



After many years observing gender in the professional comedy scene, I think the unthinkable's happened. Women haven't achieved parity but nowadays any male comic who says "Women aren't funny" isn't sexist – he's stupid.

Finally, the old comedy stereotype is dead, buried under the performances of Taylor Tomlinson, Sarah Silverman, Tina Fey, Melissa McCarthy and countless other funny females.

Still, it was a long, hard climb: from Alice Guy, who in 1896 was writer/producer/director and star of one of the first films with a story... to Mabel Normand, who in the 1910's discovered Charlie Chaplin, had her own production company and starred in more than 200 movies... to Mae West's scandalous sex plays in the 1930's (including one named "Sex")... to Nikki Glaser's scandalous sex jokes last night.

So let's put it in the past tense: why was there a belief that women weren't funny?

It's no mystery. In physical humor, it wasn't considered attractive for a woman to do pratfalls; in verbal humor, smart women were often considered intimidating to men. And for many years, women played along with that. 1920's French actress Yvonne Printemps said "Women prefer being beautiful to being intelligent because there are more men who are stupid than blind."

This multimedia talk looks at how women in comedy have gone from afterthought to an undeniable, irresistible force.

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