gente rir aí.” (Paiva, second interview)

<sup>33</sup> “Humorista bonito... As piadas dele que forem um pouco mais preconceituosas, ninguém vai gostar. Ele é bonito e vai falar da menina que é gorda? Não dá” (Marrer, first interview)

<sup>34</sup> “Se você tem necessidade de ser bonita, não passa credibilidade. Eu falo que levei fora de um mendigo. Se eu boto uma banca, isso não é crível. Ok, não é verdade, mas seria menos se eu tivesse de salto, patricinha” (Paiva, second interview)

<sup>35</sup> “O mundo é machista, então é lógico que algumas pessoas vão ter o pé atrás e já ir pensando “ah, isso não vai ser engraçado”. Se a mulher for mais pra gostosa, esquece. Aí não vai ser engraçada nunca. Então, eu tinha mania de me apresentar com uma roupa mais sexy. Aí um produtor falou pra mim: ‘não vai por esse lado que as pessoas têm preconceito, não vão achar engraçado’. Não sei dizer se funcionou, mas eu acho que procede o que ele disse. Porque aí você acaba chamando a atenção para outra coisa... Não que eu consiga também, só botar uma calça jeans e camiseta e fazer a linha lésbica desleixada. Mas eu já entendi que se eu fizer a... Na verdade não tenho muita certeza em relação a isso, mas eu acho que procede o que ele falou”

<sup>36</sup> “Sentia que quando eu me arrumava muito, as mulheres ficavam... Porque geralmente vai de casalzinho, né. As meninas se sentem ameaçadas. O cara fica meio incomodado também. ‘Putá merda, vou ficar rindo dessa moça.. E a minha namorada vai achar que...’

<sup>37</sup> “Os homens geralmente tem uma postura de ‘ah, tá bom. Me faz rir aí’. A mulher já é mais “Há! Quem essa vaca pensa que é?”. É uma pena, porque as mulheres ainda têm esse confronto quando veem outra mulher ali. Parece um desafio, parece que vai tirar a atenção do marido dela. Já percebi uma vez que tinha um casal na plateia e ela cutucava o marido e fazia ‘shhh, não ri’.

<sup>38</sup> “A mulher, pra fazer humor, ou ela tem que ser o fim da linha da gorda, da desleixada, da desdentada, da descabelada, ou ela é extremamente gostosa e fica de biquíni no palco. Mas ai ela não faz humor, ela enfeita o humor pra dar audiência. Mas porra, as mulheres normais passam por situações normais. Então eu não preciso ser extremamente linda nem extremamente feia para ter passado por situações engraçadas que outras mulheres vão se identificar”

<sup>39</sup> “Se ela quer ser vista como isso, vai ser difícil ela ser vista como humorista, porque ela já está se colocando numa outra posição” (Zoccoli, second interview)

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<sup>40</sup> “Resistência... Não tem. Você é boa, você faz. Tem mercado. Nós, poucas mulheres que fazemos, acabamos ficando com todo o nicho. A vaidade feminina é o que estraga. A mulher não tem coragem de falar da sua estria, da sua celulite. Mulher fica com vergonha. ‘Ah, vão me achar feia’. Na hora que você entra no humor, você escolhe: ou você quer ser comida ou quer ser humorista e ganhar dinheiro” (Marrer, first interview)

<sup>41</sup> “Eu tinha um negócio que chamava mordida cruzada. Mirava no sanduíche, acaba sempre arrancando um pedaço da mão” (Leal, in *Seleção do Humor Stand-up*)

<sup>42</sup> Meu texto é bem limpo, não é a minha pegar pesado. Acredito que sei fazer as pessoas rirem com qualidade e inteligência. Pra mim, pegar pesado seria uma forma de apelar. Como eu faço, às vezes eu apelo, tenho piadas que tem palavrão... Mas não são as que eu curto mais. As que eu curto mais são as piadas de inteligência, piada curta, de uma linha só” (Leal, second interview)

<sup>43</sup> “Uma vez ele fez uma cartinha super fofa pra mim. Aí ele me pegou dizendo assim. ‘amor, fiz na fonte 16 para você conseguir enxergar’. Outro dia ele me mostrou um vídeo do aniversário dele de seis anos de idade... Imagina, já tinha vídeo. Aí mostrei eu também, aos seis anos, numa xilogravura. De vez em quando ele dava uns foras, por conta da diferença de idade. Teve uma vez que a gente tava transando, ele disse assim: ‘ai, ai... É um tesão transar com a senhora’ (Leal in *Seleção do Humor Stand-up*)

