

**Louvain School of Management**

# **WE STAND UP FOR WOMEN**

The impact of gender inequalities on the minority of women in the stand-up comedy sector in Belgium (Wallonia-Brussels).

Author: VAN TWEMBEKE Virginie  
Supervisor: JAMMAERS Eline  
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## **Introduction**

Making people laugh seems so easy for a stand-up comedian. Yet every laugh is the result of hard work, constant investment, doubt, and pressure to win and audience's approval. At the moment, the stand-up comedy industry is predominantly male. It is reasonable to believe this is the result of the problem that women are often perceived by society as less funny than men (Hitchens, 2007). This stereotype presents many barriers to talented female comedians practicing their vocation, as many international festivals, galas and policies still do not fully support women in the industry to unleash all their potential. This results in the absence of female stand-up comedians in posters, programming and even in some cases in completely abject language. Problems of misogyny and sexism persist daily.

In a world where diversity and inclusion have become a priority, assuring gender equality, and proving concrete solutions to reach gender parity in different work domains is timely. Women have been advocating for more equal rights since decades now.

Still, it took until 2015 with the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals<sup>1</sup> (No. 5 gender equity) and the launch of the #MeToo<sup>2</sup> movement in 2017 that concrete and positive efforts towards gender equality emerged within the stand-up profession. Indeed, the press, politicians, researchers, and stakeholders in the stand-up community began to become aware of the abnormality because of the laces of these various movements.

In line with calls from these movements, some festivals in the cultural sector (stand-up, theatre, music, events) established gender quotas 'for themselves', to ensure gender parity in their programming (Pallarès, 2019). Currently, there is no legal obligation for quota in Belgium that would oblige institutions to employ or program a certain percentage of women in the cultural sector, and therefore in stand-up comedy.

As a woman and a participant in the cultural world as a dancer, it was obvious for me to be interested in the place of women in this sector, and more particularly concerning the profession of stand-up comedy. My research objective is therefore the following: to explore the experiences of women stand-up comedians (WSCs) in the Wallonia-Brussels federation. We

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sdgs.be/fr/sdgs>

<sup>2</sup> <https://metoomvmt.org>

will try to confirm or reject the hypothesis of the presence of inequalities in the world of stand-up comedy in French-speaking Belgium.

This thesis will allow me to dissect the profession of stand-up comedy, to know its workings, to follow its foundations and to focus on the integration of women in the profession. Welcome to the world of those who create laughter.

## Literature Review

### 1. Defining gender (in)equality and the cultural sector

Today, gender inequalities are still deeply rooted in all our societies. Gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men, girls, and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become identical, but that the rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men will not depend on whether they are born male or female (UN Women, 2022). Nevertheless, women around the world today still face a lack of access to work, occupational segregation, and significant wage gaps compared to men. According to the United Nations, they are denied access to education, basic health care and are victims of violence and discrimination. In addition, women are underrepresented in political and economic decision-making processes (United Nations, 2022).

Various international organizations (e.g. the Commission on the Status of Women; the Council of Europe; the United Nations) and global indicators (Gender Equality Index; Sustainable Development Goals) have emerged to support women in achieving gender equality around the world. Table 1 shows an overview of the Belgian score and ranking in terms of gender equality. Indeed, with a score of 72.7 out of 100 for 2021, Belgium ranks eighth in the European Union on the gender equality index (EIGE, 2022). Although our country's score keeps increasing every year, Belgium has fallen back a few places in the European ranking over time.

**Table 1. Gender Equality Index (EIGE, 2022)**

	2013	2015	2017	2019	2020	2021
Gender Equality Index Score BE	69.3	70.2	70.5	71.1	71.4	72.7
Gender Equality Ranking BE	5	5	6	7	8	8
Gender Equality EU Average Score	63.1	64.4	65.7	66.9	67.4	68

As this thesis will focus on gender inequalities in the cultural sector, it is important to clarify what is meant with culture. In its broadest sense, culture can be seen as “the set of distinctive features, spiritual and material, intellectual and emotional, that characterize a society or social group. In addition to the arts and letters, it encompasses ways of life, fundamental human rights, value systems, traditions, and beliefs” (UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies, 1982). In Belgium, at the level of the Wallonia-Brussels federation, culture is represented primarily by the activities it encompasses: performing arts, visual arts, cultural heritage, literature, books, and continuing education (Wallonia-Brussels Federation, 2022). The sector accounts for 5% of GDP, is the third largest European employer and employs 250,000 people in Belgium (L’Echo, 2022). Yet despite being relevant to so many people, is not an environment spared from gender inequalities. Indeed, in all areas of the creative and cultural sphere, women seem to take up minority positions.

For instance, in 2020 in Belgium, the proportion of mandates and budgets held singularly by women theatre directors was respectively only 20% and 18% of the total<sup>3</sup> (Makereel, 2020). In France, in 2017, only 12% of the 100 largest cultural companies were headed by women (Pasau, 2019). Since 2010, only 4 films directed by women have been nominated in France for the César Awards and none have won (Pasau, 2019). Lastly, in Belgium, only three theatres receiving annual subsidies of over 500,000 euros, are directed by women<sup>4</sup> (Pasau, 2019).

These statistics start to reveal a glimpse of the dominant positions men take up in the theatre sector. In the music industry too, issues of gender equality persist. One indicator here is the extent to which men and women take up equal space on the podia of music festivals. Recently, the Spanish music festival "Primavera Sound" announced, for the first time in history, a poster with a gender-balanced line-up<sup>5</sup>: 53% female headliners, compared to an average female participation in music festivals of 10% in the United States and 26% in the United Kingdom (Garvan & Virk, 2019). The festival launched the hashtag #Thenewnormal to support the fact that equality should be normal. Due to "forced" quotas, many people think that festivals lose quality, but festival organizer Marta Pallarès demonstrates the opposite.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.lesoir.be/art/d-20200607-GGGWK8?referer=%2Farchives%2Frecherche%3Fdatefilter%3Dlastyear%26facets%3DON%253A913AB669-A295-448F-B895-5FD3390E3FB5%26sort%3Ddate%2Bdesc%26word%3Ddiscrimination%2Bsexiste>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.rtf.be/article/quand-les-femmes-de-la-culture-se-rassemblent-pour-lutter-contre-le-plafond-de-verre-10109436?id=10109436>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-48484558>

*According to a survey conducted by BBC News, the seven best-selling albums of 2018 were all by a female artist. Other major critics and media outlets are also praising more and more female talent. So, I ask you: why are we talking about quotas as if they are unattainable? This is the reality!*<sup>6</sup> (La Libre, 2019).

One particularly interesting sub-sector of the cultural industries in which gender inequality remains underemphasized, is the world of stand-up comedy, which I will define in the next part of this thesis.

## **2. The genre of stand-up comedy**

### **2.1. History of the stand-up comedy profession**

With tens of thousands of performances per year in Europe (Le Monde, 2019), stand-up comedy has truly conquered our Western societies. Stand-up comedy is characterized as a type of performance in which a comedian addresses the audience directly, without props or characters, in a spontaneous, almost improvised manner (Le Robert, 2021). Born at the end of the 19th century in the United States, stand-up comedy took the form of a monologue on stage and for a long time did not evolve much (Le Robert, 2021). Yet around 1950, a new wave of comedians appeared. Among them was Mort Sahl. This man was the precursor, the first to have made comedy on stage as we know it now. Initially a jazz musician in California, he began to tell jokes between two pieces of music during his concerts. At the request of his audience, the share of jokes in his concerts grew and Mort Sahl continued to satirize society and improvise scenarios with only a stool and a newspaper at his disposal. When travelling to New York to test his show on a different and larger audience, his success was immediate (Gillota, 2019).

In the 1960s and 1970s, stand-up comedy again took a new turn (Gillota, 2019). Some American artists such as Lenny Bruce, Richard Pryor or Woody Allen tested the limits of comedy by provoking the laughter of the public on taboo subjects like sex, politics, drugs, and racism. Several venues dedicated to stand-up comedy were then created (e.g. the Broadway Comedy Club, the Comedy Cellar, and the Gotham Comedy Club).

Inspired by the Americans, the stand-up comedy settled in Europe, and more particularly in our French neighbours where the genre developed since the 50s. In France, André Raimbourg, from

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.lalibre.be/culture/musique/2019/05/24/les-femmes-se-font-une-place-dans-lindustrie-musicale-2BB33W5VCNAVDJ5WKGVY2UZNS4/>

his stage name Bourvil, was one of the precursors (Savary, 2020). Over time, the scene constantly renewed and took different turns through the work of leading comedians such as Michel Colucci, known as Coluche, Muriel Robin, Jamel Debbouze or Gad Elamleh. Today, there are many stand-up comedy centres throughout Europe (Blanchard, 2019).

## **2.2.Characteristics of the contemporary profession**

First of all, being a stand-up comedian requires the ability to be **versatile**. A comedian is an artist who must multitask, coupled with an entrepreneur (Menard, 2017). The comedian is a designer, writer, host, columnist, who must be able to play many different roles in order to work as often as possible. The comedian can perform scripts on stage, participate in online videos, do improvisation, voice acting, dubbing, television. The comedian must have a certain amount of absorptive capacity in their craft. What the public sees is often just the tip of the iceberg. There is a loss of disillusionment on the part of comedians in the face of perceived ease. However, humour is the result of a lot of work. The comedian must develop their comedic identity, their persona, their personality as a comedian, often shaped by family background and past experiences (Menard, 2017).

In addition to being versatile, many stand-up comedians are **self-taught**, given the lack of formal comedy training. Although there are a few ‘general’ options that can help a person build a career in comedy, like drama schools, art academies, or comedy workshops, many comedians received no specific training. The profession of stand-up comedian is accessible to amateurs as well as to theatre school or university graduates. This means there is often a fine line between professionals and amateurs, with comedians getting contracts primarily because of their talent and suitability for the role. Indeed, many great comedians are autodidacts who trained themselves, for instance by watching others perform (Katz, 2017). An example is French Moroccan comedian Jamel Debbouze who had a difficult youth within delinquent districts. He was hit by a train in Nantes in 1990 and losing his right hand, there were little occupational choices left to make for him (Mouv, 2021). To cope with the loss, he invented a character with a comical look to distinguish himself from the others. It was at this precise moment that he began to practice theatrical improvisation for which he discovered a gift and was spotted.

In Europe, the profession of stand-up comedian does not require any professional training or specific diploma (Mertens, 2019). Each comedian’s career path is different, and success is independent of past work experiences (Charby, 1998). Opportunities for comedians to get on

stage are often made by word of mouth at events or during shows (Debouzze, 2019). As a result, this open market is very **accessible for new entrants**. Access to the market is easy (Cassel, 2018). Once in the industry, new entrants face to an environment constantly unstable, changing, and uncertain. Any talented and famous comedian is unable to predict his or her success or sustainability in the marketplace (Charby, 1998). The definition of a comedian's success is not measured by visibility or income earned, but should be understood as the **length of surviving professionally** within the sector (Menard, 2017). The career should not be seen as a sprint, but rather as a marathon.

Being a stand-up comedian is often characterized as a **vocation** (Sapiro, 2007). Indeed, vocational professions are relatively minority activities, involving the idea of mission, service to the community, self-giving and selflessness. They require a total investment in the activity considered as an end, without any search for temporal profit. The vocation is not based on any specific training. The individuals who adhere to it are ready to give themselves entirely to it, often sacrificing material comfort and financial security, in the hope of deferred symbolic benefits such as recognition, fame, glory (Sapiro, 2007), as well as freedom and an uncommon space for creativity (Bédard, 2014). Indeed, stand-up comedians, by being involved in a vocational regime, benefit from their creative activity through other advantages than those related to financial income such as a fulfilling, exciting, non-routine activity, a singular lifestyle, and an advantageous, seductive social image. These non-monetary benefits seem to make up for the detriments caused by poverty (Bédard, 2014). Unfortunately, the fact that comedians are doing 'what they love', is sometimes used as a reason to not pay them a decent price or wage. The popular negotiation mode of "you should be paying us, we're doing you the favour of airing your work rather than others who might have wanted it" is quite common in everyday reality (Konbini, 2019).

Unlike many other actors who need to follow a script, stand-up comedians have the **freedom to create** and **improvise** scenarios based on subjects that inspire them (Briac, 2019). Improvisation allows comedians to be anything they want (a knight, a chair, an animal). This is experienced by comedians an incredible power (Briac, 2019). Another advantage to the stand-up comedian's profession is the rewarding power of the applause, and the benefits it brings to a person's **self-esteem**. Indeed, Jamel Debbouze notes that the applause of an audience is the first real feeling that made him decide to become a comedian.

*“Applause gives you confidence, you think you're better, much bigger, stronger and it makes Jamel what he is today. All your faults are of an incredible quality. You feel a need to be considered, applauded, boosted. It changes everything in your own perception of yourself.”* (Debbouze Interview Konbini, 2019).

As a result, applause can be defined as a social expression of approval (Victoroff, 1955). Philippe Luchsinger (2012) characterizes applause as the artist's salary. Applause is voluntary, whereas laughter is almost incoercible, uncontrollable. It stimulates stand-up comedians and relieves them (Victoroff, 1955).

Because of the high (non-monetary) rewards in the sector and the absence of entrance barriers, there is **strong competition** in the sector (Quemin, Paradeise, 1990). Indeed, the competition is intense, tough and the number of places to reach success is limited:

*“A job where people are supposedly all nice. We talk about a "big family" even though it's a very hard job because there aren't many places. Everyone is there and wants to make it. So, it's not a nice profession”* (Cassel Interview Konbini, 2018).

In Table 2, I have made a summary of the advantages and disadvantages of the stand-up comedy profession, to end this section.

**Table 2. List of positive and negative aspects of being a stand-up comedian (own table)**

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Self-esteem - Applause	Short-term contracts
Free creativity	Financial instability
Versatile	Poor salaries
Vocation - Passion	Few places, strong competition
Recognition and fame	Flexible market with little regulation
Identity creation	Difficulty to access artist status
Little training required / accessible industry	Difficult access to unemployment
Improvisation	Little training available
	GENDER equality not respected

### **2.3. Legal status of comedians in Belgium**

Generally speaking, stand-up comedians do not enjoy very favourable economic conditions. First, it is important to delineate the **legal status** of stand-up comedians in Belgium, to better understand the different aspects that characterize their low remuneration. Like other workers, comedians in Belgium work under one of three legal regimes: salaried, independent, or civil servant. However, different from others, most comedians have a variety of artistic activities, multiple employers or sponsors, and irregular and unpredictable income, making their working conditions precarious and fluctuating. To help artists cope with such situations, they can benefit from a specific legal structure called "**status of the artist**". This structure allows them to benefit from the arts allowance. The amount is defined according to their social situation (legal cohabitation, isolated) and is revalued at a minimum of 1507,54 euros (Belga, 2022). To obtain the status of artist, certain conditions must be met (SMART, 2022). The artist status must be renewed every year.

Second, as mentioned in the previous section, practicing a vocational profession is linked to a considerable loss of **earnings** in the artistic and cultural milieu. Indeed, the consequences of practicing one's vocation are the non-remuneration or partial payment of rehearsals, the voluntary contribution to technical or logistical operations, the sharing of revenues and the total investment in a project (Sapiro, 2007). Through vocation, these inconveniences can be motivated by a love of a text, an audience, affinity with the bearers of a project, and membership in a work group (Sapiro, 2007). The justification for unpaid work thus seems to correspond to a vocational rhetoric that challenges the importance of financial gain and affirms the gratuity of the artistic gesture of a stand-up comedian (Bourdieu, 1971). However, involvement in a project is only free in the short term. Indeed, unpaid work is perceived by comedians as an investment that must provide a return in the medium term (Cardon & Pilmis, 2013). For the rest, unemployment compensation is often sought to ensure the risks taken (Duchêne, 2011).

Thirdly, the poor remuneration conditions are due to the fact that stand-up comedians almost systematically work with short, **fixed term**, temporary or part-time contracts (Amplo, 2020). It is extremely rare to come across a comedian with a permanent contract. This practice therefore implies a low income, with no possible evolution and instability. These types of contracts are extremely fragile in terms of social and labour rights, and can, for example, be cancelled overnight due to the coronavirus pandemic or other force majeure events (Amplo, 2020). Short-term contracts imply a climate of permanent stress and work (Cultuurloket, 2021). They are

often outsourced to temporary agencies to avoid the redundant administrative burden of short-term employment. As a result, this implies the loss of part of the sector's funding as well as the likelihood of comedians getting an end-of-year bonus (Cultuurloket, 2021).

