How feminist comedians in Spain use stand-up comedy as a contestation communicative tool?

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ABSTRACT

This research project aims to contribute to the field of communication and social change through the analysis of different humoristic subversive mechanisms used by feminist comedians in Spanish society and their potential as a transformative tool in the country’s socio-political context.

The personal stories of three feminist comedians interviewed for this research are analysed through the feminist standpoint theory, valuing the epistemic knowledge of women’s experiences and the potential of their communication through comedy as a contestation tool. Understanding knowledge as socially situated, through the experiences of the interviewed women, this research provides an analysis of the evolution of subversive mechanisms through comedy to contest the existing sociopolitical barriers.

Comedy provides a safe space for the communication of subversive feminist messages that generate alternative points of view contesting existing hegemonic structures of knowledge and contribute to break gender stereotypes regaining subjectivity for women. Sharing marginal personal stories could promote connections among women through the identification of the oppressions suffered, creating a sorority movement that contributes to the evolution of feminism.

INTRODUCTION

The field of development and social change is more and more concerned about the relationship of culture and local practices with processes of development. The importance of culture and anthropological approaches is explained because “culture, as the bearer of subjectivities, meaning systems, values, and creative and expressive practices, lies at the heart of life and especially of definitions of the good life” (Clammer, 2012, p. 71). Despite this, Carruyo (2003) explains that,
although development provides different frameworks to discuss the relationship between nations and economies, it still fails to understand the relationships between people. The analysis of these relationships and their consequences for development and social change are the main concern of some new approaches, such as the Women, Culture and Development (WCD) approach developed by Bhavnani et al. (2016). WCD suggests that development studies and theories have reached an impasse because they have focused too much on economy and have failed to understand the centrality of women and the significance of culture. This approach discusses that non-economic factors are central to development and social change, and culture is one of these main factors. It also argues that culture, as the lived experiences and structures of feeling of communities, is important for the relationship between production and reproduction in women's lives.

Spain is well-known for the importance of humor as part of its national culture and comedy has been argued to be one “important social and cultural phenomenon” (Mintz, 1985, p. 71). Comedy can also reveal the cultural values of a society, and therefore, it is an element of community identification, becoming a powerful communication tool (Quintana Paz & Plaza, 2011). The relevance of comedy is reflected in Spanish society through the high amount and popularity of TV and radio programs in different national channels, as well as life shows in theaters, dedicated completely to this genre. Comedy in Spain has been traditionally dominated by men: mostly all popular comedy programs are directed by men and men are the subjects of humor, while the few women in these programs take usually a passive role, having less protagonism or focusing in their physical attributes. Gender stereotypes have been used for years in these programs as a way of entertainment, so humor has become a safe space for the sexist treatment of women. The reproduction of these values in mainstream media channels that are understood as the subject of reality makes the audience accept the models they reproduce as valid (Quintana Paz & Plaza, 2011).
In opposition to these mainstream programs, in the recent years, accompanied with the rise of feminism and supported with the spread of new technologies, the debate of the inclusion of women in Spanish comedy is gaining importance with several articles and spaces in different media platforms dedicated to this issue. Although there were already some famous female comedians in Spain, the use of comedy as a tool for feminist activism is quite a new and growing phenomena in Spanish society.

As discussed by Schech (2014) culture, understood from a constructivist approach, is an active force in the production and reproduction of social life and all aspects of social life are culturally constructed. Understanding comedy as a cultural representation from a constructivist approach, means that it could reinforce the structures of power and the patriarchal system. Nevertheless, also due to this very same constructivist approach, it can also have transformative effects on structures, systems and patterns of communities (Clammer, 2012, p. 63) and therefore, it has the potential of becoming a strong subversive strategy to change the current patriarchal structures. Feminist comedians are using comedy as a protest bottom-up tool against patriarchal structures and as a contribution to raise awareness about feminism, which can have a transformative effect in Spanish society.