<sup>44</sup> “A mulher, coitada, acha que ela vai mudar o homem galinha, né mulherada? Mas não vai...” (Leal in *Seleção do Humor Stand-up*)

<sup>45</sup> “Eu mal apareci lá na porta do curso, apareceu um aluno: ‘meu, saí do meu corpo, fui até o centro, dei um rolê pela praça da Sé!’, e eu pensando: “se o sujeito ficou feliz assim, imagina quando descobrir que pode fazer isso sem sair do corpo” (Leal, in *Seleção do Humor Stand-up*)

<sup>46</sup> O cara faz quatro anos de faculdade, um curso de especialização no exterior, aí volta pro Brasil, é contratado por uma puta agencia de publicidade. Aí em casa você pega a embalagem de Toddy e lê: ‘só Toddy é Toddy’ (Leal, in *Seleção do Humor Stand-up*)

<sup>47</sup> “Lembro que olhei uma vez no espelho e tinha mancha de café, macarrão e um pentelho” (Leal, in *Seleção do Humor Stand-up*)

<sup>48</sup> “O Michael Jackson, depois de morto, lançou um CD. Então quer dizer: não adianta matar o Belo que ele vai continuar mandando música do inferno” (Leal, in *Seleção do Humor Stand-up*)

<sup>49</sup> “Sou artista, tenho que ser maior que o gênero. Senão eu me reduzo à linguagem que aquele gênero pode falar. E eu não quero, nunca fiz um trabalho só falando de coisas de mulher. Porque é muito pouco, o artista é mais que

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isso. Ele tem que ser ilimitado, louco, tem que estar além disso. Se eu sou só mulher, vou fechar minha perna pra não aparecer minha calcinha. Se eu sou só mulher, me restrinjo a falar só de menstruação”

<sup>50</sup> “Se você não é um homem branco, normal, fale sobre aquilo que todo mundo tá vendo que você não é. Uma coisinha pra quebrar o gelo, precisa. Você é japonês? Uma coisinha pra quebrar o gelo. Mulher? Fala alguma coisinha pra quebrar o gelo, depois você fala do que você quiser. (...) Se você é mulher, você tem que falar sobre isso. É como se tivesse uma verruga na testa e ficasse querendo fazer piada sem comentar sobre isso”.

<sup>51</sup> “Eu começo a me zoar, e a mostrar os defeitos ao ponto de já brochar o cara” (Marrer, first interview)

<sup>52</sup> “Eu sigo uma linha, é tudo encaixado. O texto é todo linkado” (Marrer, second interview)

<sup>53</sup> “Se você fizer aquela piada com você que você sabe que vão fazer, o povo não tem mais o que falar. Ensino pro meu filho: esse é o melhor jeito de se livrar de um bullying. É a primeira coisa que eu faço no palco: como a pessoa já olha pra mulher pensando ‘ai, lá vem’, eu já chego me zoando”

<sup>54</sup> “Não me sinto à vontade de fazer ‘ah, não entendo guardanapo’. A não ser que seja comigo. Os homens fazem isso melhor, porque se você é mulher, você tem que falar sobre isso. (...) A Marcela é corajosa. Ela entra em pé de igualdade com os homens. Eu não tenho essa coragem. Ela faz piada do cotidiano. Ela é muito corajosa”

<sup>55</sup> “Sinto que essa é minha obrigação, porque os caras às vezes ficam tanto tempo falando da mulher deles, zoando, que não custa nada dar o troco. Acabo com meu namorado no palco, acabo com a dignidade dele. E as meninas se sentem vingadas”

<sup>56</sup> O pessoal chegava e falava ‘e aí, Mhel, deu pra quem pra trabalhar aqui?’ Para essas pessoas machistas, eu só digo uma coisa: foi para um bispo (Marrer in *Seleção do Humor Stand-up*)

<sup>57</sup> “Antes de vir pra cá, eu dei janta pro meu filho, contei historinha... Daqui a pouco vou descer pra ver se ele ainda tá lá no carro” (Marrer in *Seleção do Humor Stand-up*)

<sup>58</sup> “Lógico que fico preocupada, deus me livre acontecer algo com o meu carro. Prioridades, né? Meu filho demorou nove meses pra nascer, esse carro eu to pagando em 36” (Marrer in *Seleção do Humor Stand-up*)