Fourth, the conditions for accessing **unemployment benefits** in Belgium for artists are complex, subject to numerous interpretations and regularly subject to change. The National Employment Office (ONEM) implements the insurance, unemployment, and related benefit systems in Belgium (Social Security, 2022). This organization establishes a non-exhaustive list of what it understands by artistic activity and sets out the regulations for unemployment (Appendix 1).

SMART, a Belgian company offering advice, training, and tools to support the development of self-employment (SMART, 2022), questions the principle of this list. Indeed, technicians and other staff members related to an artistic activity are not included in the list. They are therefore not entitled to the benefits linked to the status of artist in Belgium. However, it is very common for an artist to have several activities, both in the creative and performing categories.

*"A difference in regime between artists, depending on their sector of activity, and technicians is not justified in our eyes. These categories of workers have the same working conditions: short-term contracts, intermittent work, payment on a per-capita basis, no schedule. It therefore seems fair to us that all the specific rules applicable to performing artists should also apply to artists in other sectors and to performing technicians. "* (SMART, 2022).

The jurisprudence<sup>7</sup> has also extended the notion of entertainers to include stand-up comedians, imitators, songwriters, and pamphleteers (T.T.Bruxelles, 05/12/1985, R.G., n°44.274/80 and 51.539/85). Indeed, before the intervention of SMART at the end of the 90s, they did not appear in the non-exhaustive list published by the ONEM.

It is also important to underline that in Belgium, artists are not considered as workers during their rehearsal and scriptwriting days, but as job seekers. They are then eligible for unemployment benefits during these periods. The basic principle of unemployment benefits is regressivity. However, in certain cases, the stand-up comedian has the possibility of

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<sup>7</sup> Issued in the context of disputes relating to the Royal Decree of 28/11/1969 issued in execution of the Act of 27 June 1969 revising the Decree-Law of 28 December 1944 concerning the social security of workers (MB 05.12.1969)

neutralizing the regressivity of his benefits to maintain it at the level fixed by the ONEM. This system constitutes a considerable advantage over other so-called "classic" workers who are not artists. Indeed, the latter cannot avoid the rule of regressivity of benefits. This exception actually reflects the precarious nature of artists benefits due to short-term employment (SMART, 2022).

Recently, in May 2022, a reform has been approved regarding the conditions of the artist status in Belgium (L'Echo, 2022). The status has been revised, and now offers specific conditions for social protection (Sophie Leroy, 2022). Here are the three major changes:

- Days of rehearsal, script writing, etc. may be considered as days of work
- Technicians and support staff will be eligible for artist status
- Renewal of status will now take place every 3 years

This major change will take place starting in September 2022 and everything must be operational by the first quarter of 2023, by March 31 at the latest (Sophie Leroy, 2022).

### **3. Participation of women in this sub-genre**

#### **3.1. The absence of gender parity in stand-up comedy**

There is ample evidence to suggest that throughout history, from Greek mythology to contemporary comedy, women have been, and continue to be enthusiastic participants in the creation and consumption of funny content (Lockyer, 2020). Indeed, since the beginnings of stand-up comedy in the United States in the first half of the 20th century, female performers have been present, albeit in small numbers (Nesterhoff 2015). Although the proportion of women performing as stand-up comedians is increasing both in Europe and around the world, their presence on the comedy stage remains low. This is a pity given the emancipatory potential comedy has for women: when they perform comedy, women move from being the object to the subject of comedy (Lockyer, 2020).

Evidence of their absence from stage is provided in a study by Keisalo (2018), who demonstrates the case of the Finnish "Finn of the Century" festival in 2017, with a line-up of 24 all-male comedians. Soon people questioned why the concept of "Finn of the Century" excluded women, especially since Finland is a forerunner in women's rights and gender equality. Initially, the festival production claimed that several female comedians had been approached, but due to scheduling conflicts, none were selected. Yet this was quickly challenged by female comedians. Several famous male comedians in response volunteered to

give up their place on the show. Yet some people continued to believe that the all-male composition of the team was a sign that female actors were not up to par with men (Keisalo, 2018). Within academic debates, this absence of gender parity within the world of stand-up comedy has led to questions regarding why this is so: is it due to women (e.g. are they not interested in being funny?), comedy (e.g. is the sector hostile towards women and family needs), or audience tastes (e.g. do audiences prefer male comedians?) (Colleary, 2015; Krefting, 2014; Limon, 2000; Seizer, 2011). In the following paragraphs we go over a few potential explanations.

### **3.2. The culture specific stereotype that women are not funny**

Historically, in Western societies, funny personas have always been represented as male, think for instance of the clown figure or of illusionists (Christen, 1998 cited in Keisalo, 2018). However, the relationships between gender, comedy, and power are also rooted in local thought and habit (Christen, 1998 cited in Keisalo, 2018). For example, on Tube Tube Island, an island off the coast of Australia, being funny and making people laugh is considered a specifically feminine trait (Macintyre, 1992 cited in Keisalo, 2018). Indeed, local people on the island expect women to laugh in their daily activities as well as at work. It is women who act out scenarios at parties, events, and funeral ceremonies. The example of the island "Tube Tube" demonstrates that public humour is not universally a male domain. Therefore, the view of women and comedy as incompatible is based on cultural and social reasoning (Keisalo, 2018).

A study conducted by Hitchens (Tohni, 2015), a famous British journalist, shows that women are still today perceived by society as less funny than men. The explanation would be due to political reasons and the inferior position of women in society. Krefting (2014) agrees that men determine what is funny: "men get to determine what is funny; if women do not laugh at men's jokes, they are deemed to lack a sense of humour, but if men do not laugh at women's jokes, the jokes are deemed to lack general appeal" (cited in Keisalo, 2018 - p. 554).

According to Bore (2010), comedy audiences prefer the performances of men, as "*they perceive women's skit performances as less demanding or of lower quality*" (p. 152). Belgian stand-up comedians Florence Mendez and Nawell Madani both share the same impression. According to them, a woman must be discreet since the dawn of time. If a woman laughs loudly, if she attracts attention, she is said to be vulgar or to be doing too much. According to the society, a

beautiful woman must, according to the clichés, be classy and that necessarily passes by discretion.

*“I don't know if women have to be more spicy, but they have to do three times as much. Because as women, we are considered less funny than men. When I saw Guillermo Guiz on stage, I thought he was funnier not because of his talent, but just because he was a man.”* (Mendez cited in L’Avenir, 2021).

*“Of course, the sexist jokes gave me a boost. But they didn't only come from my colleagues, I also received a lot of criticism from the public. How many times did I hear that “women don't make you laugh”. It was difficult, but it pushed me to redouble my efforts to tear off this label that is so attached to women”* (Madani, 2019).

### **3.3. Women’s alleged fear of failure and the pressure to do well**

Keisalo (2018) in her study finds women have a harder time accepting the inevitable failures in comedy compared to men. Indeed, failure can be seen as a risk linked to a bad spontaneous interaction with the public. Even the most experienced comedians can fail at such an interaction because stand-up comedy is unpredictable. In the jargon, this type of failure is called the "bombing" or "death on stage" (Keisalo, 2018 - p. 556). It is usually considered excruciating, resulting in chilling feelings of humiliation and shame. As a result, for both the performers and the audience, the emotional stakes are high.

*“When an actor fails, it can be extremely uncomfortable not only for the performer but also for the audience.”* (Keisalo, 2018 - p. 556).

Women are, because of socialization and upbringing, characterized as more fragile, and men as having more mental strength to overcome the inevitable failures. Therefore, if one analyses the central characteristics of stand-up such as failure, which can be deemed as gendered, one can conceive why stand-up has been represented as a predominantly male activity (Peltola, 2018).

Moreover, several researchers have concluded that, apart from an individual fear of failure, women also feel the pressure to perform well on behalf of all other (aspiring) women comedians. Indeed, Keisalo (2018) states that she herself felt an anxiety when a woman went on stage, if there was one, with the incurable hope that she would perform. Similarly, Tohni (2015) also demonstrates this tension felt by an audience when a woman takes the stage:

“Some female actors talk about a pressure to do well because they feel like they are representing all women and not just themselves.” (Tohni cited in Keisalo, 2018 - p. 555).

### **3.4. Representation of women stand-up comedians in Belgium and absence of quota**

In the French-speaking part of Belgium, a small-scale survey conducted by journalist Clément Brunet<sup>8</sup>, inquired about the “best stand-up comedians” of the moment. Table 3 shows the 20 comedians mentions by the 59 respondents as of Thursday, May 26, 2022:

**Table 3. Survey answers to “best Belgian comedian” question (Top 32 best Belgian comedians Toplitic)**

Survey answers to “Best Belgian comedian” question			
1	RAYMOND DEVOS	11	MANU THOREAU
2	GUILLERMO GUIZ	12	LAURA LAUNE
3	BENOÎT POELVOORDE	13	PIERRE-EMMANUEL (PE)
4	FRANCOIS DAMIEN	14	FANNY RUWET
5	ALEX VIZOREK	15	GUIHOME
6	STEPHANE DE GROODT	16	BERT KRUISMANS
7	KODY	17	ANDRE LAMY
8	CHARLINE VANHOENACKER	18	PHILIPPE GELUCK
9	LAURENCE BIBOT	19	RENAUD RUTTEN
10	VIRGINIE HOCK	20	YOLANDE MOREAU

<sup>8</sup>Top 32 Belgian comedians, according to the fans (n.d.). Toplitic. Consulted 26 May 2022, <https://toplitic.com/celebrities/humoristes-belges>

Indeed, only 30% women comedians were mentioned, against 70% of male comedians. A similar situation becomes clear from the following Table 4 by L. Bretonnier (2016) which shows women's participation in the line-up of big comedy events, ranging from 0 to 26%.

**Table 4. Survey conducted by Lucas Bretonnier in 2016 (Le parisien magazine. Being a woman and a comedian, what a struggle)**

	Location	Proportion of women stand-up comedians on program
Humour festival « <b>Juste Pour Rire</b> » since its inception in 1985	Montreal	9%
<b>Marrakech du rire</b> since its inception in 2011	Morocco	12.5%
« <b>On n'demande qu'à en rire</b> » in 2013-2014	France	14%
Closing Gala « <b>Montreux Comedy Festival</b> » in 2015	Switzerland	25%
« <b>Grosses têtes</b> » in RTL in 2015-2016	Belgium	26%

The organizer of ceremonies Jamel Debbouze says the following regarding the low participation of women in the “Marrakech du rire” festival:

*“There are those who don't have enough work and there are those who are obliged to go into raw, vulgar texts to be like the guys. Whereas we want to see a girl! Frankly, between quality and availability, we are spoilt for choice.”* (Debbouze, 2019, Interview Konbini).

Faced with these facts, some organizations in the cultural world have decided to introduce quotas “for themselves”, to guarantee an equity between the percentage of men and women in their events. First, the Belgian comedy festival "Féminité - Egalité - Virilité" (for more information, see website<sup>9</sup>) focused on equal opportunities has implemented a 50-50 quota, aiming to invite 5 female and 5 male comedians. This is the first ever comedy festival on the

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.bruzz.be/fr/culture/events-festivals/feminite-egalite-virilite-2012-11-30>

theme of gender equality (Spoto, 2012). Christos Doulkeridis, Minister-President of the French-speaking government of Brussels (Cocof) reacted about the festival.

*“As Minister President of the Cocof, I had the French-speaking government of Brussels adopt an action plan for more equality. Because let's face it: the time has not yet come to award ourselves laurels collectively. If we want to look at the balance sheet on gender equality, and if we do so with a bit of honesty, we must note that, unfortunately, this balance sheet is negative.”* (Festival « Féminité Égalité Virilité », clap deuxième pour combattre les préjugés liés au genre, Christos Doulkeridis, 2014)

Second, a group of comedians started a collective launched by women on May 4, 2018, following the umpteenth nomination of a man to head a theatrical institution, while many women were candidates. This collective of a group of actors identifying as women, named “F(s)” (for more information, see website<sup>10</sup>) defines itself as an activist association fed up and angry at the “unconscious and never named sexism of the milieu” (F(s), 2022). They have set up working groups, including a harassment group (linked to precarious contracts), a group to quantify gender equality in culture, a group on gender dynamics, and a group to theorize their demands. They regret that by dint of integrating the current patterns, some women put internal brakes on themselves, limit themselves in their ambitions, and, when they are in place, integrate male codes to remain in place (RTBF, 2020).

#### **4. Coronavirus Crisis**

In January 2020, a virus called “Covid-19” began to take hold throughout Europe. This virus, characterized as a global pandemic a few weeks later by experts, will disrupt our lives, as well as that of billions of companies and sectors. Among the sectors most seriously affected, the cultural sector, to which the profession of stand-up comedian belongs.

The health crisis is characterized as a real blow for all comedians in the cultural world. The closure of theatres has generated numerous economic, political, and social impacts (RTBF, 2021).

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<sup>10</sup> <https://f-s.collectifs.net>

#### **4.1. Economic impact**

From an economic point of view, the cultural sector is recording losses of 319 million euros for the year 2020 in Belgium due to the restrictions linked to the health crisis (Sabam, 2021). Indeed, revenues from cultural events are down by 87%, according to the Belgian Society of Authors, Composers and Publishers (SABAM), which states that festivals and theatrical performances suffer the most severe economic impact. The organization testifies to this:

*“During 2020, the first year under Covid-19, only 21,429 cultural events took place because of the strict measures introduced to combat the spread of the coronavirus. In 2019, this figure was still 92,972, a decrease of no less than 77% in one year”* (Sabam, 2021).

A study carried out at the request of the European Grouping of Authors' Societies (GESAC) also points to the extent of the loss of turnover at European level: in one year, the cultural and creative sector has recorded a drop in turnover of 31% or 199 billion euros (Sabam, 2021). It is thus one of the sectors, along with tourism and air traffic, most strongly affected by the health crisis (Sabam, 2021). The measures taken by the public authorities to combat the spread of the coronavirus have resulted in an abysmal loss of copyright (Libert, 2021). Authors have not received any compensation from the authorities for this. As a particularly vulnerable link in the cultural ecosystem, they are thus thrown into a very precarious situation (Libert<sup>11</sup>, 2021).

#### **4.2. Political impact**

From a political point of view, the cultural sector has not been spared from restrictions by Belgian leaders. Indeed, after having put in place a multitude of regulations (ventilation, distancing, etc.), the country's politicians have practically never reallocated the opening of theatres in two years, despite the respect of all the procedures as well as the agreement of experts and scientists in view of a reopening of cultural places (RTBF, 2021). These restrictions have caused great mass movements such as demonstrations and hashtags<sup>12</sup> from the players in the sector (Havelange, 2022).

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<sup>11</sup> CEO of the SABAM

<sup>12</sup> #NOCULTURENOFUTURE & #STILLSTANDING

*“All the cultural operators of the country launched an appeal yesterday to be heard. We are waiting for perspectives”* (Havelange, 2022).

Faced with repeated abuses by the Belgian Council of Ministers concerning the cultural sector, the high court has suspended the measure to close the closed premises of establishments in the cultural sector, deemed disproportionate and not adequately motivated (Belga, 2021).

#### **4.3.Social impact**

From a social point of view, the population in Europe seems to miss theatrical activities. The results of a survey have highlighted the strong social motivation of cultural outings. The latter are done for reasons that go beyond the simple artistic interest (Havelange, 2022). It is an opportunity for people to socialize, to discuss, or simply to be part of a group for a few hours (RTBF, 2021). According to the citizens, culture goes beyond the interest in the cultural object and makes society. On the other side of the curtain, artists, too, need a recovery for their psychological health (Havelange, 2022).

*“Regardless of the financial and political aspects, culture is important to the mental health of the population”* (Havelange, 2022).

#### **4.4.What about women?**

In the cultural sector, women are out of breath. Between lack of financial aid and recognition, they feel completely forgotten (RTBF, 2021). Faced with this crisis, solo moms are the ones who have the most difficulty, financially, because they have almost no income (Lalonde, 2021).

*“I have artist status, so I have set contracts each time for productions. We are very rarely paid for rehearsals, or you must be in a big production. We are paid by the evening (so by the performance). For instance, I was performing in October, and we had a case of coronavirus in the company, so we had to cancel the dates, and for those dates, I didn't get paid: the contracts are done by the day, so I lost a week's contract”* (Justens, 2021).