Comedians usually focus on personal experiences and stories. As discussed by Gracés (in Ngozi Adichie, 2018, p. 42), personal stories expand our knowledge and allow us to connect with the things we do not know about others, but also about ourselves. Ngozi Adichie (2018) also valuing the power of stories, warns about the dangers of a single story, that excludes the realities and diversity of local experiences. The growing performance of feminist comedians introduce alternative discourses and stories from the point of view of women, expanding the knowledge of the audiences and contesting existing patriarchal and neo-chauvinism ideas that are having a growing presence in Spain.
The current socio-political context in Spain follows the trend of other countries in Europe, showing a rise of populism and the success of far right nationalist groups that shapes the perceptions on feminism and increases the polarization around the ideas of gender equality. Equality is legally guaranteed to a certain extent but debates to regress and eliminate some of the advances to protect women are now more alive than ever: the last elections in Andalucía, the biggest region in Spain, ended the rule of socialists for more than 40 years in the region and the growing power of the far right group Vox, from 0 seats to 12. One of the main requirements of the party to support a right parties coalition with its seats, is to eliminate the Organic Law on Integral Protection Measures against Gender Violence and increase the persecution against false complaints on gender violence, although the Judicial power states that they represent just the 0.1% (Álvarez & Valdés, 2018).

Despite a growing presence of feminism and feminist activism being stronger than ever in Spain, which is reflected in the high participation in demonstrations for women’s rights all over the country, the mentioned changes in the political sphere respond to an increase in the neo-chauvinism movements which defend the existence of an excess of equality that is starting to have effects in the discrimination of men (Menéndez, 2017). Despite this claims, Spain experiments continuous episodes of violence against women. Since 2003, year when Spain started to assess the number of women killed by their partners or ex-partners, 972 women were murdered, 47 women only in 2018 despite being the year with less victims, this data does not include other gender based violence killings, which would increase this number to 97 only in 2018 (Feminicidio, 2018). Women are experiencing an intensification of violence in different aspects of social life, nevertheless “there is an increase of a common public discourse, which without formally reneging on equality, argues that feminism has achieved a domination and subordination of men and that legitimate claims for equality are an excuse for the discrimination of men” (Menéndez, 2017, p. 4).
In this context, comedy could play an interesting role contributing to feminism diversity and understanding. The fact that comedy speeches or sketches are entertaining has as a consequence that the stories communicated through comedy are easier welcomed by the audiences. This was stressed in the last studies around comedy from the Center for Media & Social Impact (CMSI) at American University’s School of Communication, based in Washington, D.C., which have created a report about comedy and social influence: The Laughter Effect: The [Serious] Role of Comedy in Social Change (2017) summarizing the main conclusions from a variety of studies from different disciplines and concluding that all different types of humor formats can promote five common forms of influence: attracting attention, persuading through emotion rather than learning, offering a way into complex social issues, breaking down social barriers, and encouraging sharing (multiplier effect).

This research aims to contribute to the studies on culture and social change, by exploring how comedy, understood as an important cultural representation in Spain, is used by feminist comedians as a contestation communicative tool in the current socio-political context, to understand what are the opportunities of feminist comedy as a transformative mechanism. Analysing local practices of women through comedy can provide with alternatives to contest hegemonic knowledge. Therefore, the following research question will guide the analysis: How feminist comedians in Spain use stand-up comedy as a contestation communicative tool?

To be able to answer this question, first the literature analysis provides an overview of the main existing research around women and comedy, exploring how the genre has developed in recent years with the evolution of feminism, its scope as a contestation tool and the different resources used by feminist comedians. Moreover, the chosen theoretical framework, the feminist standpoint theory, focuses on the core of women’s lives and values their personal experiences as epistemic knowledge. This theory is broad and complex, for that reason, it is
included an analysis of the evolution of the theory and the main contributions made by its most relevant scholars.

Through the use of interviews as a research method, the analysis part of the research project studies the comedy work of three feminist comedians with relevant presence in Spanish society. The conversations with these comedians provide an understanding of the objectives of their humoristic discourses, the communication tools used and the argumentative after the selection of topics and humoristic genres chosen. Their different experiences show how women's representation and voice is generally silenced and the variety of opportunities through different resources that comedy provides for women to regain subjectivity and contest existing structures of power.

**LITERATURE**

Having overcome the studies focused on the social facts that prevented women to be popular in the comedy world and with more and more women having an active role in comedy as we have illustrated in the introduction, most recent studies around women and comedy have focused mainly on how humor made by women has evolved, being always a tool to communicate personal experiences with which many other women could identify, denouncing those inequalities under which their realities take place. As explained by Waugh and Crasnow (2013) when analysing how female comedy mainly builds on the critique of established gender roles “[C]omedy succeeds, in part, by making use of tensions” (p. 6). In the study of those tensions and how they are communicated by female comedians lies most of the recent research.