<sup>59</sup> “Prefiro uma história de amor. Que mulher que não assiste uma comédia romântica com o namorado... Pra ver se o filho da puta aprende alguma coisa. Pra vocês homens, aquilo é um filminho, pra gente é telecurso!” (Marrer in *Seleção do Humor Stand-up*)

<sup>60</sup> “Tem que ser didática com o homem. Começa o filme, eu começo: ‘Olha amor, ele dando flor pra ela. Ta vendo?’ Não adiantou nada, ele se vinga botando filme pornô e falando ‘olha amor, como ela engole!’ (Marrer in *Seleção do Humor Stand-up*)

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<sup>61</sup> “Mulherada, não coloca isso dentro de casa que é a maior burrada da vida. Se você fizer isso, o único prazer que você vai ter é quando ele perder no jogo, porque o joystick treme, você vai e senta em cima” (Marrer in *Seleção do Humor Stand-up*)

<sup>62</sup> “Eu faço a piada, se você não riu, sigo pra próxima tão rápido que você pode pensar que aquilo não era uma piada” (Marrer, second interview)

<sup>63</sup> “São coisas que estão na comunidade. Sentir inveja de uma modelo faz parte da cultura, não é algo estritamente feminino. A TPM faz parte da vida... Tanto o homem convive quanto a mulher. Então não acho que este seja um texto feminino. Tanto que os homens dão risada. Pode ser que mulheres se identifiquem mais”

<sup>64</sup> “‘Carol, você ta casada há 7 anos, não pensa em ter filho?’ Se eu pensar em ter filho, vou ter que pensar em alguém pra adotar a criança, porque eu não vou ficar não!” (Zoccoli, in *Não to Aqui pra Julgar*)

<sup>65</sup> “Minha mãe diz que se eu aceitar Jesus, vou ganhar a vida. Eu digo: ‘mãe, a vida eu já tenho, será que dá pra ganhar um iPhone?’” (Zoccoli, in *Não to Aqui pra Julgar*)

<sup>66</sup> “Ela não gosta que eu ouço Marilyn manson, porque diz que ele adora o diabo. Pelo menos ele fala do diabo pra quem vai no show dele. Testemunha de Jeová vai na minha casa sábado 8 da manhã”. (Zoccoli, in *Não to Aqui pra Julgar*)

<sup>67</sup> “Eu falo ‘mãe, Jesus transformou a água em vinho. Qual a lição que ele quis passar? Que a gente tem que beber vinho que nem água’” (Zoccoli, in *Não to Aqui pra Julgar*)

<sup>68</sup> “Minha mãe fala ‘a alegria esta em jesus’. Eu falo ‘pelo jeito ele não esta distribuindo’ (Zoccoli, in *Não to Aqui pra Julgar*)

<sup>69</sup> “Outro dia vi um cara falando assim pra uma moça ‘ei fia, você gosta de vitamina? Então bate uma pra mim’! Mulher não faz um negócio desse. Pode passar o Gianecchini que agente não vai dizer “Gianecchini, não é absorvente mas pode colar aqui na minha calcinha’... ‘Rodrigo Santoro, tua piroca não é shopping center mas eu ficava dando volta nela o dia todo’ (Zoccoli, in *Não to Aqui pra Julgar*)

<sup>70</sup> Homem fica com frescura com exame de próstata. Frescura, é só um dedo. Exame ginecológico o médico coloca um instrumento dentro da gente que parece um macaco de trocar pneu. O nome desse instrumento é bico de pato mas é mentira porque entra o pato inteiro. Ele consegue ver o útero através desse instrumento. Queria ver se o proctologista tivesse q conseguir ver o estomago através do exame. Aí falam “mulher é o sexo frágil”. E qual sexo que é o forte? O do homem? Queria ver passar um bebe pelo sexo do homem, ele ia mijar pelo umbigo o resto da vida”

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<sup>71</sup> “Outro dia fui pegar um ônibus e levei uma encoxada... Situação horrórosa. Mulherada que está aqui e já levou encoxada sabe que é uma situação humilhante... Às vezes é bom. Às vezes a gente gosta e faz até uma bundinha pra ajudar. Mas não era esse o caso. O cara ficou me encoxando e eu não podia nem denunciar porque ninguém ia acreditar que tinha um cara querendo comer meu sovaco”

<sup>72</sup> O que eu acho ruim de bebida é propaganda de cerveja. Tem sempre uma mulher gostosa, acho muito machista. As pessoas falam que isso é recalque. Não é. Pra quê eu vou querer mostrar a bunda na Playboy e ganhar 500 mil se eu posso ter uma profissão decente como professora e ganhar 500 mil em 45 anos?” (Zoccoli, in *Não to Aqui pra Julgar*)

<sup>73</sup> “A gente quer ter o corpo da Juliana Paes. O olho esbugalhado não, mas o corpo a gente quer. Só que a maioria das mulheres são normais, não tem o corpo da Juliana Paes. Então eu acho que enquanto maioria a gente devia se juntar... E dar uma surra nessa vaca”.