In times of crisis, inequalities are exacerbated for women (Lalonde, 2021). Indeed, it should be remembered that in this sector, gender effects are related to vertical segregation (Justens, 2021). Women occupy the lower levels of the hierarchical ladder while men are at the top of the pyramid (Justens, 2021).

*“After that, it doesn't mean that it is easy for men either, because our job is a difficult one, but even more so for women” (Justens, 2021).*

## **Methodology**

After establishing a theoretical framework through the literature review, let us continue our analysis based on a **qualitative research method**. Qualitative research analyses non-numerical data in order to obtain an **exploratory approach** to the phenomena it studies (Economy Pedia, 2022). This inductive technique is adapted to the study of social phenomena, to the understanding of their context and environment. This method makes it possible to explore the emotions and feelings of humourists, as well as their behaviour and personal experiences (I. Aubin-Auger, A. Mercier, L. Baumann, A. Lehr, P. Imbert, L. Letrilliart, 2008). The objective of this research is therefore to understand the situation of women at the heart of stand-up comedy, and thus to discuss possible answers and solutions to the stated research question.

To do this, we conducted a qualitative study based on **semi-structured interviews** with male and female stand-up comedians, as well as with stand-up comedy club directors, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the sector. The semi-structured interview is defined as a data collection technique that contributes to the development of knowledge that favours qualitative and interpretive approaches, particularly those based on constructivist paradigms (Lincoln, 1995). Meeting with professionals in the sector allowed us to better understand their profession as well as their feelings regarding gender equity in the world of stand-up comedy in French-speaking Belgium. I was also lucky enough to be invited to the show of two of them. A **survey** of 120 people (Appendix 2) was also conducted to test the perceptions of the general public in Belgium regarding the stereotypes attributed to women comedians in society.

The objective of this study is to confirm, or to disprove, the presence of norms influencing gender inequity in the stand-up industry in French-speaking Belgium. Therefore, the thesis will attempt to answer this hypothesis, and thus bring potential avenues of evolution.

## **Data sampling**

To provide the most relevant analysis possible, it was necessary to select appropriate stakeholders. Given that this study mainly addresses the clichés and stereotypes towards women in the world of stand-up comedy, it seemed essential to analyse the points of view of people inside and outside the sector, namely respectively, professionals (semi-structured interviews) and the public (online survey).

For the semi-structured interviews, a total of eleven people were interviewed, all of them specialized in the stand-up sector. In order to get as many different points of view as possible, four men and six women were interviewed, as well as a director of a well-known stand-up comedy club in French-speaking Belgium. Some of them belong to feminist groups and collectives. A total of 70 interview requests were sent out and 11 interviews were obtained. It is interesting to reflect on the fact that this low response rate could imply certain reasons. All men and women were contacted with the subject of communication: "the inclusion of women in the stand-up comedy sector in Belgium". Firstly, there are the people who never responded to my requests. We can hypothesise that these people simply did not respond because of their awareness of women's issues. If I had turned my request differently (gender equality), their reaction might have been different. Then there are those who responded negatively. This category includes most of the people contacted. The main answer: lack of time. Dozens of people replied that they were working hard on new projects after the reopening of the area. In a non-pandemic setting, these people might have been able to respond to my request. The international health crisis situation must be taken into account in the realisation of this thesis. At this stage, we are in a phase of fresh reopening of the cultural sector, under certain conditions (wearing of masks, social distancing, limited capacity in theatres).

These reasons are own hypotheses, but it is essential to remain aware of the potential self-selection bias in the sample. All stakeholders were contacted by email and via social networks. Each interview lasted on average one hour.

Regarding the survey, a random sample of 120 people in total completed the survey. They were 27 men and 93 women, aged 18 to over 40, consuming or not consuming stand-up culture. Twenty questions were asked to each of them online, via the interactive digital survey platform "Dragn Survey"<sup>13</sup>. The survey was posted on my own social network (Instagram) and relayed by several friends and family members. It is important to keep in mind that the average age of the survey (18-25 years old) and most girls correspond to the influence of my distribution method. This is not an obstacle to my research, but it should be kept in mind that it may have an influence on the results.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.dragnsurvey.com>

## Data collection

In this study, two means of data collection were used: semi-structured interviews and a survey.

On the one hand, the semi-structured interview offers more freedom, spontaneity, and flexibility to stakeholders (Fenneteau, 2015). Like directive and non-directive interviews, the semi-structured interview offers a fair balance for the two people participating in the interview: the manager and the respondent. Table 5 below shows all the stakeholders interviewed in the form of semi-structured interviews.

**Table 5. Respondent Table (own table)**

	Name	Gender	Characteristics	Theatre degree	Working Regime	Seniority (Years of experience)	ITV Place	ITV Length (min)
1	Yves	M	Stand-up comedian, white, hetero, married, 30-40y old	No	FT	15	ON	69
2	Pierre	M	Director of Comedy Club, white, hetero, married, 35-50y old	No	FT	13	ON	35
3	Patrick	M	Stand-up comedian, black, hetero, married, 30-40y old	No	PT	11	ON	42
4	Marine	F	Stand-up comedian, white, hetero, single, 30-40y old	No	PT	6	OF	63
5	Sophia	F	Stand-up comedian, arabic, hetero, single, 30-40y old	No	FT	10	ON	115
6	Laure	F	Stand-up comedian, white, single, 25-35y old	No	PT	3	ON	48
7	Jean	M	Stand-up comedian, white, hetero, single, 20-30y old	No	FT	4	ON	40
8	Céline	F	Stand-up comedian, white, bisexual, single, 25-40y old	No	PT	10	ON	49
9	Maxime	M	Stand-up comedian, white, hetero, living with partner, 25-40y old	No	PT	10	ON	64
10	Martine	M	Stand-up comedian, white, hetero, single, 35-60y old	No	PT	3	ON	38
11	Brigitte	F	Stand-up comedian, white, hetero, single, 20-30y old	No	PT	3	ON	50

On the other hand, the online survey makes it possible to collect data from many people, from all walks of life and in a completely random way. This makes it possible to gather a large amount of data, to ensure the anonymity of the people interviewed, and to optimize the time factor, for example through interviews (Dubois, 2020).

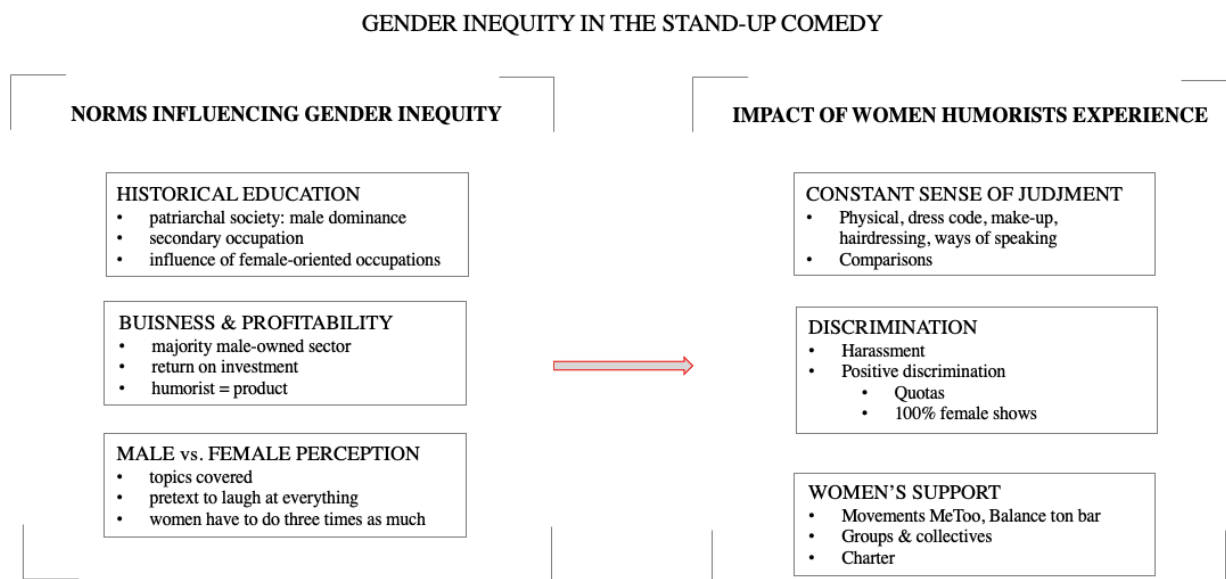
### **Data analysis**

First, in order to examine and interpret the large amount of qualitative data collected, the tool of **coding** was used to optimize the abstraction of data for theoretical construction (Doty & Glick, 1994). Coding is an analytical process of reducing, rearranging, and integrating into categories (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Codes are labels given to units of text which are later grouped and turned into categories (Huberman & Miles, 1994). It is a **linear process** by which the researcher transforms the raw and disordered world of experience into an organized world of ideas and concepts (Allard-Poesi, 2003).

*“Coding, as we have noted, can become tedious if you treat yourself as a sort of machine scanning the page methodically, picking out small segments of data and assigning categorical labels to them” (Miles & Huberman, 1994 - p. 66).*

*“Coding is fun, isn't it? You never know what you might discover in a simple encounter” (Strauss, Corbin, 1990 - p. 73)*

The **inductive** coding method, "bottom-up", was adopted (Appendix 3), in order to develop categories and thus emit relevant relationships between them (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As with deductive coding, the different parts of the data were analysed to find commonalities and discrepancies in relation to the theme (Gauzente, 1998). To dissect the different categories, the process of "**in-vivo**" coding, which consists of highlighting data related to a keyword, was used (Thomas, 2006).

**Table 6. In-Vivo Coding Process**

Second, once the data reduction was done using the inductive "in-vivo" coding method, the goal was to present the data by organizing the selections of quotes, graphs, and other forms of data presentation in a condensed manner. This is the **data display** stage.

Third, **drawing conclusions** based on patterns in the data was the final step in the methodology of this study.

## Results

To study in depth the place of women in the world of stand-up comedy in French-speaking Belgium, two research questions are posed.

- *What are the norms influencing **gender inequity** in the stand-up industry in French-speaking Belgium?*
- *To what extent do these norms impact the **experience of women** in the world of laughter?*

### 5.1. Norms influencing gender inequity in the stand-up industry

#### 5.1.1. Gendered roles and stereotypes

First, historically, within patriarchal<sup>14</sup> society, men and women have very specific gendered roles. Women are still the **main caregivers** to children and run the household, in many parts of the world, including Belgium. This makes stand-up comedy a challenging profession for women, especially when combined with motherhood and in most cases, another profession. The practice of stand-up comedy requires a significant human investment and a lot of time, without necessarily bringing in much money. Therefore, most of them have a second job like Marine, who works in the corporate sector: “*Another job gives you financial stability*”. Indeed, the stand-up comedian job requires flexible working hours in the evening or on weekends for the performances as well as a lot of rehearsal and script writing time beforehand for low financial return. Martine, as a mother, underlines this fact: “*often it is the women who manage the house and the family when there are children*”. She also points out that during the pandemic period, the impact was heavier for women: “*This period must have been very hard for women who have families. I'm a single mother and it had a heavier impact on women. It's like always. The world is going bad, women are going worse*”.

Moreover, women are in general **perceived as much less funny** than men, because of historical stereotypes. This stereotype weighs particularly hard on women stand-up comedians whose profession relies entirely on being identified as funny by others. Yves confirms this perception in view of the prejudices and stereotypes present in society: “*There are clichés that are actually anchored in our society*”. Other humour professionals also affirm this quote and underline however the small evolution they have seen in the last few years: “*It has changed a little, but*

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<sup>14</sup>meaning *father's command* in Greek

*not yet enough*" quotes Sophia. *"I would say completely agree three years ago, today we might be closer to just agree"* quotes Pierre. Regarding my survey, the question: Do you think women are perceived as less funny than men, was answered by NO by 55% of people, 23% of people answered YES and 22% abstained. This shows us that 23% of the population clearly assume that women are perceived as less funny than men.

### **5.1.2. "Demand-driven", male-dominated programming**

The stand-up sector in French-speaking Belgium is currently an **industry largely owned by men**. Pierre, being the director of a comedy club in Belgium testifies: *"most of the big production companies or festivals or theatres are owned by men in fact"*. Brigitte and Maxime confirm this fact: *"Well, every time I'm booked, it's really rare that it is female bookers"*, *"There are a lot more men than girls for the moment in the stand-up comedy"*.

The survey I conducted with 120 people reveals that when a person is asked to name a comedian, male or female, a male name is cited in 76% of cases. In fact, since the sector is mostly composed of men, fewer women identify with it. This result is even more impactful, especially when you consider that 77% of women responded. Maxime also underlines this influence: *"But in fact with the rising talent of all our women comedians in Brussels, it will just feed girls to go on stage, and we will say to ourselves Ok in fact, they are funny and well I will also try the trick and then you it's going to create this thing that there was for the men at the beginning"*.

Stand-up managers are not interested in the quality of the talent or the gender parity of their posters, their first objective remains **profitability**. First of all, Maxime explains that the most famous comedians were not noticed by production companies when they had talent, but when they had enough **visibility** to bring a return on investment: *"It's when you made a video that managed to convince a community behind you. Before that, they didn't care. You see these people, they waited until there was a video that made the buzz, and then they get in touch with the person"*. Sophia adds: *"The productions, they invest but they want a quick return on investment. They have understood that it is much easier to go after people who have already built their image. For example, it is known today in the business, if you don't have 10K on Instagram, you don't exist. For productions today, you must have at least 10K followers on Instagram, if possible, a radio column on France Inter and already videos that have made millions of views. They only think about filling their theatres"*. Today, productions are looking

for the ultimate profitability, considering that someone who has made millions of views, will probably work. However, Sophia underlines: *"We are in a moment a little complicated where the productions try to bring people from social networks on stage. Some producers they are there yes views, but a view is just someone who has seen, it's not someone who liked you, it's just someone who has seen your video. And besides, we have a lot of them, once they are on stage, it's a 'bide'<sup>15</sup> in the face"*.

Moreover, Céline shares with us an experience with the platform "What the fun<sup>16</sup>" which organizes humour shows in the trendy bars of the capital. Some bars, accused of drugging and raping female customers, have been the subject of serious accusations in late 2021. The **#balancetonbar**<sup>17</sup> movement has brought together several women victims, denouncing the veracity of these accusations. Celine quotes: *"I would find it good to stop going to play in all the bars that came back to #balancetonbar, let's stop giving money to problematic bars. And you see for example it was yeah, but you see there are a lot of people who come to see us there and well I was there, but we don't give money when there is a bar that comes back several times because a staff member would be accused of drugging people. So, you see, that's where you really see a big difference"*.

Thereafter, the humourist remains, whether he is male or female, for the production companies, a **product**. Sophia quotes: *"Humour is a business. Comics are products and only products that are part of a market, like any other product for sale"*. Patrick adds: *"People who do a show, a festival or whatever, their goal is to sell, so they'll see who sells the best, whether it's a woman or a man, they don't care. The important thing is business, so at a certain point there is no more colour, there is no more sex, it's the people who are doing the best at the moment, so if someone is doing well, if he has a lot of followers, we won't even look at his origin, it's because it brings in money, so there you have it, we're in a bit of capitalism"*.

In view of the large number of men in the milieu, we can see that the producers feed the system of inequalities within the stand-up comedy. Indeed, they only pay attention to the **return on investment**<sup>18</sup>, failing to put forward women, people from minorities, talented comics less active

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<sup>15</sup> Means a failure, a fiasco, a failure especially in the field of theatre

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.whatthefun.be>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.rtl.be/info/regions/bruxelles/-balance-ton-bar-pres-de-500-personnes-rassemblees-dans-la-capitale-pour-protester-contre-les-violences-sexuelles-1337318.aspx>

<sup>18</sup> When you put money into an investment or a business endeavour, return on investment (ROI) helps you understand how much profit or loss your investment has earned. Return on investment is a simple ratio that

on social networks, or even their programming in bars accused of raping and drugging girls repeatedly.