Gilbert (1997) states that female humour, as well as the humour performed by other oppressed groups, works from the marginality, focusing the discourse on the power relations where this marginality operates. Laughter provides a safe space to
reflect on these relations and to communicate the causes and consequences of the marginality suffered by women, therefore, it has the potential to be subversive.

When female humour operates from marginality, it understands the existence of a series of inequalities in terms of control and power, for this reason, female comedy tends to adopt subversive discourses with the aim of contesting existing unequal structures of power. Gilbert (1997) focuses on the autobiographical performance of marginal groups through comedy, specially women. Exposing personal marginal experiences, women represent themselves as victims, but at the same time they reappropriate the subjectivity of the jokes. As discussed by Gilbert, for comedy to work is necessary that an objectification process takes place, it is only when the other is represented as a thing that it is permissible to laugh (p. 324). In this process of objectification through humour, women have been denied subjectivity, being the object of traditional or mainstream humour in which they did not have access to active participation. Roqué López (2016) analysing the ideas of Mulvey (1975), explains that the representation mechanisms have traditionally defined masculine subject positions as inherent, and in consequence the general logics of audiences are defined around the dichotomy of a masculine subject and an objectivized woman.

For that reason, female humour plays an important role: by performing subjectivity women are able to elevate themselves and reclaim the subjectivity that had been objectified before, being inclusive of women’s perspectives. Gilbert (1997) continues explaining that, marginal female humour opens more possibilities, having the possibility of being both the victim (object) and the performer (subject), this type of humour plays with the us/them distinction and creates victims and butts of the jokes that are not always necessary different, neither one and the same (p. 327).

Gilbert (1997) compares female marginal comedians to professional fools, since humour allows them to make others the butt of the joke in ways that are not
immediately apparent. She puts as an example the case of self-deprecating humour, used as a subversive strategy that appears to be reaffirming established values but in reality is criticizing them in a subtle way. For Gilbert, this kind of humour is safe entertainment since it fools the audience but does not offend it, and at the same time sends powerful and subversive messages; nevertheless she acknowledges the fact that this kind of humour through public comedy performance could be also perpetuating the status quo, since the same status quo mechanism “has institutionally “allowed” a potentially subversive discourse to be voiced” (p. 327).

Moreover, as discussed by Russell (2002) humour is dependant on the audience, who needs to understand and participate in the joke, but more important for female comedy, audience has to accept the performer. Female comedians needed to fight (and they are still doing it) against the established stereotypes that did not accept them as funny. For this reason self-deprecation was used by female comedians as an accepted way to enter the comedy world and overthrow existing barriers imposed by the cultural industries. In this sense, the use of self-deprecating humour by women is in itself subversive. Nevertheless, with the rise of new technologies and the possibilities of creating comedy content outside from the mainstream media, as well as the recent rise of feminism, self-deprecatory humour starts to be analyzed in other ways.

In line with this idea, the majority of recent critics have found female self-deprecating humour nowadays not subversive for the current changing context. Bell (2015) states that existing stereotypes are not only not challenged through self-deprecating humor, but perpetuated. This humour allows audiences to accept the stereotypes comedians are making fun of, since these stereotypes are not overcome yet.

Following these critiques to self-deprecating humour, it is illustrative to mention here the recent case of Australian female comedian Hannah Gadsby who has starred a Netflix show called Nanette, in which she tears apart the need of
self-deprecation for comedy. Hannah spent her career doing self-deprecating humour, understanding it as a way of reappropriation and acceptance of her own flaws, but in Nanette she deconstructs and analyzes this type of humour as something she had been doing just to be accepted by the same industry and society that is excluding her. Gadsby explains that, for marginal comedians, the use of self-deprecating humour entails a greater humiliation. It distorts the individual identity and relies on self-hate for acceptance (Amin, 2018). Breaking with her past, Hannah Gadsby wants to tell her story directly and advocates for reclaim subjectivity without tricks and subtle messages, which is in line with the evolution and rising of feminism in the lately years.

As stated, most recent marginal female humour, as we will continue developing, has an openly subversive aim against established unequal structures of power. When humour operates from marginality and aims to denounce existing gender inequalities, it is not just humour made by women, but feminist humour, which at the same time opens up the arena to different concepts of gender and identity that do not reduce the type of comedy just to the sex of the performer.

