

# Why Women (Still) Aren't Funny

January will mark the 10-year anniversary of Christopher Hitchens' famous (notorious?) essay, "[Why Women Aren't Funny](#)."

In the impolite article, Hitchens, as only he could do, delivered a devastating exposé explaining the causes behind "the humor gap." The article enraged female comedians and sparked a slew of indignant (and unfunny) [letters](#) to the editor.

Looking back, one can see why Hitchens struck a nerve. In the essay, he didn't just argue that men and women are not equally funny; he argued that women are incapable of being funny because of their *physiology*.

*Humor, if we are to be serious about it, arises from the ineluctable fact that we are all born into a losing struggle. Those who risk agony and death to bring children into this fiasco simply can't afford to be too frivolous. (And there just aren't that many episiotomy jokes, even in the male repertoire.) I am certain that this is also partly why, in all cultures, it is females who are the rank-and-file mainstay of religion, which in turn is the official enemy of all humor. One tiny snuffle that turns into a wheeze, one little cut that goes septic, one pathetically small coffin, and the woman's universe is left in ashes and ruin.*

Child-rearing, Hitchens argued, is the prime evolutionary function of women; as such, they are imbued with a "kind of seriousness and solemnity at which men can only goggle." They cannot tap that "childish" well from which forth springs nearly all great humor: "Filth, and plenty of it. Filth in lavish, heaping quantities."

Many women, of course, try to employ filth, but ultimately humor eludes “the fair sex.” (Hitchens actually used the phrase “the fair sex.”)

Now contrast that to men.

“For most men, if they can’t make women laugh they are out of the evolutionary contest,” Hitchens says. “They are never going to get laid.” Women aren’t funny because, well, they don’t have to be funny.

Re-reading the essay today, it’s still unclear to me if Hitchens believed any of this. Part of me thinks the irreverent writer was simply doing what he did best: poke at sacred cows for his own amusement. The other part of me suspects Hitchens saw it as *prima facie* that women aren’t funny, so on a whim he decided to try to explain why.

Whatever the case may be, I bring up his essay now because last night I attended a comedy show with my wife and several friends. The headliner was Martha Kelly, a comedian who made her name doing stand-up in Austin, Texas, and now stars on a TV show on FX opposite Zach Galifianakis.

Kelly’s act focused primarily on her dead pets and the many medications she was on. (I’m not joking.) Now, I enjoy dark humor. But this was something else. It was, well, sad. Not funny.

This of course doesn’t mean women aren’t funny. I’d never suggest such a thing. (Ever!)

Which brings me to my final point. In the nearly 10 years since *Vanity Fair* published Hitchens’ article, things have changed a lot.

People increasingly are cocooned in “safe-spaces,” shielded from microaggressions and ideas that can cause discomfort. Using the term “fair sex” would, in many places (including

editorial departments), cause heads to explode. (Figuratively speaking. I think.)

Would *Vanity Fair* even publish such a scandalous piece of journalism today? I wonder. The thought made me miss Christopher Hitchens. What fun he would have today.

*(Warning: Viewer discretion advised.)*

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[Image Credit: [Vanity Fair](#)]