Some producers of large stand-up shows, and festivals were asked about gender inequalities in their programming. A common thread in their responses is that women comedians are **less available** than men in general to participate in stages. Céline confides to us: "*We are full girls, like me I made the list for the collective, we are at least 30. So, there are always good excuses for not having more women on the line up*". Céline further explained how in March 2021, the French-speaking platform BRUT<sup>19</sup> also organized, in the middle of a confinement, a stand-up night live version on social networks. On the bill 15 comedians exclusively male. A female comedian contacted them and said: "Are you serious? In 2021, on 15 humourists, there is not a woman? To which the platform replied: "Ah, we haven't found". A private WhatsApp group of French-speaking female comedians was then created following this controversy, in order to prove to the organization that some of them are indeed available to participate in the live event". Following this, the platform has then removed boys to make room for available women. Sophia says: "*So there are 3 or 5 guys who have jumped to give more space to women*".

Nevertheless, for the producers, the criterion of **quality** is often added to the criterion of availability when they are offered profiles of available women. Since there are fewer good-level female comedians than men in Belgium, they might be more called upon and therefore busy. Maxime quotes: "*They are already busy, it's normal because they are very talented, but there are fewer of them*". Céline adds: "*So there may be fewer high level [not at a full-time professional level] participants, but it is also an opportunity to let them test and get involved*".

By working this way, a **vicious circle** is created. The chances of getting on stage for lower-level female comics are minimized. Without gaining experience by participating in sets and stages, women have fewer opportunities to grow. The sector then goes round in circles, not reaching parity between men and qualified women in stand-up comedy in French-speaking Belgium.

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divides the net profit (or loss) from an investment by its cost. Because it is expressed as a percentage, you can compare the effectiveness or profitability of different investment choices (Forbes, 2021).

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.brut.media/fr/news>

### 5.1.3. Responsible comedy content for women comedians

Society's perception of male and female comedy shows also creates a gender gap in the world of stand-up comedy. In interviews with stand-up professionals, the 5 most common themes comedians mentioned referring to in the shows were racism, homophobia, sexism, misogyny, and personal anecdotes. These are themes that they themselves use in their scripts or that they have seen in the scripts of other comedians, men, and women together.

First of all, under the pretext that one can "laugh at everything", some comedians tackle themes in a sometimes very serious way, such as differential treatment, rape, or misogyny with impunity. This was not the case for the people interviewed for this thesis. According to Céline, women comics are tired of hearing this and stress the **responsibility** of speaking up about matters of injustice in front of an audience: *"In fact, I'm generally fed up with the different treatment of all this. There is a responsibility when you are a humourist. I consider that when you play and speak in front of 200 to 500 people a week, I think you have a basic responsibility not to talk rubbish because you have a whole audience listening to you. You have people who don't understand second degree<sup>20</sup>. Making jokes about rape, making jokes about misogyny with impunity, it drives me crazy"*. Telling such jokes feeds the public's perception of women's inferiority, and thus society in general.

Furthermore, given society's perception of women, female comedians had the sense they must do three times as much as a man to make an audience laugh. Women are much **more quickly judged on what they say**. Sophia tells us that a well-known Belgian humourist called her out on a sketch she was doing in which she talked about vaginas: *"But don't talk about vaginas. Yet male comics have been talking about their sex during their shows for 50 years, and it has never bothered anyone"*. Indeed, between men, they quickly find themselves funny and are much more at ease than women. They embody this "boy band" image according to Sophia and "band of friends" according to Martine. Brigitte quotes: *"They can throw one or two at women and it will always go down well"*. Men tend to show confidence and self-assurance linked to their upbringing in society: *"Men have a kind of self-assurance like that, you see they say to themselves, I'm a guy, I'm funny. Unlike girls who are more likely to apologize for being there, they are more likely to have doubts, but that's linked to their education. They have the*

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<sup>20</sup> A form of irony and humour that implies the opposite of what one really thinks. The second degree consists in leading to a more subtle meaning than the sentence would have us believe (Google, 2021). Example: "Harry Potter is the only film where you will see guys using a broom".

*confidence of men, because they have always been taught to have this assurance, or at least to show it. Maybe it's not sincere, but in any case, they show that they have legitimacy*", explains Sophia.

Likewise, women comics put **more pressure** on themselves because, according to Martine: *"They force themselves to be better. Indeed, they are demanding in terms of the technicality of their texts and scripts and take part in many courses and workshops to work on their sketches"*. Martine and Brigitte say: *"I have taken a lot of courses and there are many more girls than boys"*, *"I have a workshop on Saturdays, there are more girls than boys"*. The quality of the women's proposals is much more prepared, written, and thorough. Laure quotes: *"With the girls it's more written, there's more of an effort to write, it's quite thoughtful. They all make a greater effort. With guys, it's a bit more; well, if I make my mates laugh, I'll make them laugh. The boys can perhaps show up with their hands in their pockets more"*. Generally speaking, women are therefore likely to take longer than men in terms of the work involved in the proposal creation process. This time factor could imply a slower evolution of women to get on stage in the stand-up scene.

## **5.2. To what extent do these norms impact the experience of women in the world of laughter?**

In light of the disparities highlighted, the women humourists share their experiences. Three key aspects of the interviews are highlighted: a constant sense of judgement, discrimination, and support between women.

### **5.2.1. A constant sense of judgment**

Women comics, in addition to being judged on the content of their performances, are constantly judged on their physical appearance, whether it is their dress, make-up, hair, or the way they speak.

#### **Dress code**

All of the professional female speakers interviewed said that their choice of outfit before going on stage is a key step. Their outfit should be as neutral as possible, with the aim of being seen to be interested only in their jokes, not what they are wearing. *"I was just hiding behind my outfit, but I know that for me it's important. It's like in a bar. Women comedians hide behind their clothes so that they are not seen as a sex object. It's a way of disempowering themselves"*

says Sophia. Céline recounts her experience: *"My outfit is very neutral. It's relatively loose. I like this aspect; people don't really know how to judge me on my clothes. I know that people have often told me to wear more colour, to be more feminine"*. Laure and Brigitte add: *"In fact, I like the idea that it is as pure as possible and that there are no distractions. And so, I would like the outfit not to be a distraction", "I'm careful not to wear a big neckline, I never wear a dress, never a skirt"*. Martine also shares the same feeling: *"I try not to be too beautiful, but not to be too sexy or too made up. I don't want to distract the audience. I don't want people to be interested in my costume. I want people to be interested in the rest"*.

All these testimonies, collected independently from each other, show an intense judgement in terms of dress towards women. Not once during the interviews did the male speakers introduce the fact that they felt judged on their dress. Yves said, *"No, I just wear comfortable clothes"*. Maxime added: *"I don't get worked up about it. I don't know any comedians who say to themselves; I don't want my clothes to have any influence on going on stage"*.

#### Make-up and hairdressing

In addition to dress, the make-up and hairstyle of female comedians is also a factor in judgement and criticism from the public and from within the industry. Sophia explains: *"Celine, I know she's been criticized for not wearing make-up. She was told, 'Why don't you wear make-up?' But when you know Celine, well, she's not going to wear make-up, she's not going to put little clips in her hair, it's not her character"*. Céline supports this argument by saying: *"You have lots of people who have lots of opinions on how you should do things, how you should dress, how you should put make-up on, everyone has an opinion"*. Brigitte adds: *"At the beginning, I never wore make-up, I said to myself, it's cool, don't worry, don't wear make-up. And now I wear eye make-up, it makes me look better on stage, so it definitely plays a role too"*.

Some of the comments made about female comedians from other minorities, such as blacks or Arabs, even tend to be racist. Sophia says: *"In retrospect, it's even borderline racist. I was criticized for leaving my hair curly; you must blow-dry it, you have to straighten it a bit more. No, it's actually my hair, so first of all it's because I'm a woman, I did a blow-dry and moreover it's my hair as a Mediterranean person. I saw boys arriving, it was the fashion, they were in lumberjack shirts, they don't have hair, they are disgusting. But we girls must always have good hair"*.

### Ways of speaking

Women comedians explain how they are nowadays easily categorized as vulgar, trashy, and sometimes violent in the way they express themselves on stage. This categorization is once again the result of a judgement made towards women comedians in the Belgian stand-up comedy. Sophia says: *"It's a violent generation in the way of being because it's a moment of deconstruction. The girls want to respond violently to everything they've been taking. People say to us: "Oh girls, you're vulgar, you're pretty, why are you playing the angry girl? Until we have perfect equality, well yeah, sorry, I'll carry on. But then again: "That's what you're defending, that's not the problem, but you're still a bit arrogant when you say that. Be a bit gentle"*. Women are asked to be careful, to be more delicate, not to upset the public with certain texts, whereas what women denounce are things for which they are more than upset. Marine explains: *"I know for a fact that women are asked not to do trashy humour because they are women"*. Pierre quotes: *"I think it's also important for the girls to say it because they finally have the opportunity to say it"*. Patrick too understands why women feel a need to say everything now: *"Women have had to keep their mouths shut too much, not to talk about certain things and so now they are saying it"*. However, he adds: *"There's this difference in the trashiness. I don't want to generalise, but it's true that there is a tendency for some girls to use humour and gratuitous vulgarity, but that's just my opinion"*. This showcase how Patrick too believes there should be limits to the level or kind of trash women are allowed to talk on stage.

In this sense, because of their physical appearance, women feel judged even before they open their mouths to present their shows. They sometimes feel like a piece of meat or a mere object. Celine quotes: *"You feel like fresh meat"*. Patrick adds: *"There will always be this side, the woman is an object, and I am clearly fed up with it. I think that a woman with big breasts could not even be funny, because that's all you'll see, for example, and guys will start drooling, whereas she's there just to make people laugh"*. The women express a general feeling of being fed up. Sophia quotes: *"In fact I come to work, I don't come to be hit on"*. Pierre, the theatre director, underlines the daily struggle of female comedians: *"As women, they have to fight to be more than just a pair of breasts on stage. When they were offered work to write things, a lot of people said, 'Yeah, but that's because other people want to fuck them'. I mean, you know, and it's still ingrained"*. In short, these physical judgements are still very much embedded in the stand-up world and in our society in Belgium.

### “Gardin-copy cats”

In general, women comics are very often compared to their predecessors. Many women are associated with one of the emblematic figures of Belgian stand-up comedy, Blanche Gardin. Brigitte, Céline, and Laure testify: *"I am compared a lot", "I am often compared", "You are necessarily compared"*. Sophia added: *"If you are a girl and you do stand-up, people will always say that you look like Blanche Gardin. It's always going to be she's a copy of Blanche Gardin. No, we are not all Blanche Gardin, we have a personality"*. As for male comedians, Jean confirms this fact: *"Women are associated with girl comedians. I think we associate them more than men, we're quicker to say to them; it's Blanche Gardin. It's the classic"*.

### 5.2.2. Discrimination

#### Harassment

Women comedians are victims of many inappropriate behaviours and remarks, sometimes leading to harassment in the Belgian stand-up industry. These behaviours take place both live during shows and on social networks, virtually.


On the one hand, women tend to be victims of **sexist and macho comments** during or after their shows. Céline said: *"I come off stage and there are two boys who come up to me and say 'Bravo'. So, I say to myself, 'Okay, great. It goes well. And then at one point I say, well, I'm going to go and there's one of the boys who says to me; You'd better come and say goodbye, bitch! Men who don't let you go after the scene, that's only with women"*. After the **#balance ton bar** movement, several female comedians realised that they were experiencing similarities. Maxime adds: *"There are outbursts during the shows. For a man towards a woman, I think that sometimes people can go too far. As men, we don't have these excesses. Finally, there is no one who attacks us about our sexuality"*. When women comedians were asked how they would react if they were asked to perform in front of an all-male audience, most of them would be afraid of a slightly too macho interaction. Another fact was mentioned by Brigitte, who sometimes felt uncomfortable with men in the audience: *"What bothers me is that every time I talk about more sexual stuff, which is not the point, but I feel like I'm attracting a guy or two in the room. It's uncomfortable because I'd like to find a way to do my sketches without them feeling any seduction"*.

On the other hand, women tend to receive sexist remarks and comments on **social networks**. In this analysis, we only consider messages with a sexist character. In view of the high visibility

profession, it is important to note that men also receive threats and hate messages on social networks. However, it is never sexist discourse, as Maxime points out: "*there is nobody attacking us about our sexuality*". Céline confided to us that she had already received messages of this kind: "*you are hot, sexy*", "*you are really a slut*". Social networks are extremely violent. Sophia tells us that she recently received a sexist comment under one of her videos: "*Ah, female humour...*".

Here are some of the comments I found on my own while searching under several videos of stand-up performances by female comedians. Some of these videos are from the comedians' own Facebook accounts, others were posted under videos shared by TV stations as covers on their social networks.

**Table 8. Comments found under videos of female comedians on social networks.**

Original comment	Translation
 <p>... a commenté : « L'humour féminin... » 3h</p>	Female humour...
 <p>Le mec était certainement meilleur qu'elle, d'ailleurs elle est avec le temps moins bonne. ( sur scène bien sûr) J'aime Répondre 26 sem</p>	The guy was certainly better than her, besides she is with time less good <sup>21</sup> (on stage of course)
 <p>Mouais ..... bon un peu drôle les filles svp 😊 ... J'aime Répondre 8 sem</p>	Mmmhh.... well, a bit of fun girls please
 <p>Pourquoi crie t elle c est désagréable la voix haut perché Insupportable Touche a tout bonne a rien . Enfin j espère qu il y a des exceptions 🤔🤔🤔 J'aime Répondre 24 sem</p>	Why does she shout, it's unpleasant the voice Unbearable Touch everything good for nothing I hope there are exceptions
 <p>Bcp de Foresti dans cette influence. Bravo. J'aime Répondre 32 sem</p>	A lot of Foresti <sup>22</sup> in this influence. Bravo
 <p>Comment justifier la vulgarité et l'absence de talent. ... J'aime Répondre 27 sem</p>	How to justify vulgarity and lack of talent

<sup>21</sup> Vulgar term in French to define a hot, sexy girl

<sup>22</sup> Famous French Women Humourist

Female comedians explained that they receive messages of different degrees. There are those who say, *"I really like what you are doing"*, and then at some point they will try to flirt by saying *"you are beautiful"*. Some even reach an obscene level by sending pornographic videos or sexual images. Sophia quotes: *"There are things, sometimes it turns into harassment and then purely sexual stuff"*.

Faced with these sexist remarks, made live or virtually, women react and do not let themselves be bullied. According to Patrick, women are even stronger psychologically than men to endure this kind of remarks: *"I think women are stronger psychologically, a woman is already more willing to endure in her life"*. Sophia shares how she reacts: *"I will always say to myself, at least I dared, so why should I be bothered by someone who didn't actually try"*.

### Positive discrimination

Positive discrimination is a principle: it involves instituting inequalities in order to promote equality, by granting preferential treatment to some (B. Villenave, 2006). This principle aims to favour certain groups of people who are systematically discriminated against, in order to restore equal opportunities (B. Villenave, 2006). Indeed, some women comedians are confronted with this form of discrimination, due to the establishment of quotas and 100% female comedy shows.

The first form of positive discrimination against women concerns the issue of **quotas**. According to Villenave (2006): "positive discrimination is a principle, the establishment of quotas is a concrete measure to achieve this principle". The quota principle is defined as a positive measurement instrument aimed at accelerating the achievement of gender-balanced representation by establishing a defined proportion (percentage) or number of places to be filled by, or allocated to, women (in our case) (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2016).

Indeed, some producers call on women comedians, in order to ensure parity, or a minimum of space for the female gender in their line-up. 4 out of 5 female comedians interviewed, faced with the practice of quotas, feel devalued. Céline, Sophia, Brigitte and Laure testify: *"There are scenes that we refuse because we think that we are not taken for our talent, we are just taken for the fact that we are women, it is not very rewarding"*, *"I am not taken because I have a uterus, but because I have talent and it is very offensive"*, *"When you are a woman, you are going to be taken because the organiser wants parity, I find this remark totally inappropriate"*, *"they are going to be lined up if I am a girl, when in fact nobody finds me funny"*.

Introducing quotas is not the solution to the gender problem in the sector, according to comedy professionals. However, some of them bring the subject to open reflection and cite this paradoxical principle. Laure explains: *"I think quotas can play a role. The more you show people from different minorities, the more people are going to be inspired and say to themselves, okay that means I can do it too because there is one. And so, it's important in that respect"*. Patrick adds: *"I don't like the word quota, it's this paradox. You have to go through it to have visibility"*.