<sup>74</sup> “A gente batalha, faz uma faculdade, entra numa empresa, cresce dentro da empresa, compra uma roupa melhor, compra um sapato da Arezzo. E aí você vai pra festa, tem uma vaca de Havaiana e tá muito mais gostosa que você. O que você faz nessa hora, gente? Que homem vai olhar pro seu Arezzo?”

<sup>75</sup> “Nosso show é ‘humor de salto alto’. Então geralmente as pessoas pensam que a gente vai falar muito mal de homem e na verdade eu falo bem pouco mal de homem. Eu critico mais as coisas que nós mesmas fazemos. Tento equilibrar. Gosto disso, de apontar um lado e depois outro” (Paiva, second interview)

<sup>76</sup> “Existe dia da sogra. Existe, sim. Que nem dia das mães, dia dos pais, existe dia da sogra. E não é dois de novembro não. Existe um dia de verdade pra comemorar a sogra viva. Sabiam? Sabiam? Se não sabiam tudo bem, também sempre comemorei no Halloween. Mas não é. Existe um dia da sogra”.

<sup>77</sup> “Tava o dia dos namorados chegando, eu cheguei pro meu namorado e falei ‘amor... Me surpreenda’. Aí chegou no dia 12 ele terminou comigo. Eu de fato não tava esperando, hein! Me pegou desprevenida, olha lá! Tomei no meu cu! Que ódio!” (Paiva in *Humor de Salto Alto*)

<sup>78</sup> “No começo a chance de eu escrever uma piada e ela ser totalmente água era muito grande, porque eu ainda trabalhava com a minha mente. O que me faz rir, não necessariamente o público geral. Hoje eu penso ‘isso eu acho engraçado, mas a plateia não vai achar’”

<sup>79</sup> “Parou a novela, entrou a Dilma. Falei ‘Dilma, você vai provar que é sapatão assim, na boa?’ Que mulher interrompe novela? Primeira mulher na presidência, era a nossa chance, era a hora da vingança, era a hora de estar lá, 47 do segundo tempo, dois a dois, último escanteio... Era isso, Dilma! Era essa a hora de falar!”

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<sup>80</sup> “Eu entendo esse preconceito, é mais fácil aceitar um homem fazendo piada. Porque a função social de fazer merda é do homem” (Paiva in *Humor de Salto Alto*)

<sup>81</sup> “Mulher não, mulher faz cara de santa, que não caga, não fala palavrão e não gosta de sexo anal. Como se alguém acreditasse. Pessoa que lava, passa, cozinha, cuida de criança e faz revolução pra ter o direito de trabalhar... Não quer tomar no cu, essa filha da puta? Da um ódio no coração, porque sou muito preguiçosa. Fica em casa, filha, dorme até as 10”

<sup>82</sup> “Não gosto dessa coisa de ‘mulherice’. Na verdade, tinha mais preconceito até com isso. De falar só de assuntos femininos. Afinal posso falar de tudo. Mas ao mesmo tempo percebo que as mulheres gostam disso. Tem um mercado. E eu sou uma pessoa que me interesso por tudo. Mas aí tem que ver o que o público mais quer ouvir... E o assunto mulher, mulher dando o seu depoimento, é uma coisa mais recente. Porque o homem sempre falou, enquanto as mulheres ficavam cuidando dos filhos”.

<sup>83</sup> “O texto que faço agora, é sobre o cotidiano feminino, porque eu sou mulher, não tem como falar de mecânica” (Dip, first interview)

<sup>84</sup> “Para quem não sabe, eu era a Penélope do Castelo Rá Tim Bum. A molecada chega pra mim e fala: ‘Angela Dip! Você fez parte da minha infância!’ E eu me sinto tão... Velha! Para piorar, me convidaram pra fazer *Maísa*, pra fazer a mãe da Maísa, a avó do Jayme Monjardim. Em *Malhação*, fui convidada para o elenco da terceira idade. Mas eu me vinguei. Aqueles meninos lindos de 20 anos... Era só me esfregar neles que nem precisava fazer reposição hormonal”