In this sense, Zwagerman (2014) explains the risks of homogenized and try to overgeneralize humor made by women “if we treat gender terms as ultimate, we risk making claims that are easily disproven, whether claiming that women don’t have a sense of humor, or that women’s humor always is or does x” (p. 180). In order to combat this generalizations, Zwagerman renames the features of women’s humor presented by Tannen as a summary of transformative humor, and by doing this, he is admitting that an important part of the humor made by women has a potential transformative effect. The features described by Tannen (as cited in Zwagerman 2014) for this type of humor state that the goal of this humor is mainly spotlighting issues instead of looking for superiority; moreover, the target is in the powerful instead of the weak; and finally, it questions the established structures of power while at the same time questioning its owns perceptions.
Feminist comedians, in the use of transformative humor, tend to use specific forms of making comedy that relate to the subversive objectives they pursue. Several critics, such as Bakhtin (as cited in Dooling, 1994) have demonstrated that some forms of comedy “(specifically, the subgenres of farce, satire, and parody) have a transgressive, anti-authoritarian potential” (p. 46). The use of these different genres with transformative effects have been studied by several scholars, such as the very known Judith Butler.

Specially parody has been analysed by Butler (1990) who discusses that parodic repetitions could achieve the exercise of power. Butler argues this in relation to gender parody, that parodies the very notion of an original gender in her known work *Gender Trouble* where she deconstructs existing concepts of gender identity. From a constructivist approach, Butler argues that the pre-established masculine and feminine categories are constructed as a consequence of power formations and therefore they should not be understood as pre-given. It is then when parody could be a strategy that opens up these traditionally established categories by contesting them and highlighting their constructed nature.

Parody in feminist humour, as explained by Dooling (1994), allows the creation of an alternative vision that contests the view of patriarchy as “an overpowering and insurmountable force by emphasizing its contradictions and weaknesses (the laughable aspects) and by replacing female victimization with resistance (female laughter)” (p. 52). But, as discussed by Butler (1990) “[p]arody by itself is not subversive, and there must be a way to understand what makes certain kinds of parodic repetitions effectively disruptive, truly troubling, and which repetitions become domesticated and recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony” (p. 189). Due to the lack of an intrinsically subversive characteristic of parody, Butler concludes saying that parodic repetitions should find local spaces of subversion enabled by the very same constructions they want to contest (p. 201).
Feminist humour has been entering the mainstream structures through comedy using diverse subversive strategies. The general trend was for these strategies to be subtle so they could be enabled by the cultural industries, such it is the discussed case of self-deprecating humour, but in recent years these subversion strategies have been more obvious, more strong and powerful. Waugh and Crasnow (2013) explain that the current trends of feminist comedy in Western societies, have moved from subtle forms of critique to much more provocative ways, concurring with the boom of feminism. This type of humour is called by Kate Clinton (as cited in Waugh and Crasnow, 2013) fumerist humour, due to it is funny but at the same time it aims to burn the house down. Fumerists go against conventional moralities, defying established structures of power in a direct and noisy way (p. 19).

This evolution from subtle to provocative concurs with the last waves of feminism that brought the appearance of a large number of different perspectives and realities to feminism. One of the perspectives that is gaining popularity in the cultural industries in these array of feminisms is postfeminism.

Postfeminism in media cultures has gained an important role as part of a mainstream culture with which it concurs. Mainstream culture is defined by Lipotevsky and Serroy (as cited in Fernández Hernández, 2017) as hyperculture, which has a mere commercial objective and is consumed just for distraction, opposed to the original educative and formative aim of culture. This “artistic capitalism” is highly aesthetic, focused in visual elements and in the individual (p. 458). As analysed by Shifman and Lemish (as cited in Tomsett, 2017) postfeminist media cultures generally focus on the body and the individual, using sexuality as an empowerment and liberation tool, it provides a new focus on gender differences targeting both women and men, and it depoliticizes feminist concepts since it operates in the world of leisure and consumption.
In the trivial use of feminism and the lack of political aim, lay most of the criticism against postfeminism and other recent feminist trends. The most current debates on feminism in cultural industries relate to the paradox of these new feminisms, such as celebrity feminism or postfeminism, being critical and supportive at the same time of the neo-liberal and patriarchal systems that allow it to gain terrain. Several scholars have extensively focused on this paradox, with lots of critical voices that oppose to the trivial use of feminism by the new waves of neoliberal feminism, as well as to the lack of critical perspective and analysis of the root causes of inequalities (Gay, Hobson, Douglas, as cited in Fernández Hernández, 2017).