The second form of positive discrimination concerns **100% female comedy shows**. Here again, some women comedians feel devalued. Sophia quotes: *"when girls' shows are proposed, I say no, either you take me because I have talent, or no thanks"*. Women-only shows also create an additional gap between male and female comedians. Maxime quotes: *"all-female shows, I find that a bit dangerous too. I find that it continues to create a distance and a differentiation"*. According to him, the presence of women should not be announced and emphasised every time: *"It should not be promoted as 100% female, it's just a plateau, full stop. Or when they say, the next one is a woman. It shouldn't be an event, it's normal"*.

However, the organisation of 100% female sets is controversial in the minds of some female comedians. This type of practice allows them to have the opportunity to go on stage, without having to wait for a place to be available for a woman in the sets organised in Belgium. Laure and Martine quote: *"if I can benefit from this, I play"*, *"thanks to this, I have been able to play a little more often"*.

Furthermore, Céline underlines that the organisation of 100% female shows upsets male comedians, who feel left out, and react to the fact that men are not allowed to participate in these shows. She says: *"Men tell me that they will never be able to perform on them and I am there, but you guys are in the majority everywhere but really everywhere, for us to get a place it is really difficult. There is only one 100% female stage every month and a half and it bothers you not to be on it, it's crazy. That's when you see that they are not used to it at all"*.

### **5.2.3. Women's support**

Faced with their common experiences, women are coming together, creating movements, groups, and collectives to denounce the gender inequalities they face in the stand-up sector in Belgium. Among them, we can mention the F(s) collective, the group *l'atout charme*, the #MeToo and #Balancetonbar movements. Brigitte explains: *"We support each other in the*

*group l'atout charme and it actually works too much. There is a lot of information and support on this group". The #MeToo and #Balancetonbar movements are also gaining momentum in society. Sophia says: "I really felt the change, with MeToo in 2017. Thanks to these provisions, women dare to speak out more and more and feel more listened to".*

Belgian women comedians have also come together to write a charter (Appendix 4). Céline tells us about the initiative for this charter: *"Following the #Balancetonbar, we asked to see the directors of the comedy club with several women comedians, almost all of those who play there, and we said that we wanted things to change, that they may have had the impression that we were a happy bunch, but that in fact the behaviour of the men inside the club was not good at all".* So, this charter became the official contract for comedians playing in this stand-up comedy club, which is very well known in French-speaking Belgium. The charter has gone viral and other Belgian venues are discussing adopting it as well. Here are three extracts.

1. In this Comedy Club, everything will be put in place so that all artists, whatever their gender, sexual orientation, or origin, feel respected and safe. If you don't agree with this, don't come here. And don't come here anymore.
2. Just because we're in the Comedy Club doesn't mean everything is funny. Racist, sexist, LBGTQIA+phobic and generally disrespectful thoughts and attitudes towards the most vulnerable people, if you have them, keep them in your larynx and go and do them at Eric Zemmour's convention.
3. Artists who come to play at the club will be required to sign the charter. It will be included in the production contracts.

Finally, the experience of women comedians in French-speaking Belgium shows a slow and limited but positive evolution over time. Céline quotes: *"We are happy, but it's still quite slow. It's still very much in the process of changing".*

## Discussion

The profession of stand-up comedy may seem simple, exciting, and very fun to do at first glance. However, in reality it is a very hard and competitive business to survive in, given its precarious nature and instability of income. As a result, being a comedian is a very hard job, and very few people manage to make a career in this sector. However, it remained unclear how a rising number of women stand-up comedians experience this profession, hence this thesis topic.

Three sets of norms influencing gender inequality in the sector were identified: (1) gendered roles and stereotypes, (2) a business sector that is demand-driven and male-dominated, and (3) an expectation for women to provide responsible comedy content.

Firstly, the low number of women as professionals in the industry (whether comedians or bookers and club owners) may have been influenced by historical **gendered roles and stereotypes** in our society. First, historically, patriarchy was prominent. The dominant position of men in a sector still influences the minds of Belgian citizens. In addition, the stand-up profession for women is often perceived as not a real serious job, a secondary profession by society. Stand-up comedy was seen as a restrictive profession for women because they had to spend their free time looking after the family household, rather than going out to do stand-up comedy in the evenings or at weekends, and ultimately bringing in little or no money for her family. But it would also seem that girls are influenced from an early age to work in a female-oriented occupation. Given the minority of female comedians, fewer girls identify with the industry, and therefore fewer girls go into stand-up.

Secondly, the stand-up sector is a **male-dominated profit-driven business sector**, largely owned by men. Producers, who were predominantly male at the time, were not interested in the quality of a talent or gender parity in their line-ups. Their primary objective was profitability and return on investment. Comedians are seen as products. As a result, a vicious circle is created in view of the minority in the sector, leaving less space, visibility, and opportunities for women to develop by participating in stages and platforms.

Thirdly, **society's perception** of female and male comedy performances also creates a gender disparity factor in the world of stand-up comedy. Under the guise of being able to laugh at anything, themes such as rape and misogyny fuel the differential treatment and perceived inferiority of women by society. It is a double standard where men get away with rude content

while women are pushed to create responsible content that is accountable to other women and minorities. As a result, female comedians must do three times as much as a man to make an audience laugh, put more pressure on themselves in terms of their technical requirements and participate more in courses and workshops. Likewise, men tend to show a more dubious confidence and legitimacy in front of female comedians.

In response to these disparities, women reacted and spoke of how this impacted on their experience in the stand-up sector. Three key aspects are noted: (1) a constant sense of judgement, (2) discrimination, and (3) strong support between women.

Firstly, women comedians feel constantly **judged** on their physical appearance, whether it is their dress, make-up, hair, or the way they speak. They feel judged before they even open their mouths to perform and sometimes feel like a piece of meat or an object. In addition, female comedians are very often compared to their predecessors or to other women in the industry, unlike men.

Secondly, female comedians report being **discriminated** against because of numerous inappropriate behaviours and remarks, both during their shows and on social networks. Sexist and macho comments lead to harassment and sometimes reach an obscene level. In addition, women feel devalued by the positive discrimination supported by the practice of quotas and all-female stages, even though these controversial practices allow women to increase their visibility by having the opportunity to perform.

Thirdly, the common experience of women is that there is a great deal of **support** among them. The weight of gatherings, movements, collectives, groups, and charters, denouncing the gender inequalities they face, is a positive and slow evolution over time. As a result, women comedians feel increasingly listened to and considered.

In conclusion, the results of this thesis allow us to confirm the hypothesis of the presence of gender inequalities within the stand-up comedy sector in French-speaking Belgium.

## Solutions and opening to the future

Throughout the writing of this thesis, I have developed a sense of reflection as a result of the encounters I have had with professionals in the stand-up industry. Some of the testimonies made a real impression on me and I could not have imagined all that could happen in the life of a female comedian. Being a female performer myself, I find it important to seriously take their stories into consideration, and suggest ways of improving the inclusion of women in the stand-up industry.

A first solution could be linked to the **education of new generations**. Workshops and tutorials could be organised in schools to teach young people the importance of deconstructing stereotypes. Role-playing games could be set up to change things in everyday reality and thus encourage a collective approach to change. These workshops could be beneficial to the stand-up sector, but also to all other sectors of society where gender inequalities exist and all the workplaces (outside show business) where women continue to struggle with being identified as funny.

A second solution would be to inform professionals and **create awareness of gender inequity** within the stand-up sector. Some men pretend or say they don't realise. Awakening their minds by organising a training day or running a campaign to sensitise them to the issue every year could make them a little more aware of what happens to women in the Belgian stand-up industry. During this training or campaign, testimonies and facts could be shared, sexist and misogynistic behaviours and jokes could be illustrated, but also tips on how to react and help women in case of problematic situations, to create "male allyship" could be given. Men would no longer be able to deny the facts or say, "we didn't know", if days dedicated to this are offered.

A third solution would be to give **women with less experience a place** on the stage. Having the opportunity to go on stage means having the opportunity to gain experience and to improve the quality of one's sketch. Leaving the door open to these women would allow them to become more quickly confirmed and thus balance the ratio in terms of qualitative male and female comedians in French-speaking Belgium.

Finally, there is no miracle solution, it is rather a **long societal struggle** that will take time. When the question of gender is no longer being asked, the problem will be solved.

## **Limitations**

Before concluding this thesis, it is important to mention the limitations that were encountered during this study.

Firstly, the stand-up comedy sector is a **very difficult sector to access**. As mentioned in the methodology section, a total of 70 interview requests had to be sent out in order to get 11 interviews. The majority of people in the sector are either very busy with projects, rehearsals, or never respond to the request, despite several attempts and reminders. Finally, after insisting, I was granted interviews, and I was also invited to attend the performances of two of them. It is therefore important to stress that this study is based on a sample of 11 professionals in the sector. The results should not be generalised to the entire stand-up comedy industry in Belgium. However, they have given us a good understanding of the gender aspects of their profession.

Secondly, **talking in terms of 'gender'** is becoming more and more deconstructed in our society. In my interviews, some comedians explained to me that there are more and more people who claim to be non-binary. 'Non-binarity' is a generic term used in the social sciences and in the LGBTQIA<sup>23+</sup> lexicon to categorise different non-binary gender identities, i.e. people who identify as neither strictly male nor strictly female, but somewhere in between, a mixture of both, or neither. It is therefore important to consider that these people exist. It is time to change the way we communicate in terms of gender equality, making sure that we do not neglect non-gendered people.

Lately, it has been essential for me to make a **connection between the world of stand-up comedy and the business world of LSM**. Through this thesis, I wanted to demonstrate that the cultural sector is a business sector in its own right. The stand-up sector is a normal sector that employs men and women and contributes to the economic life of Belgium. Comedians are seen as entrepreneurial workers. It was important to highlight the importance of stereotypes in this business world, combining my studies with my passion.

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<sup>23</sup> LGBT, or LGBTQIA+, are acronyms used to describe lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, and asexual people

## General conclusion

This study aimed to analyse the presence of gender inequalities in the stand-up comedy sector in French-speaking Belgium. After conducting literary research, a qualitative study was carried out based on eleven semi-structured interviews with stand-up professionals and an online survey of the public, with 120 respondents. The results of this analysis enabled us to answer the two research questions posed: (1) What are the norms influencing gender inequity in the stand-up industry in French-speaking Belgium? (2) To what extent do these norms impact the experience of women in the world of laughter?

Although this analysis allows us to confirm the presence of gender inequalities within the stand-up sector in French-speaking Belgium, two similarities and disparities can be highlighted in relation to previous studies conducted by different authors.

On the one hand, some of the results allow us to draw **similarities** with previous studies.

One of the similarities is that the stand-up industry is a **male-dominated industry** and that women are always **perceived as less funny** than men. Indeed, Hitchens demonstrated this in 2007 when he stated that the industry is male dominated due to the problem that women are often perceived by society as less funny than men (Hitchens, 2007). Furthermore, Bore later stated that comedy audiences prefer male performances because they perceive female sketch performances as less demanding or of lower quality (Bore 2010, p. 152). Today, these beliefs still persist in our society: most major production companies, festivals or theatres are in fact male owned. However, stand-up professionals and my own survey point out that attitudes have changed very slightly.

A second similarity is related to the **impact of the coronavirus crisis directly on women** in stand-up comedy. Lalonde and Justens previously stated that in times of crisis, inequalities are exacerbated for women in the stand-up sector, due to gender effects and vertical segregation (Justens, 2021). In this sector, women occupy the lower levels of the hierarchy while men are at the top of the pyramid (Justens, 2021). These statements are very strongly linked to the results of the interviews: 'This period must have been very hard for women who have families. I'm a single mother and it had a heavier impact on women. It's like always. The world is going bad, women are going worse' (Martine, 2022).

On the other hand, some of the results allow us to draw **disparities** in contrast with previous studies.

Firstly, Keisalo in her 2018 study found that women found it **harder to accept the inevitable failures** in comedy compared to men. This idea was also supported by Peltola who argued that women were, due to socialisation and upbringing, characterised as more fragile, and men as having more mental strength to overcome the inevitable setbacks (Peltola, 2018). The interviews conducted during my study showed the opposite: faced with the sexist remarks, made live or virtually, women react and do not let themselves be bullied. According to the speakers, women are even stronger psychologically than men to endure this kind of remarks: 'women are stronger psychologically, a woman is already more willing to endure in her life' (Maxime, 2022).

Secondly, Tohni demonstrated in 2015 that some female actors felt pressure when they went **on stage** as they felt they were **representing the community of all women** and not just themselves (Tohni, 2015). This was completely refuted by all the interviewees. Although the women comedians testify to pressure regarding the quality of their scripts, every woman comedian interviewed testifies that she never thought of representing the whole community of women when she went on stage. This nuance of the location of the stage is important to note, as the women still expressed a need to represent their community, but at events outside the stage, such as at the Balancetonbar movement, at collective gatherings. Women are more supportive of each other and mainly put forward their minority to be heard outside the scene.

I would also like to highlight a new development, identified during the analysis of the results, which was not identified during the previous studies. The **development of a charter** (Appendix 4) following the creation of feminist movements (MeToo, Balance ton bar) is a major advance in the stand-up sector in French-speaking Belgium. This novelty is specific to the region under study and allows all comedians to adopt a responsible attitude towards inequalities, minorities, and women in particular.

The analysis therefore allowed us to confirm the presence of gender inequalities within the stand-up sector in French-speaking Belgium, and to highlight the causes and impacts of these inequalities, thanks to the comparison of previous studies and results obtained.

In conclusion, the stand-up sector is evolving slowly but positively. There is still a long way to go to achieve optimal gender equality in the sector.

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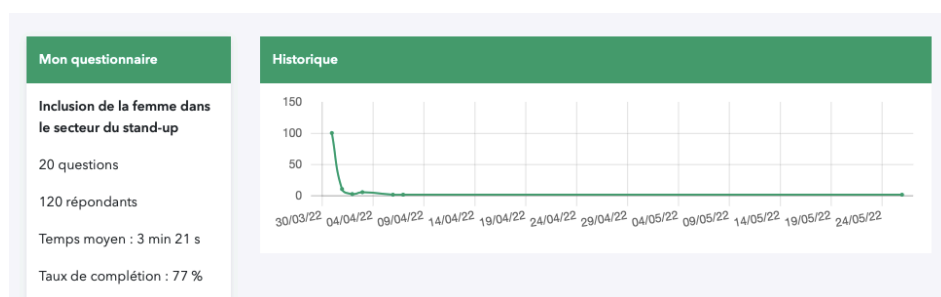
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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Non-exhaustive list of artistic activities by the ONEM.

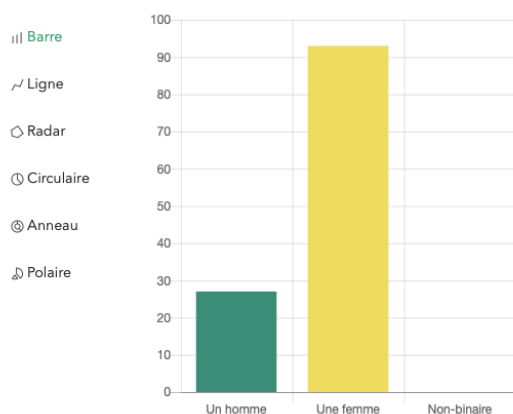
artiste de spectacle (interprètes)	artistes créateurs	non artistes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ chanteur</li> <li>▪ choriste</li> <li>▪ musicien</li> <li>▪ artiste de café théâtre</li> <li>▪ artiste de cirque</li> <li>▪ comédien</li> <li>▪ danseur</li> <li>▪ instrumentiste</li> <li>▪ doubleur</li> <li>▪ mime</li> <li>▪ illusionniste</li> <li>▪ chorégraphe</li> <li>▪ scénographe</li> <li>▪ créateur de décors</li> <li>▪ maquettiste</li> <li>▪ décorateur</li> <li>▪ créateur de costumes</li> <li>▪ maître de ballet</li> <li>▪ orchestrateur (arrangement musical pour orchestre)</li> <li>▪ chef d'orchestre</li> <li>▪ régisseur (théâtre, cinéma, radio, TV)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ peintre</li> <li>▪ restaurateur de tableaux</li> <li>▪ sculpteur</li> <li>▪ graveur (burin, eau forte...)</li> <li>▪ dessinateur</li> <li>▪ caricaturiste</li> <li>▪ illustrateur</li> <li>▪ graphiste</li> <li>▪ dessinateur créateur (bijoux, ferronnerie d'art, tissus, meubles, mode...)</li> <li>▪ publiciste (dessinateur, scénariste)</li> <li>▪ scénographe</li> <li>▪ chorégraphe</li> <li>▪ maître de ballet</li> <li>▪ orchestrateur (arrangement musical pour orchestre)</li> <li>▪ chef d'orchestre</li> <li>▪ dessinateur modéliste</li> <li>▪ photographe d'art</li> <li>▪ compositeur</li> <li>▪ auteur (parolier)</li> <li>▪ scénariste</li> <li>▪ écrivain</li> <li>▪ poète et conteur</li> <li>▪ traducteur littéraire</li> <li>▪ réalisateur</li> <li>▪ régisseur (théâtre, cinéma, radio, TV)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ disc-jockey</li> <li>▪ présentateur radio ou TV</li> <li>▪ journaliste</li> <li>▪ rédacteur (d'un journal ou d'une revue non littéraire)</li> <li>▪ mannequin</li> <li>▪ figurant</li> <li>▪ responsable casting ou du script</li> <li>▪ habilleur</li> <li>▪ maquilleur</li> <li>▪ accessoiriste</li> <li>▪ technicien de spectacle (éclairagiste, ingénieur du son, monteur, cameraman,...)</li> <li>▪ traducteur (non littéraire)</li> </ul>

## Appendix 2: Own Dragn Survey on the inclusion of women in the stand-up sector.



### Question 1

Vous êtes ?