<sup>85</sup> “Se eu tirar essas meias aqui, são tantas varizes que minhas pernas estão parecendo o Google Maps” (Dip in *La Putanesca*)

<sup>86</sup> “Agora, no camarim, entrou um menino e ficou olhando vidrado nos meus seios. Criança adora um brinquedode plástico” (Dip in *La Putanesca*)

<sup>87</sup> “Depois dos 40, você não engorda, você incha. Não emagrece, murcha. E não bronzeia, encarde” (Dip, *La Putanesca*)

A joke with the Portuguese word for distilled, “destilado”, which sounds like “this side” (Dip, *Angela Dip só para Mulheres*)

<sup>89</sup> “Ser mulher não é fácil, não importa quão fácil você seja” (Dip, *La Putanesca*)

<sup>90</sup> “Eu nem gostava de humor,. Na verdade, eu não gostava de nada de humor que era feito. Quando eu entrei em contato com o clube da comédia, do Danilo Gentili, da Marcela, vi que eles faziam ‘stand up comedy’. E aí eu fui

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pesquisar. Ver o que era, comecei a ver os vídeos. Eu sempre gostei muito de escrever, aí comecei a ir nos bares e pedia cinco minutos. Porque o trabalho n o mestrado de filosofia, vc sabe como é, é um trabalho muito solitário. Então era meio deprê, ficar lá estudando pra caralho. Eu queria sair de casa, só queria sair de casa”

<sup>91</sup> “Estava tensa, achava que eu precisava copiar o Seinfeld, o jeito dele andar... estava muito dura por não saber ficar à vontade no palco e ser eu mesma” (Leal, first interview)

<sup>92</sup> “Me senti nua. Era uma estreia, depois de tantos anos tendo trabalhado com teatro. Precisava de algum apoio. Coloquei uma cadeira e uma mesa. Aí de repente ‘ah tem uma apresentação não sei aonde’ e fui só eu e o microfone” (Dip, first interview)

<sup>93</sup> “A primeira vez foi horrível! Ninguém riu. Mas eu não tava nem aí! Sabe inocência de principiante? Pra mim foi beleza, normal” (Zoccoli, first interview)

<sup>94</sup> “Eu era muito técnica, tipo: texto, texto, piada. A cada duas linhas, uma piada. Era muito xiita nesse ponto. Agora estou mais tranquila. Tento fazer coisa engraçada, mas sem uma métrica” (Leal, second interview)

<sup>95</sup> “Quando comecei, fazia um texto mais duro. Piada, punchline, piada, punchline. Pá, pá, pá, pá. Tinha essa música. Pá, pá, pá, pá. E depois eu fui soltando um pouco mais, e contando piadas de outras formas. Por exemplo, esse ‘não tô aqui pra julgar’. Isso nem era uma piada, é um comentário... Só que eu tenho que instalar toda uma carga emocional para que este comentário se torne engraçado”

<sup>96</sup> Corinthians is a soccer team of São Paulo, and a stereotype about its fans is that they are low class or thieves.

<sup>97</sup> “Comecei a ficar mais engraçada, ou o que as pessoas consideram como engraçada, a partir disso, da interação com a plateia. Meu namorado falou: ‘por que você não faz piadas sobre futebol?’. E aí você cria um monte de coisas incríveis, mas chega lá o que dá mais resultado é falar que corintiano é pobre. Sempre briguei com isso... Briguei comigo mesma. Aí acabei cedendo, por isso faço essas piadas fáceis. A plateia parece que fica feliz, quem contratou acha maravilhoso”.

<sup>98</sup> “Cada vez eu fico mais à vontade de fazer humor. Só que ainda não consigo fazer humor político. Mas acho que isso é problema do brasileiro. O brasileiro é muito assim: se você falar mal do FHC, você é um petista de merda. Se fala mal do Lula, é um direitista reacionário. As pessoas não entendem que tudo deve ser criticado”

<sup>99</sup> “Escrevo muito no Twitter, texto muita coisa” (Leal, second interview)

<sup>100</sup> “Perguntei no Twitter: o irmão gêmeo processar o outro por plágio seria o cúmulo de quê? Aí as pessoas ficaram entre o cúmulo da inveja e o cúmulo da justiça. No fim ganhou a inveja, embora eu ache que justiça fique mais inusitado. Mas de repente inveja é mais acessível” (Dip, second interview)