The mainstream cultural industries, as all aspects of society, are inevitably influenced by the prevailing neo-liberalism and patriarchal ideology. In this context, subversive strategies are understood as critical with these prevalent ideologies. Therefore, for the critics of postfeminist comedy, these new forms of feminism do not entail a way of social resistance against the existing norms but reproduce and perpetuate them. Menéndez (2017) explains that in the myth of free choice that defends neoliberalism and which postfeminism has joined, individuals become responsible for issues that were previously the responsibility of the State. Tomsett (2017) in her analysis of the feminist humour of Bridget Christie against the postfeminist comedy trend, states that she conforms to the fumerist idea “in the way her comedy both deals with feminist issues and also clearly displays her anger at the injustices and inequalities experienced by women” (p. 2). This emphasis in the injustices and inequalities is central to marginal female humour and it becomes fumerist humour when it is fiercely critical about them. By noticing and emphasizing these inequalities through humour, fumerists comedians are making a political statement that has an effect in the audiences. As analysed by Menéndez (2017), post-feminist positions have shifted the focus of analysis from the inequalities between women and men towards a focus in the differences between women themselves. This extent has the risk of denying the existence of a generalized oppression against women.
Menéndez continues discussing that post-feminism trivializes the criticism against patriarchal culture and the mainstream media as its reproductive channels. Nevertheless, at the same time, other scholars start to recognize the possibilities of subversion from the same neoliberal and patriarchal regime where new feminisms take place. As explained by Braidotti (2015), we all are part of the same established system and it is important to recognize the possibilities of change from this very same system instead of simple rejection, understanding the capabilities of women to subversion (p. 227).

At the same time comedy can provide a mechanism to continue the feminist debate, it can also help to find common ground. Waugh and Crasnow (2013), explain how the positive experiences developed through laughter provide spaces for understanding: “Laughing together can break down the differences that prevent us from achieving feminist solidarity” (p. 10). Also, Gilbert (1997) focuses on the attitudes and actions of postmodern female comedians to destabilize and undermine the master narratives of history, understanding traditional feminism as another master narrative. For this reason traditional feminism itself is the butt in the comedy of several postmodern female comedians. Targeting feminism itself through humour could open up the feminist debate and allow different women realities to be heard. The re-appropriation by women of the humoristic dimension as another communication mechanism could promote what Lagarde (1997) named as sorority, the coexistence among women through the feminists movements, based on organization, care and support, which allows a exchange of experiences.

**THEORY**

From more subtle ways, such as self-deprecating humour, to more obvious, such as the recent trend of fumerist humour, comedy made by women has always been about communicating personal experiences. These experiences, since they are marginal, are at the same time subversive, and therefore they have the potential to contest unequal structures of power by pointing out the failures of the system.
The emphasis on the diversity of personal experiences of women that have a subversive potential, makes female comedy about transformation and it necessarily becomes feminist comedy. This makes appropriate to analyse the situation of Spanish feminist comedy from a feminist theory that values the personal experiences of women as alternative visions that contest the superiority and dominance of patriarchy, as well as the importance of the context in which these experiences take place.

Feminist standpoint theory relies on the situated knowledges of individuals which are conditioned by the context and values the alternative ways of knowledge production as a tool for contestation. It is part of the set of feminist epistemologies, which are characterized by their compromise with social change through the challenging of existing structures of knowledge, reclaiming relevance for other subjects of knowledge that have been traditionally less benefited by the dominant social institutions. Therefore, this theory is relevant to observe the interrelation of the personal stories communicated through feminist comedy in Spain and the specific sociocultural context in which they take place, which will allow an analysis of their power as alternative modes of knowledge production and its subversive potential. This theory is complex and it is still developing, which means it has not fixed categories or paradigms. For this reason, I will do first a quick review of the origins and evolutions of this theory, that will allow a better explanation of its application as a theoretical framework to this research project.