Masquer la question

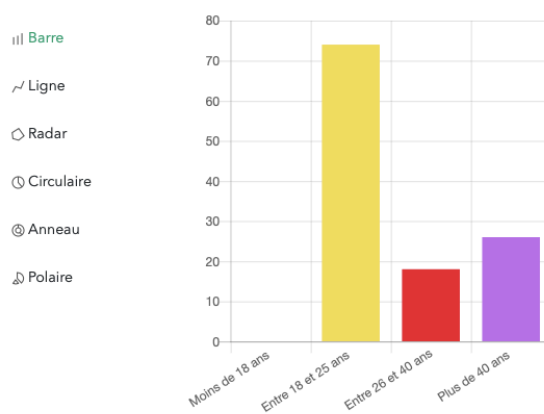
Ajouter un filtre à cette question

Pondérer les résultats

Intitulé des réponses	Nombre de réponses	Pourcentage
Un homme	27	22.5 %
Une femme	93	77.5 %
Non-binaire	0	0 %

### Question 2

Quel âge avez-vous?



Masquer la question

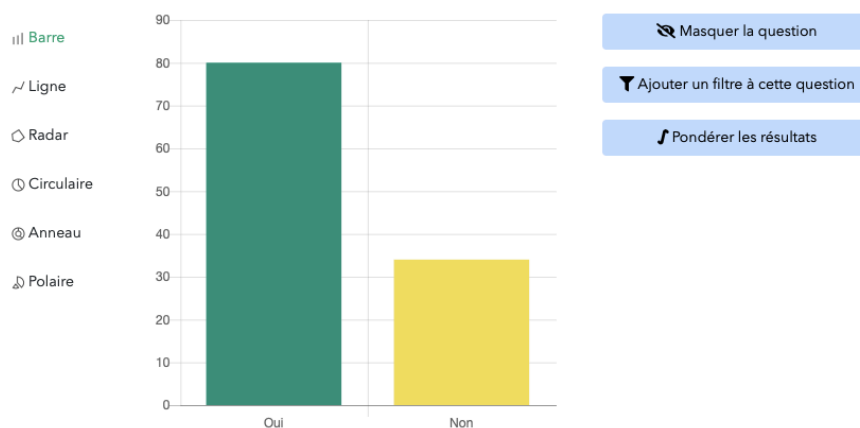
Ajouter un filtre à cette question

Pondérer les résultats

Intitulé des réponses	Nombre de réponses	Pourcentage
Moins de 18 ans	0	0 %
Entre 18 et 25 ans	74	61.67 %
Entre 26 et 40 ans	18	15 %
Plus de 40 ans	26	21.67 %

### Question 3

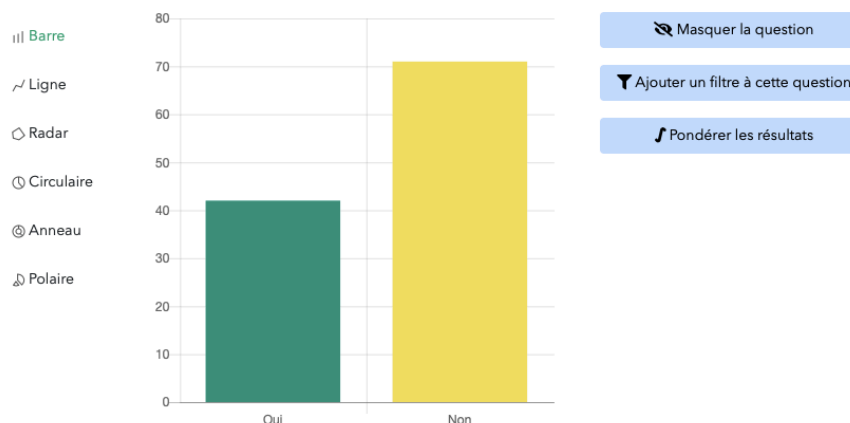
Avez-vous un intérêt pour la comédie de stand-up ?



Intitulé des réponses	Nombre de réponses	Pourcentage
Oui	80	66.67 %
Non	34	28.33 %

### Question 4

Êtes-vous déjà aller voir un spectacle de stand-up ?



Intitulé des réponses	Nombre de réponses	Pourcentage
Oui	42	35 %
Non	71	59.17 %

### Question 5

Si oui, quel(le) humoriste de stand-up êtes-vous allez voir?

Afficher  éléments

Rechercher :

Réponses	Date de la réponse
Paul Mirabel	26/05/22
Foresti	06/04/22
Kodi	03/04/22
Pe	03/04/22
Gad Elmaleh	02/04/22
Felix Radu	01/04/22
Frank Dubosc, Véronique dicaire, Jeff Panacloc, Florence Foresti,...	01/04/22
Fabrice Eboue	01/04/22
Veronique gallo	01/04/22
Véronic Dicaire	31/03/22

## Question 5

Si oui, quel(le) humoriste de stand-up êtes-vous allez voir?

Afficher  éléments

Rechercher :

Réponses	Date de la réponse
Fanny Ruwet, Nikoz, Jamel Comedy Club, Lisa Delmoitier, Guillermo, ...	31/03/22
Richard Ruben	31/03/22
Gad Elmaleh	31/03/22
Jeff Panacloc	31/03/22
Jeff panacloc	31/03/22
/	31/03/22
Nikoz dernièrement	31/03/22
Jérémy Ferrari	31/03/22
Alex Vizorek	31/03/22
Jamel Debouzze, Olivier Debenoit,...	31/03/22

## Question 5

Si oui, quel(le) humoriste de stand-up êtes-vous allez voir?

Afficher  éléments

Rechercher :

Réponses	Date de la réponse
Jarry	31/03/22
GuiHome	31/03/22
Florence foresti, Max boublil	31/03/22
Des humoristes peu connus, amateurs	31/03/22
Maxime gasteuil	31/03/22
Arnaud tsamer	31/03/22
Gad Elmaleh (mais je suppose que ça ne compte pas vraiment 😊)	31/03/22
Norman	31/03/22
Jeanfi Janssens, Cecile Djunga	31/03/22
Guillermo et les jeunes du Kings of Comedy Club	31/03/22

## Question 5

Si oui, quel(le) humoriste de stand-up êtes-vous allez voir?

Afficher  éléments

Rechercher :

Réponses	Date de la réponse
Guillermo Guiz, Gad Elmaleh	31/03/22
Gad elmaleh	31/03/22
Denis Richir	31/03/22
Jp	31/03/22
Jeff Panacloc	31/03/22
Hock	31/03/22
Fary	31/03/22
Jarry, Virginie Hocq, Camille Iellouche	31/03/22
Virginie Hocq, Camille Iellouche, Jarry	31/03/22
Gus	31/03/22

## Question 5

Si oui, quel(le) humoriste de stand-up êtes-vous allez voir?

Afficher 10 éléments

Rechercher :

Réponses	Date de la réponse
Roman fraissinet	31/03/22
GuilHome	31/03/22
Me souviens plus.. c'était à Bruxelles	31/03/22
/	31/03/22
fary , paul mirabel, roman frayssinet, fanny ruwet , fadily camara, rédouane bougheraba...	31/03/22
Je sais plus	31/03/22
Bruno Coppens	31/03/22

## Question 6

Citez UN nom d'humoriste de stand-up que vous connaissez

Afficher 10 éléments

Rechercher :

Réponses	Date de la réponse
Paul Mirabel	26/05/22
Guihome	07/04/22
Foresti	06/04/22
Aucun	03/04/22
Guillhome	03/04/22
Pe	03/04/22
Paul Mirabel	02/04/22
Foresti	01/04/22
Jeremy Credeville	01/04/22
Paul Mirabel	01/04/22

## Question 6

Citez UN nom d'humoriste de stand-up que vous connaissez

Afficher 10 éléments

Rechercher :

Réponses	Date de la réponse
Serine AYARI	01/04/22
Blanche Gardin	01/04/22
Gad Elmaleh Kev Adams	01/04/22
Nawell madani	01/04/22
Bill hicks	01/04/22
Paul Mirabel	31/03/22
Guillermo	31/03/22
?	31/03/22
Paul Mirabel	31/03/22
GuiHome	31/03/22

## Question 6

Citez UN nom d'humoriste de stand-up que vous connaissez

Afficher 10 éléments

Rechercher :

Réponses	Date de la réponse
Gad Elmaleh	31/03/22
Florence Foresti	31/03/22
Florence Foresti	31/03/22
Blanche Gardin	31/03/22
gad elmaleh	31/03/22
Jeff Panacloc	31/03/22
Kev Adams	31/03/22
Artus	31/03/22
Gas elmaeh	31/03/22
Gad Elmaleh	31/03/22

## Question 6

Citez UN nom d'humoriste de stand-up que vous connaissez

Afficher 10 éléments

Rechercher :

Réponses	Date de la réponse
Ines reg	31/03/22
/	31/03/22
Gad Elmaleh	31/03/22
Gad Elmaleh	31/03/22
Haroun	31/03/22
Ricky Gervais	31/03/22
Alex Vizorek	31/03/22
Gad Elmaleh	31/03/22
Ines Reg	31/03/22
Guillermo	31/03/22

## Question 6

Citez UN nom d'humoriste de stand-up que vous connaissez

Afficher 10 éléments

Rechercher :

Réponses	Date de la réponse
Paul mirabelle	31/03/22
RICHARD RUBEN	31/03/22
Paul Mirabelle	31/03/22
Gad Elmaleh	31/03/22
Kev Adams	31/03/22
Ines Reg	31/03/22
Paul mirabel	31/03/22
Paul Mirabel	31/03/22
Gad Elmaleh	31/03/22
GuiHome	31/03/22

## Question 6

Citez UN nom d'humoriste de stand-up que vous connaissez

Afficher 10 éléments

Rechercher :

Réponses	Date de la réponse
JeremStar	31/03/22
Jeanfi Janssessens, Cecile Djunga	31/03/22
Gad	31/03/22
Gad elmaleh	31/03/22
Guillermo Guiz	31/03/22
Blanche Gardin	31/03/22
Kheiron	31/03/22
Gad Elmaleh	31/03/22
Guillermo Ruiz	31/03/22
Gad Elmaleh	31/03/22

## Question 6

Citez UN nom d'humoriste de stand-up que vous connaissez

Afficher 10 éléments

Rechercher :

Réponses	Date de la réponse
guillermo guiz	31/03/22
Denis Richir	31/03/22
Fanny rewet	31/03/22
Kev adams	31/03/22
Hock	31/03/22
Guillermo Guiz	31/03/22
Guihome	31/03/22
Paul Mirabel	31/03/22
François Pirette	31/03/22
Gad	31/03/22

## Question 6

Citez UN nom d'humoriste de stand-up que vous connaissez

Afficher 10 éléments

Rechercher :

Réponses	Date de la réponse
Gad Elmaleh	31/03/22
Ines Reg	31/03/22
Claudia Tagbo	31/03/22
Florence foresti	31/03/22
GuiHome	31/03/22
Florence Foresti	31/03/22
Gad Elmaleh	31/03/22
Gus	31/03/22
Gad Elmaleh	31/03/22
Djimo	31/03/22

## Question 6

Citez UN nom d'humoriste de stand-up que vous connaissez

Afficher 10 éléments

Rechercher :

Réponses	Date de la réponse
GuilHome	31/03/22
Gad Elmaleh	31/03/22
Florence foresti	31/03/22
Paul mirabel	31/03/22
panayotis pascot	31/03/22
Je sais plus	31/03/22
Virginie Hocq	31/03/22
Je ne connais personne	31/03/22
Guillermo guiz	31/03/22
Jamel	31/03/22

## Question 6

Citez UN nom d'humoriste de stand-up que vous connaissez

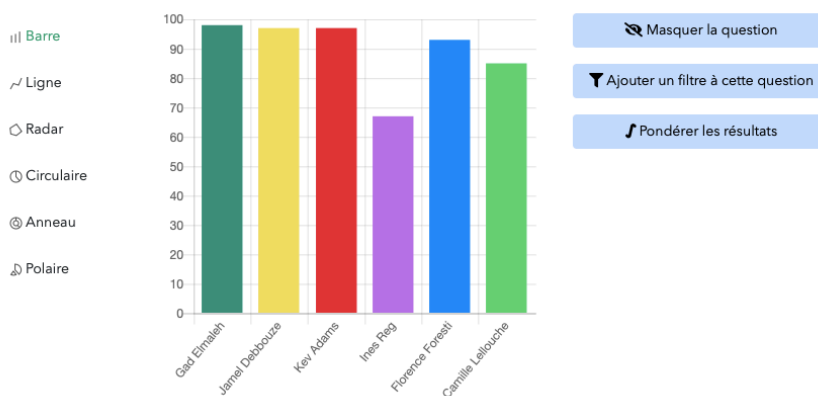
Afficher 10 éléments

Rechercher :

Réponses	Date de la réponse
Gad ElMaleh	31/03/22
Gad Elmaleh	31/03/22
Inès Reg	31/03/22
Mohamed El Atrassi	31/03/22
Florence foresti	31/03/22
Guihome	31/03/22

## Question 7

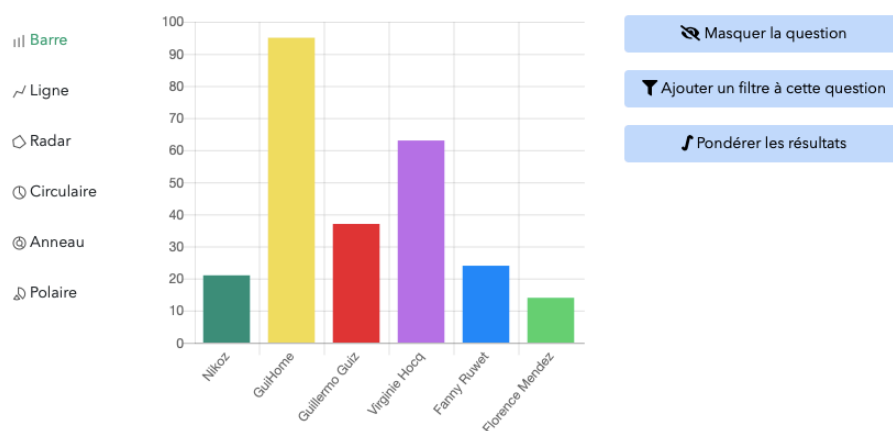
Parmi ces 6 humoristes français, lesquels connaissez-vous de nom ?