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<sup>101</sup> “Eu senti no começo por conta de estar só com homem, e às vezes homem muito macho, tipo o Rafinha fazia um show e eu entrava na sequência. E todo mundo (girando os olhos) “ai”... Porque chegava eu: “oi gente, tudo bem”, Rolava menos... Então o que eu pedia só era pra entrar primeiro, ser uma das primeiras a entrar. Pra não ficar todo esse peso masculino... E as pessoas irem se acostumando com o gênero ali, só homem e aí entra uma mulher. Tem uma quebra”

<sup>102</sup> “Me falaram: ‘por quê ? Você não confia no seu trabalho ?’ Eu disse: “não, é uma questão de inteligência. Quando só tem homem e você é a última, não adianta gente... Já se estabeleceu um código ali” (Leal, first interview)

<sup>103</sup> Falei: ‘claaaro, eu abro’. Aí eu pensei: ‘esses caras vão se foder tanto... Vou deixar essa plateia com um fogo tão alto que quem vir depois de mim vai se foder’. Porque é foda quando um humorista deixa a plateia muito pra cima, o que vem depois tem que entrar matando senão ta fodido. É muito difícil. Em 15 minutos, devo ter levado umas quinze palmas. Pá, pá, pá. Aí voltei, o cara que era mestre de cerimônias nem conseguiu... Ele já chamou o próximo direto, nem quis fazer piada dele. Eu fodi os caras. Aí nem quis ficar no camarim, falei: ‘ai, gente, preciso ir que estou meio atrasadinha para outro compromisso. Tchau, boa sorte!’ Nunca mais fizeram isso comigo. Não tenho problema nenhum com abrir. É que eu vi o que eles estavam fazendo comigo naquele momento”

<sup>104</sup> “Nunca entendi isso. Qual a relação entre ser engraçado e ter um pênis? Não entrava na minha cabeça” (Zoccoli, second interview)

<sup>105</sup> “Era um teste muito bizarro, não tinha o mínimo fundamento a pesquisa” (Zoccoli, second interview)

<sup>106</sup> “Vocês já devem ter ouvido o Emílio do *Pânico* dizendo que mulher não sabe fazer humor. Só pra tranquilizar vocês, gostaria de informar que estou fazendo a apresentação toda de pinto” (Zoccoli, *Não to Aqui pra Julgar*)

<sup>107</sup> “Tem essa coisa, né. Que mulher é mal humorada, não tem senso de humor. Na verdade, a mulher tem mais preocupações diárias do que o homem, normalmente. Então não é que a mulher tem menos senso de humor que homem, é que ela demora mais pra se desligar porque ela tem mais coisas na cabeça pra resolver. Minha casa, meus filhos, a compra do mês. Entao homem se desliga muito mais fácil dos problemas de maneira geral. Mas as mulheres têm muita história pra contar. Muita coisa engraçada, justamente porque elas têm mais problemas. E o humor é a problematização da vida”

<sup>108</sup> “É um meio masculino. Os caras que são os donos das grandes coisas, dos clubes e programas de TV, são homens. Existe isso do cara convidar mais o amigo que come puta com ele. Tem os brothers, aí vão fazer um show, chamam os brothers” (Zoccoli, second interview)

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<sup>109</sup> “Um liga pro outro e fala ‘vamos jantar aqui em casa hoje? Vamos jogar uma bola juntos?’ Eu não posso fazer isso com um cara porque ele vai achar que eu quero dar pra ele. Então a mulher fica fora de várias panelinhas. Às vezes você acha que tá fazendo parte da turminha, aí eles começam a falar de alguém que eles acham gostosa pra caralho, e fica um papo de homem. Sempre vai ter assuntos que só eles vão falar, e por mais que você tente ser a menina mais descolada do mundo, não adianta. Tem assunto que eles nunca vão te falar”

<sup>110</sup> “Nas artes também, no cinema, a maioria dos diretores são homens com filmes que falam sobre homens” (Dip, first interview)

<sup>111</sup> “Aí eles colocam um monte de humorista forte e uma mulher que não é humorista... Aí todo mundo fala: ‘olha lá, mulher é sem graça’. Mas não é, cara, é que ela não é humorista (Zoccoli, first interview)

<sup>112</sup> “Se uma mulher sair falando o que ela pensa, muitas vezes ela vai ser chamada de puta” (Dip, first interview)

<sup>113</sup> <sup>113</sup> “Se o cara tá fazendo um texto sobre dentista. E não tá funcionando. Aí ele faz o q, “Bom aí chegou no final da consulta, eu chupe o pau do dentista’. Hahaha. Isso é engraçado. Porque ele, entre muitas aspas, se fez de viado. Se uma mulher fala isso, que não tinha dinheiro pra pagar a consulta e chupou o dentista, não é engraçado, é vulgar”.