Standpoint theory appeared in the 1960s and 1970s, as a way of applying Marxist epistemology to the growing feminist movements during the second wave of feminism. Its most relevant authors from its beginnings are Nancy Hartsock, Sandra Harding, Patricia Hill and Dorothy Smith. These scholars developed the first ideas of feminist standpoint theory that would be in the future further discussed, contested and reformulated. The first steps were developed during the second wave of feminism, which main emphasis was the achievement of equality
addressing the constructed social differences between men and women. Standpoint theory reflected these ideas and was presented as a mechanism to disrupt existing unequal structures, both at the theoretical and material sphere. Taking as a basis the Marxist insight that the oppressed class standpoint offers a special access to certain types of knowledge and Gramsci's ideas of the revolutionary potential of class consciousness, that was discussed as the capability of disruption against the capitalist structures of power through the self-understanding of the proletariat’s own position in society, these scholars started to explore the possibilities that offered these ideas to the realities of women's knowledge and oppression experiences from below (Cockburn, 2015).

Following Marxist theory, these scholars argue that material life is characterized by structures of domination of some groups over others, and these structures set limits to the understandings and points of view of each group, being “the vision of each [...] an inversion of that of the other” (Cockburn, 2015, p. 4). This means that knowledge is socially situated, therefore our position in society determines our understanding of reality (Harding, 2004). The concept of situated knowledge means that the subject of knowledge is inserted in a complex network of positions and points of view shaped by the socio cultural and historical context that influences the experiences and understandings of reality (Haraway, 1988). Feminist standpoint scholars argue that the existence of patriarchal systems create structures of power that oppress women, these structures are argued to shape the experiences of men and women in different ways. In these different experiences, feminist standpoint scholars described the view from above (that of male domination) as partial and harmful, while they privileged the perspectives of women since they are placed in a marginalized position that allows them to point biases that are unknown for the dominant group (Moral Espín, 2012). This privileged knowledge of women, which later in the development of the theory will be expanded to marginalized or oppressed groups, was named by Harding (1995) as strong objectivity.
Susan Hekman (1997), does a very complete review of the main ideas developed by feminist standpoint theorists, and although stressing the importance of the theory to the development of feminism itself, she points out what she understands as the two main limitations of the theory. First, Hekman discusses the tensions between the two main claims of the feminist standpoint theory: the situated aspect of knowledge and the epistemic advantage of marginal standpoints. She argues that the fact that situated knowledge has as a consequence that any standpoint is neutral is not compatible with the epistemic advantage of women and the claims of truth that are given by these theorists to the knowledge generated from below. Secondly, the inclusion of several standpoints as a way to include women's diversity without eliminating the epistemic marginal advantage argued by standpoint theorists, it is in her opinion, also problematic, since it could lead to confusion and a lack of cohesiveness.

The answers by Harding (1997), Hartsock (1997) and Smith (1997) to these criticisms allowed an evolution on the ideas of standpoint theory and the understanding of its multiple possibilities, acquiring the concept of standpoint theories instead of theory (in Kokushkin, 2014). Harding (1997) answers to Hekman explaining that standpoints allow the stress on alternative types of knowledge that come up from several personal experiences. She states that traditional methods of knowledge are androcentric and authoritarian, therefore, the personal experiences that standpoint theory defends are critical and emancipatory, allowing the views of a multiplicity of standpoints that have been traditionally suppressed to reveal different aspects of reality. For this reason, Harding (1997) argues that standpoint epistemologies are a more democratic and intersectional epistemological option than positivism. Therefore, these scholars argued that Hekman stress on “truth” claims was mistaken, since the goal of standpoint theory is challenging power from the position of the marginal, not prioritizing truth (Kokushkin, 2014).
Moreover, with the third wave of feminism, characterized by the discussion over questions of difference and diversity, feminist standpoint theory also received some opposing views, mainly from postmodern feminism (Hekman, 1997). The fact that feminist standpoint is based on women’s experiences and their epistemic advantage as an oppressed group, led to the understanding of an essentialist universalism of women and a single standpoint of women as a category, which would benefit the experiences of privileged women.