Intitulé des réponses	Nombre de réponses	Pourcentage
Gad Elmaleh	98	81.67 %
Jamel Debbouze	97	80.83 %
Kev Adams	97	80.83 %
Ines Reg	67	55.83 %
Florence Foresti	93	77.5 %
Camille Lellouche	85	70.83 %

## Question 8

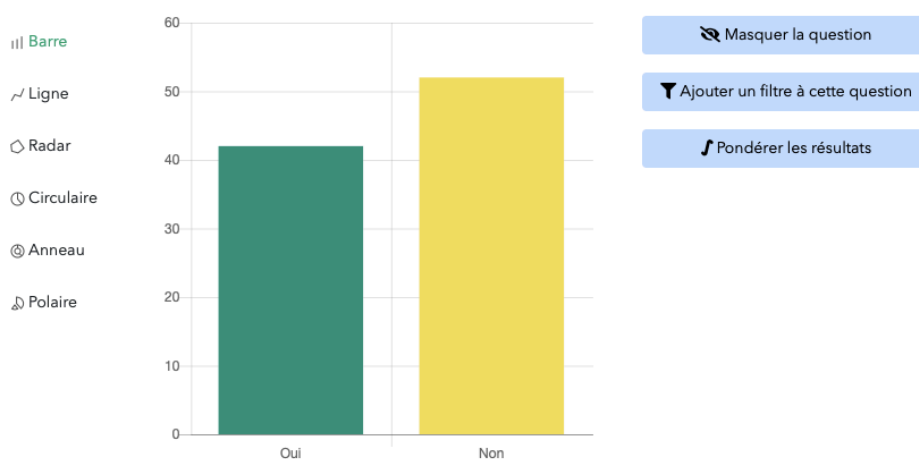
Parmi ces 6 humoristes belges, lesquels connaissez-vous de nom ?



Intitulé des réponses	Nombre de réponses	Pourcentage
Nikoz	21	17.5 %
GuiHome	95	79.17 %
Guillermo Guiz	37	30.83 %
Virginie Hocq	63	52.5 %
Fanny Ruwet	24	20 %
Florence Mendez	14	11.67 %

## Question 9

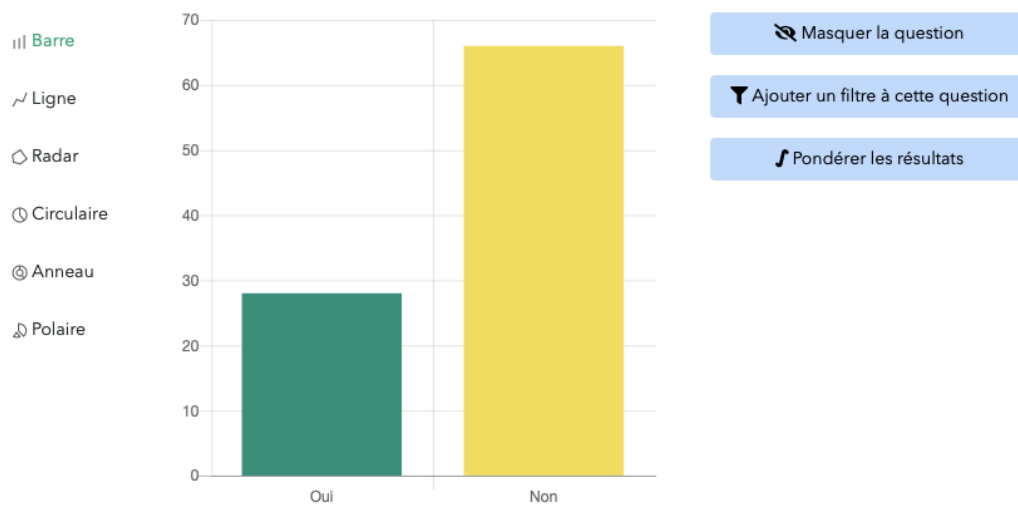
Pensez-vous que les femmes sont moins connues que les hommes dans le secteur du stand-up ?



Intitulé des réponses	Nombre de réponses	Pourcentage
Oui	42	35 %
Non	52	43.33 %

## Question 10

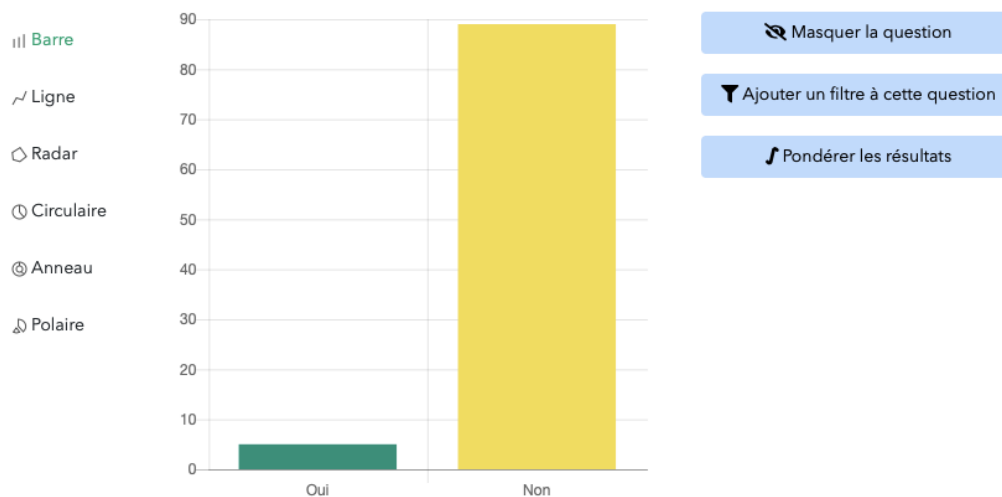
Pensez-vous que les femmes sont perçues comme moins drôles que les hommes ?



Intitulé des réponses	Nombre de réponses	Pourcentage
Oui	28	23.33 %
Non	66	55 %

## Question 11

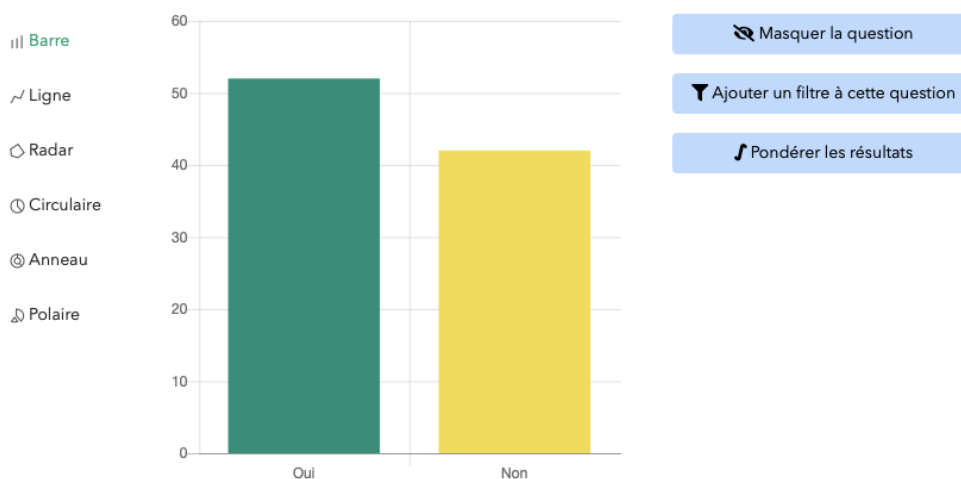
Pensez-vous que les sketches des femmes sont de moindre qualité ?



Intitulé des réponses	Nombre de réponses	Pourcentage
Oui	5	4.17 %
Non	89	74.17 %

## Question 12

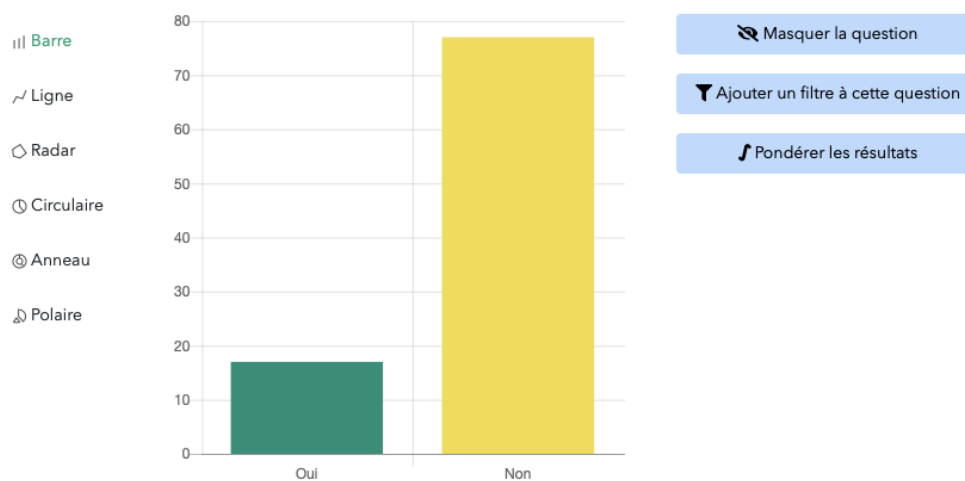
Pensez-vous que les femmes ont plus de mal à faire carrière dans le secteur du stand-up comparé aux hommes ?



Intitulé des réponses	Nombre de réponses	Pourcentage
Oui	52	43.33 %
Non	42	35 %

## Question 13

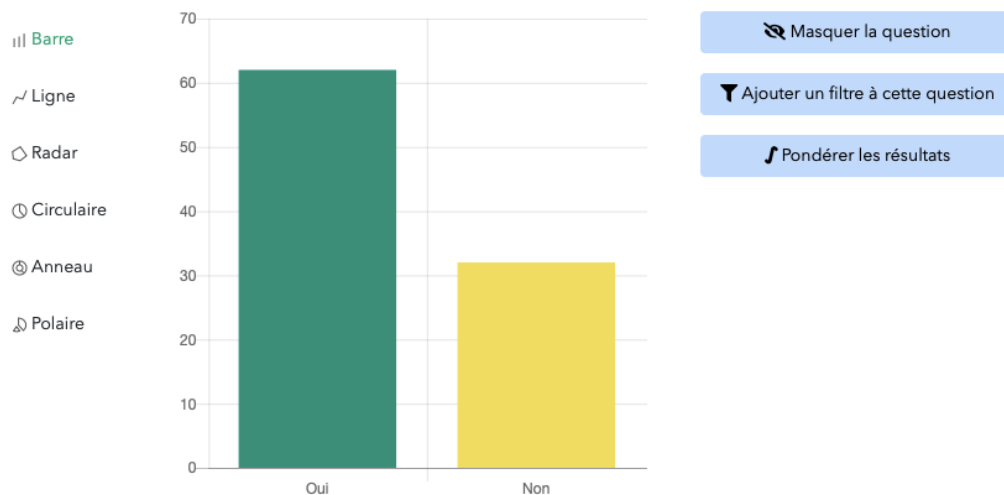
Pensez-vous que les femmes essaient trop souvent de faire des blagues comme les hommes, et devraient plutôt se distinguer par d'autres moyens ?



Intitulé des réponses	Nombre de réponses	Pourcentage
Oui	17	14.17 %
Non	77	64.17 %

## Question 14

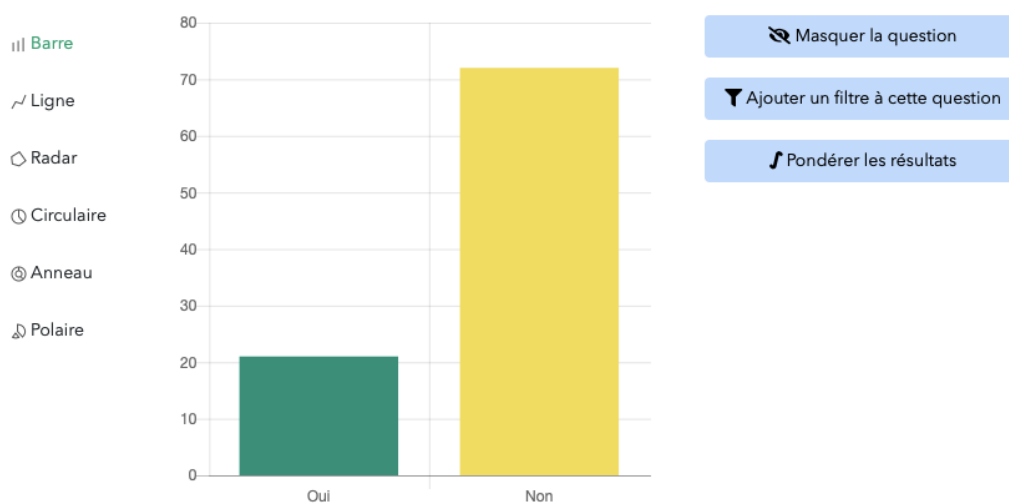
Pensez-vous que les femmes ont plus de pression que les hommes dans le monde du stand-up ?



Intitulé des réponses	Nombre de réponses	Pourcentage
Oui	62	51.67 %
Non	32	26.67 %

## Question 15

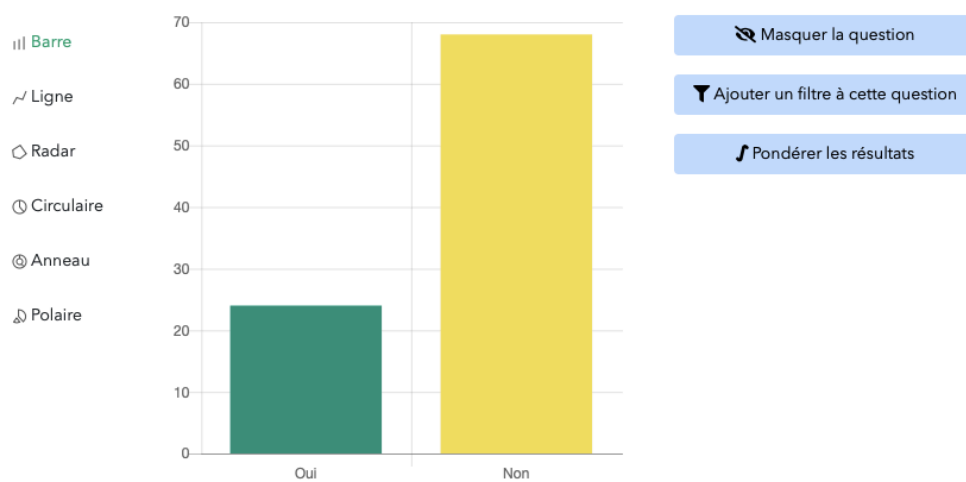
Trouvez-vous que l'humour des femmes doit être différent de celui de hommes ?



Intitulé des réponses	Nombre de réponses	Pourcentage
Oui	21	17.5 %
Non	72	60 %

## Question 16

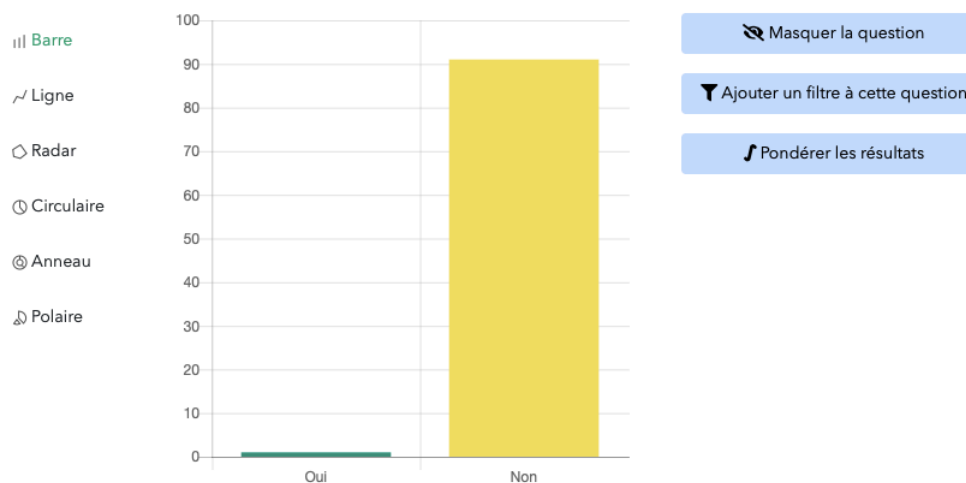
Pensez-vous que le nombre d'occasions de se produire sur scène en tant que femme humoriste est souvent limité et censuré ?