<sup>114</sup> “Brinco que tem pouca mulher no stand-up porque as mulheres acham difícil acreditar que existe uma profissão em que ela é paga para dar sua opinião. Porque ninguém quer saber a opinião da mulher. Ela tá lá falando, o cara tá cagando. Então eu falo “existe! As pessoas inclusive pagam pra ouvir a gente falar, é uma coisa louca”.

“Não sou machista e não sou feminista. Se eles fizerem uma piada machista que for legal pra caralho, vou rir. Não vou levantar bandeira de mulherzinha. Acho um saco, um saco feminismo, um saco machismo”.

<sup>116</sup> “Tenho tanta raiva de feminista. Qual o problema em sermos diferentes? Você é mulher e quer fazer humor? Tem mercado. Tem um texto bom? Tem mercado. Agora, se você não tem um texto bom, não vem ficar botando culpa que o mundo é machista, porque não é verdade. O mercado tá aí. Você sofre um pouco de preconceito por dez segundos. Dez segundos, o pessoal olha com aquela cara ‘xi, mulher’. Mas na hora que eu entro e começo a falar, acabou o preconceito”.

<sup>117</sup> “Comecei a sentir que quando fazia, no começo do show, alguma pontuação sobre ser mulher e estar solteira, ser mulher e me ferrar... Achei que funcionou e adotei isso. Porque aí a mulher olha pra mim e fala ‘ok, ela não é tão boa assim, ela já levou um fora’. Eu procuro sempre trazer sempre as mulheres. ‘Não é mesmo, mulherada? Não concordam, mulherada?’

<sup>118</sup> “Vi que a reação delas era muito mais forte, elas riam mais, se sentiam mais soltas... Principalmente quando eu falava de sexo, de homem” (Dip, second interview)

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<sup>119</sup> “Quando você sai com as suas amigas, fica muito mais à vontade do que quando tem um macho no meio. Então é a mesma coisa na plateia. E até eu, eu como intérprete, quando só tem mulher eu me sinto muito mais à vontade para brincar. Se você vai fazer uma piada sobre rímel, ele não vai entender”.

<sup>120</sup> Na minha cabeça, nunca foi um show pra falar mal de homem. Um show que não tivesse limite, de quantos homens e quantas mulheres pudessem fazer. Pra mim sempre foi: ‘não tem limite, pode ser quatro mulheres, três, cinco, dez’” (Zoccoli, second interview)

<sup>121</sup> “Acho que não tem que ter limites para o humor. O limite é do artista. Porque você pode apertar o botão e desligar, pode levantar e ir embora, pode trocar de canal... Mas se você vai num show de humor com o intuito de... Você não tem que procurar um advogado, mas sim um psiquiatra. Porque é humor, é besteira”.

<sup>122</sup> “Teve uma menina que foi no clube da comédia e mandou uma carta pra produção dizendo que ela e o pai dela saíram no meio porque ela era gorda, tinha ganhado o show do pai dela de aniversário e ficou muito magoada. Eu li tudo aquilo pensando ‘blablabla’. A pessoa também, ela quer. Ela sai pra encher o saco. Ela entra num teatro, ela pagou, tá lá fechado. Pode ser que um de nós resolva tirar a roupa no meio do show. É um espetáculo que tem limite de idade. Então quer dizer, vai assistir, aceita. Ou não volta mais. Fala pros outros que não gostou. Mas não leva pro pessoal. Porque é arte. E a menina se ofendeu como se eu tivesse falado, sei lá, da abelhinha de mel e ela poderia se ofender também porque no passado a mãe dela foi picada por uma abelha e morreu. As pessoas são loucas”.

<sup>123</sup> “A pessoa acordou do outro lado da cama. Tem gente que quer reclamar de tudo, que acorda e fala ‘ah, vou ficar bravo hoje’. A piada que você viu, de eu não querer ter filhos. Teve uma vez que eu fiz essa piada e uma grávida ficou super ofendida. Mas eu não falo ‘vocês não podem ter filho’, estou falando que eu não quero! Então você entende quando eu digo que as vezes esta na cabeça da pessoa?”

<sup>124</sup> “Eu tenho um set de piadas sobre como é difícil pra mim lembrar rostos. Digo: já tenho problema com fisionomia, imagine com os orientais. Confundo todos. Uma vez uma japonesa ficou brava. Ela saiu do bar, reclamou com o dono. Eu falei “e aí?” e ele falou “dane-se. Não estou nem aí”. Beleza, se o dono do bar falou que tá ok... Porque a piada não é agressiva, é sobre mim. Eu não reconheço! Que querem que eu diga? Que eu reconheço?”

“Você nunca vai ver japonês pedindo teste de DNA, entregou o filho, cria, vai ser parecido” (Paiva in *Humor de Salto Alto*)

<sup>126</sup> “Eles devem economizar um dinheirão com pulseirinhas de maternidade no Japão. Bebê nasceu, vai botando numa esteira. Aí cada um pega um na saída” (Paiva in *Humor de Salto Alto*)

<sup>127</sup> “Tem dois tipos de piada, a boa e a ruim. A que tem graça e a que não. A que não tem graça, não interessa o

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assunto dela. E a que tem graça, ri. É só essa a função dela. Se eu fiz uma piada com câncer, o fato de eu fazer essa piada não vai matar ninguém. E o fato de eu não fazer essa piada também não vai impedir que pessoas morram de câncer. É um assunto. Se esse assunto faz parte do nosso cotidiano, por que não abordá-lo?”

<sup>128</sup> “Dá pra sacar, quando o cara tá fazendo uma piada -- seja machista, feminista, de gorda -- mas a piada é boa e ele está fazendo pela piada, ou se ele tá fazendo porque quer botar pra fora alguma aflição. É impressionante, porque é isso que não pega bem. Quando ele tá fazendo por raiva, por uma questão pessoal. É muito sutil. Mas dá pra sacar”.

<sup>129</sup> “O termômetro tem que ser se é engraçado. A maioria riu, é engraçado. Se não riu também não significa que vc não possa fazer”

<sup>130</sup> “Ninguém quer propagar ódio. A gente quer ter o direito de poder educar o povo. Deixa o povo todo saber ler de verdade, que melhora. O problema é que a gente alimenta o público como se alimenta uma criança. Você dá batata batata batata, aí uma hora vc tenta um espinafre. Faz cara feia, vc volta pra batata. Vc tem que passar pro espinafre mais cedo ou mais tarde, mas não passa porque o público não vai aceitar. Eu gostaria de poder ir lá e dizer tudo o que eu penso, mas se você não fizer o povo gargalhar, ele vai sair de lá achando que o show foi uma bosta e não ele que é limitado”

<sup>131</sup> “Se a natureza fosse justa, Gisele Bundchen tinha nascido sem uma perna” (Zoccoli in *Não to Aqui pra Julgar*)

<sup>132</sup> “Tem uma galera que quer defender a liberdade da piada e outra galera que quer defender a ofensa” (Zoccoli, second interview)

<sup>133</sup> “Se eu tiver vontade de fazer uma piada, sei lá, com câncer... Vou avaliar. Tá mais engraçado do que ofensivo? Eu quero fazer essa piada por que? Porque eu quero ser foda, quero ser o macho alfa do mundo e ter todo mundo aos meus pés ou quero fazer essa piada porque acho muito engraçado, quero compartilhar e a galera vai rir muito?”

<sup>134</sup> “Outro dia eu vi no Twitter um menino que fez uma piada machista, mas engraçada demais. E engraçada sabe por quê? Porque ele não acredita nisso. Ele não é machista, levantando uma bandeira. É um cara que sabe que isso funciona, então ele brinca com isso”.

<sup>135</sup> “Toda piada é um absurdo. A graça tá nisso, em você não ser assim. Quando eu faço uma piada de pedofilia, estamos assumindo que a gente não é. E por isso é engraçado. É um absurdo, é fora da linha (...) O Porta dos fundos tá podendo tudo porque são personagens. Tá sendo aceito porque são personagens. Eles não conseguiram aceitar o stand-up, não aceitam que é uma persona que você tá criando”.

<sup>136</sup> ”Não tem muito o que fazer. É a maneira deles de pensar, eles são machinhos e acham isso engraçado. Na verdade, é uma coisa que tem que mudar socialmente. Enquanto não muda dentro de um contexto maior, eu não tenho

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como reclamar. A Carol Zoccoli gosta de fazer piada de filosofia, eu não gosto. Mas não acho que o fato deles fazerem piada machista pe pior ou melhor do que ela fazer piada de filosofia. São coisas que eu não curto abordar. Agora, se for uma piada legal pra caralho, eu vou rir”.