Intitulé des réponses	Nombre de réponses	Pourcentage
Oui	24	20 %
Non	68	56.67 %

## Question 17

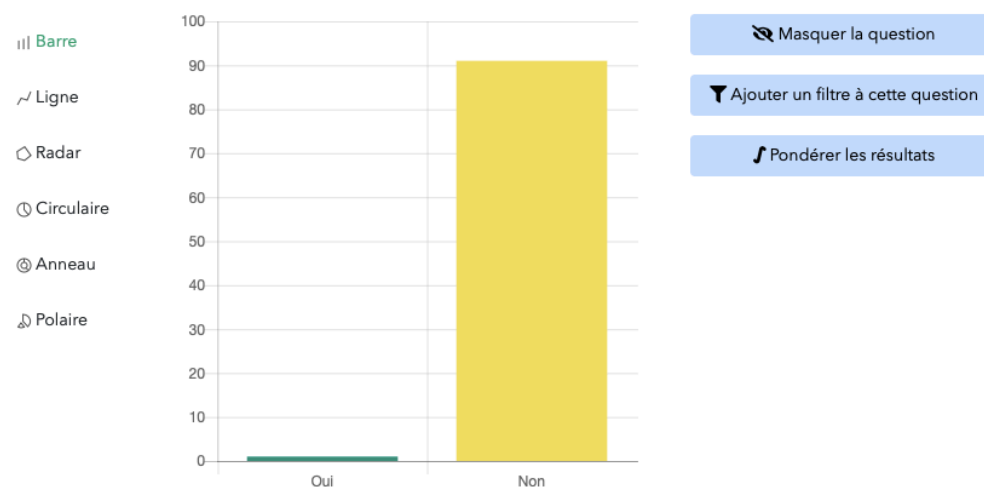
Si une femme rit et attire l'attention, trouvez-vous cela vulgaire ?



Intitulé des réponses	Nombre de réponses	Pourcentage
Oui	1	0.83 %
Non	91	75.83 %

## Question 18

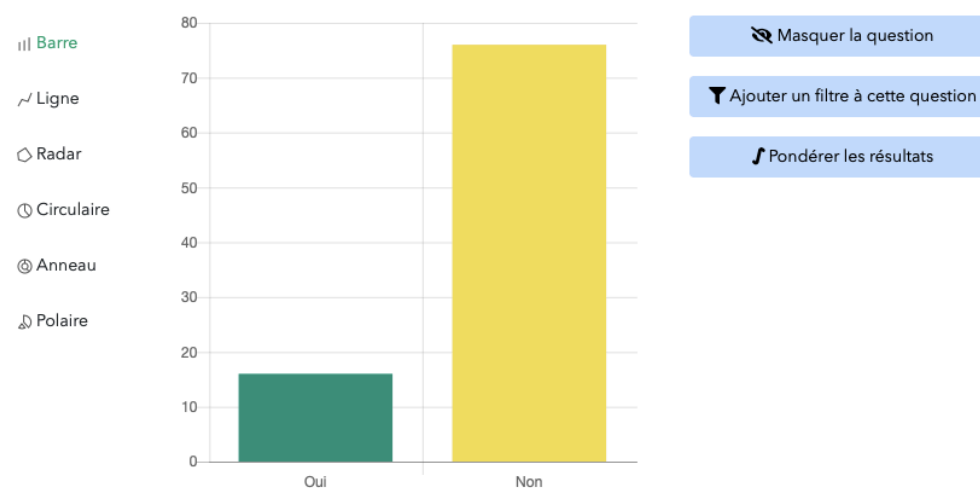
Selon vous, une femme doit se faire plus discrète que les hommes dans la société ?



Intitulé des réponses	Nombre de réponses	Pourcentage
Oui	1	0.83 %
Non	91	75.83 %

## Question 19

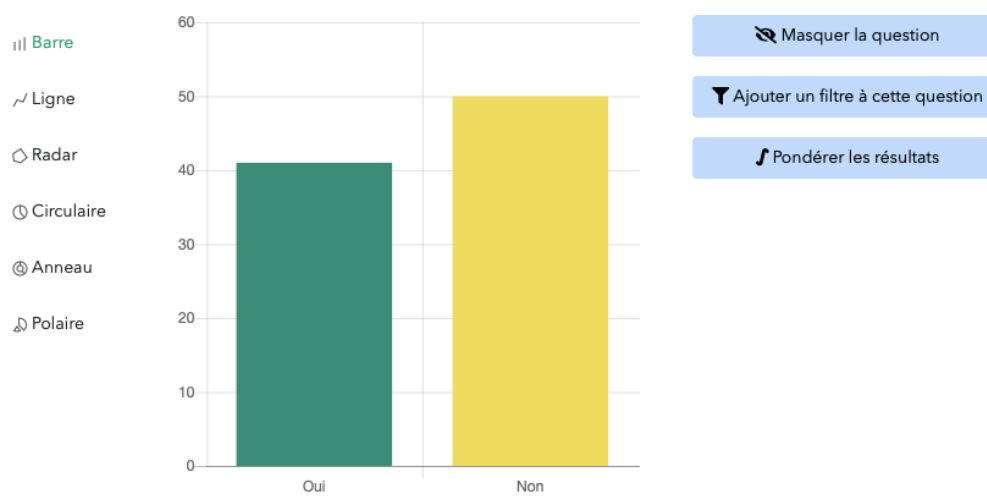
Avez-vous déjà fait attention à la parité homme/femme dans les affiches de festivals (festivals de comédie, de musique) ?



Intitulé des réponses	Nombre de réponses	Pourcentage
Oui	16	13.33 %
Non	76	63.33 %

## Question 20

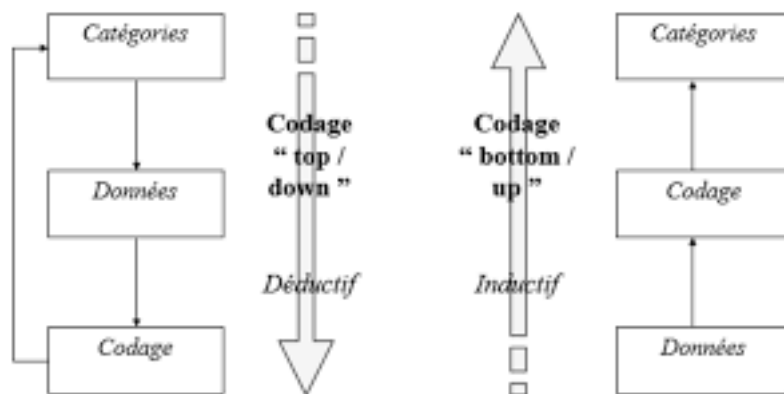
Pensez-vous qu'instaurer un quota en termes de genres dans les affiches de festivals et évènements comiques + musicaux serait une bonne idée ?



Intitulé des réponses	Nombre de réponses	Pourcentage
Oui	41	34.17 %
Non	50	41.67 %

### Appendix 3: The inductive coding method.

Point, S. (2018). Chapitre 15. L'analyse des données qualitatives : voyage au centre du codage. Dans : Françoise Chevalier éd., Les méthodes de recherche du DBA (pp. 262-282). Caen: EMS Editions. <https://doi.org/10.3917/ems.cheva.2018.01.0262>



### Appendix 4: Charter written by Belgian women comedians.

Charter included in all contracts of artists performing in the comedy club. It is compulsory for all artists performing in the venue to sign it <https://www.kocc.be/charte-kings-of-comedy-club/>.

« METS DES PAILLETTES DANS MA VIE, PAS DANS MON VERRE »

- Dans ce Comedy Club, on condamne toute forme de violences sexuelles, de quelque nature et de quelque degré qu'elles soient.
- Dans ce Comedy Club, tout sera mis en place pour que tou.te.s les artistes, quel que soit leur genre, leur orientation sexuelle, leur origine, se sentent respecté.e.s et en sécurité.
- Si t'es pas d'accord avec ça, nique-toi. Et ne viens plus ici.
- Dans ce Comedy Club, tout sera mis en place pour que tou.te.s les client.e.s, quel que soit leur genre, leur orientation sexuelle, leur origine, se sentent respecté.e.s et en sécurité.
- Si t'es pas d'accord avec ça, nique-toi, change de pose mais nique-toi. Et ne viens plus ici.
- C'est pas parce qu'on est dans Comedy Club que tout est drôle. Les réflexions et attitudes racistes, sexistes, LBGTQIA+phobes et plus généralement peu respectueuses des personnes les plus vulnérables, si t'en as, tu les gardes dans ton larynx et tu vas les faire au congrès d'Eric Zemmour. Et si tu les fais sur scène, t'as intérêt à être très marrant.e.

- Tu ne te branleras devant personne, si on te l'a pas demandé (Louis CK).
- On ne drogue pas les gens pour avoir une relation sexuelle (Bill Cosby).
- On ne drogue pas les gens, tout court.
- Chacun.e est responsable de son comportement.
- Si tu deviens trop con.ne quand t'as bu, ne bois pas. Ou rentre chez toi.
- Laisse les gens tranquilles
- (Kant ou Tomer Sisley, mais on pense que c'est Tomer qui l'a prise à Kant).
- Le Kings of Comedy Club est un lieu progressiste, tourné vers l'harmonie, la tolérance et le respect. Aucune censure ne sera appliquée sur les textes des artistes, mais l'esprit général du club sera tourné, dans la programmation, vers l'humour le plus moderne, le plus subtil et le plus intelligent possible. Enfin on va essayer.
- Ce Comedy Club est un matriarcat (pas encore, mais on est sur le doss).
- Une boîte mail dédiée est disponible en cas de souci. Une personne de confiance recueillera les éventuels témoignages de comportements racistes, sexistes, LBGTQIA+phobes et autres. Toute dick-pick sera affichée sur le wall of fame (de la police).
- Si tu penses que quelque chose d'anormal t'es arrivé, signale-le. Tu seras écouté.e.
- Si tu es témoin de quelque chose, signale-le (si c'est d'un mariage, tu peux le garder pour toi).
- Toutes nos serveuses et humoristes sont spécialistes en krav-maga (sauf une).
- Donc laisse-les toutes tranquilles.
- L'humoriste qui ne respecte pas la charte ne sera plus le bienvenu dans ce Comedy Club
- (et y'en a pas tant que ça à Bruxelles, donc réfléchis bien).
- En cas de méfaits dans les murs du club, le club se portera partie civile (et notre avocat, c'est un ténor. Du barreau ? Non, juste un ténor. Il chante hyper bien ses plaidoiries).
- Les artistes qui viendront jouer au club seront tenus de signer la charte.
- Elle sera incluse dans les contrats de production (on a des contrats de production, t'as vu ?).

## **Appendix 5 : Interview guide line**

### **Introduction**

Hello, my name is Virginie, and I am a last year student in the Master of Management, at Louvain Management School. For the purpose of my master thesis, I plan on interviewing 10 people working in the stand-up comedy industry in order to explore the topic of women's inclusion within this sector.

It is important that I stress that the respondents that I interview will remain anonymous, as will the organizations they work for. For instance, I will change respondents' names and leave out any information that could potentially lead to identification. It is also important that you are aware of how the information gathered in this interview will be used. I will ask you a number of questions and later on type out the interview. No one expect my promotor will be able to see this entire transcript. However, what I will do is take out some quotes from the interview to illustrate a common theme, expressed by multiple of the respondents. The end result, my thesis, will be shared with all respondents of this study who are interested in receiving a digital copy, but will only contain aggregated results, to not disclose the identity of individuals. I want to ask you for permission to record this interview. The recording will be deleted, once the interview has been transcribed and the thesis has been written and successfully defended. Is the purpose clear to you, of the recording and in general, of the thesis? May I start recording now? Do you have any questions for me before we start?

Lastly, I will just point out that you can, at any time, choose to skip a question if you don't feel like answering it. And also, there are no right or wrong answers, I am just here to explore your views about this topic. Finally, the interview should last about an hour.

### **The calling**

1. Can you tell me how you entered the world of stand-up comedy?
  - a. Was it easy to 'get on board' at open mic night?
  - b. Were you already active before in the creative/performing industries?
  - c. Did someone ever advise you to go and try comedy?
  - d. In your previous jobs, were you also considered 'a joker' by colleagues?
2. What is it you enjoy so much about (performing) comedy?

3. What or who inspires you in your professional life?

### **The performance**

4. What type of comedian are you?
  - a. How would you describe your own style?
  - b. *What is your most typical joke/what joke characterizing you most?*
5. What topics or themes do you address in your performances?
  - a. Do you ever talk about ‘men’ and the differences between ‘men and women’?
  - b. Do you talk about work, relations, hobby’s, politics, ... ?
6. In your opinion, is there something as male humor and comedy and female humor and comedy?
  - a. Some say female comedians tend to stick to ‘female themes’ rather than more general topics. Is this something you can relate to?
  - b. Is female comedy more personal?
  - c. Is female comedy more self-deprecating? In other words, do female comedians make more jokes at the cost of themselves (less aggressive) while men do this more at the cost of others? (*According to a content analysis by Russell in 2002 self-depreciation occurred in 22% of women’s content but only 4% of men’s content*).
  - d. Women are said to narrate more comic stories (aim: communication and sharing experiences) while men are said to perform comedy as a series of jokes (aim: self-presentation and demonstrating wit). Is this something you recognize?
  - e. Women would use the powerful as object of humour while men would be more inclined to use the pitiful. Recognisable?
  - f. Do you yourself stick to what is known as the ‘humane humour rule’ (no laughter with what people cannot change like their looks, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ...)?
7. Is the person you are on stage a lot different from the person you are in your daily life?
  - a. How are they different?
  - b. Is your staged persona an exaggerated version?
8. Who is your regular public?
  - a. Young/old/male/female?
  - b. Is there an audience that works better? In other words, what does your ‘ideal audience’ look like?

- c. Is there an audience that does not work so well?
  - d. Is it harder as a woman to entertain a male audience?
    - i. Is there a fine line between 'taking control over the audience' and 'showing yourself as vulnerable to not come across as threatening'?
9. How can you tell if you did well as a comedian?
- a. How do you deal with 'bombing' on stage?
  - b. Do you often receive direct negative feedback from people? And on social media?
  - c. Your colleague Serine Ayari (28) said the following in an interview with Flair magazine 'Few women keep up comedy. The threats and haters make it difficult', agree?
  - d. How do you deal with negative reactions from others?
  - e. It is sometimes said that there is a 'double standard' for women on stage, where men who raise taboos or are obscene are seen as brave and 'edgy', while e.g. Sarah Silverman was described as 'nasty' and 'cruel'.
10. Due to the crisis, your performances may have been postponed? Are you still writing new material? How do you come up with that new material?

**The body** (*Ask the respondent to send a drawing before the interview of themselves on stage performing, see examples*)

11. Do you make use of your body when you are on stage and if so, how?
- a. Is this different for other comedians?
  - b. Do you sometimes use your own body as 'joke'/so as content for your show? (*e.g., do you relate it to beauty ideals and your own failure to reach them?*)
12. Do you ever feel uncomfortable to be the center of attention, just you and your body in the spotlights?
13. What would you usually wear on a show night? Would your outfit look different from any other night/day?
14. Some say (and critique how) some female comedians act very manly on stage. Recognisable?
15. Do you think nowadays it is easier to get the audience's interest if you are not in a white, straight, hetero normative body?

### **The business**

16. Would you say you are a successful artist?
  - a. What defines success in your field?
  - b. How often per year/month are you planned in a line-up of comedian; how often do you have one woman show?
17. Are you able to make good living out of this?
  - a. Is there something like a gender pay gap, or gendered division in stable contracts offered in comedy?
  - b. Are you often invited to talk shows or quizzes? I
18. Is there a lot of rivalry in the business? And between women?
19. Does it happen a lot that people are accused of stealing jokes are not being authentic?
20. How do you advertise for yourself? Is social media an important tool for your marketing?
  - a. Do you ever encounter hate speech or negative reactions on social media? How do you deal with that?
21. Do you have a management? What is it your management does for you? What tasks are you left to do for yourself?
22. Why, in your opinion, are there so many fewer women performing in comedy as compared to men?
  - a. Are there essential, biological differences: are women for instance less well in dealing with failure?
  - b. Social differences: does the role of often male gatekeepers play a role, like in the film and music industry in general?
23. Tips for future girls in comedy: How does one become a successful comedian?
  - a. Are there any comedy classes or coaches available that you know of?
  - b. How does one make the move from amateur to pro?

### **Ending interview**

We have now covered many different topics. Before we close, I want to ask you if there is anything you think is important for me to know about women in the stand-up industry that we haven't talked about in this interview?

Thank you for your time.

**UNIVERSITÉ CATHOLIQUE DE LOUVAIN**  
**Louvain School of Management**

Place des Doyens, 1 bte L2.01.01, 1348 Louvain-la-Neuve  
Boulevard Emile Devreux 6, 6000 Charleroi, Belgique  
Chaussée de Binche 151, 7000 Mons, Belgique

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