Feminist standpoint scholars responded to these considerations stressing that just the fact of being a woman does not provide automatically an epistemic advantage. The social position of women provides a starting point to achieve feminist consciousness but this should be earned through struggle, which is the main reason why marginal groups are privileged over dominant groups to achieve a standpoint. This is taken from Marxist theory in which the standpoint of the proletariat is an intended vision, available only through struggle and charged with a liberatory aim (Hartsock, 1983). Additionally to struggle there is a need for consciousness, which is a direct consequence of struggle and allows to see beneath the surface of immediate reality; this is what differentiates a standpoint from a perspective, a standpoint needs to be achieved while a perspective is given just by opening the eyes (Harding, 1991). Moreover, a standpoint is not achieved individually, it is in the diversity of standpoints and in the process of sharing experiences where alternative knowledges with power to challenge established structures of power emerge (Harding, 2004).

It was particularly in the assumed universality of epistemic advantage for all women where feminist standpoint scholars have been developing and rebuilding the concepts of the theory, enriched by the critics of anti-racist and postcolonial feminists that questioned the supposed essentialist claims of the theory and positioning against the homogeneity of women and a single feminist point of view (Moral Espín, 2012). The feminist standpoint theory has focused since then on continuing incorporating considerations of difference and in the recognition of
women’s diversity and marginalization, taking into account the complexity of oppressive systems, such as in the work of Patricia Hill Collins (2000) on the experiences of black women through black feminist epistemology.

Over the different positions and analysis about the theory, feminist standpoint theories advocate for the production of alternative knowledge based in the diversity of women's experiences, which commonality is their situation as a marginal group in patriarchal systems all over the world and their difference the diversity of other transversal oppressions derived from their social situation. Therefore, it has been developed since its beginnings as a theory aiming to contestation and social change. The application of this theory as a theoretical framework to analyse the work of feminist comedians in Spain sets the basis to understand how feminist humoristic discourses are developed as alternative ways of knowledge that work as a contestation tool against patriarchal systems. As discussed, feminist comedy is based on discourses created mainly from the personal experiences of women. The production of these discourses from a feminist perspective requires an analysis of the personal oppressions suffered which could allow the comedians to achieve a feminist consciousness. The reproduction and communication of these experiences could be a way to generate alternative knowledge that challenges the status quo and builds consciousness for women about their oppressions, contributing to the generation of feminist standpoints.

Moreover, the emphasis on the situated aspect of knowledge by feminist standpoint theories implies that, as well as the understanding of reality is limited and shaped by the social structures, also the ways we communicate that personal experiences are limited by the same structures. This has important implications on the analysis of feminist comedy and its evolution. As discussed, an identified general trend of feminist comedy by Western scholars, has been to evolve from subtle techniques of communicating alternative visions of reality to more direct mechanisms and discourses, accompanied by the evolution of the context in those
places where feminism has gained popularity. Observing this trend from a feminist standpoint perspective, allows to enrich this superficial analysis and discover the set of circumstances that shape the ways of communicating personal marginal stories in the Spanish context.

**METHODOLOGY**

The additional advantage that has comedy to communicate these contesting personal experiences and create connections is its entertaining aspect and therefore, as a communication tool it has the potential to reach greater audiences. Following the typology of comedy formats for social change from The Laughter Effect report, the three cases of feminist comedians explored in this research are part of the stand-up sketch typology. The focus on this type of humor is justified due to its popularity in Spain and its potential to change perceptions. Stand up comedy, as discussed, is based in the personal stories of women, that analyse and communicate their experiences through humour. Moreover, as analysed by the CMSI report “stand-up comedy’s impact can be found in its particular characteristics: (1) social commentary on social issues and power dynamics, (2) breaking down cultural barriers, (3) reducing stigma for marginalized people and ideas, and (4) its use by racial minority groups to normalize and express their experiences” (Borum Chattoo, 2017, p. 8).

Therefore, the three cases (See Appendix for further information on the interviewed comedians) were chosen firstly due to their use of the stand-up typology. Apart from this typology of comedy, three other components were determinant to select the comedians analysed:

1. The speeches used by the comedians focus on situations of inequality that affect women. This is an essential component of the analyzed speeches to be able to understand how marginal experiences are understood and communicated by different women.
2. Creation of the comedy discourses by the comedians, using a bottom-up approach, meaning that there is not apparently a direct guidance from the interests of mainstream media in their work.

3. Diversity, meaning that each of the comedians represent a specific type of humour or discourse, in order to reflect the variety of feminist discourses through comedy and analyse its potential as a contestation tool. This does not mean that the aim of this research is to do a comparison between the different comedians in order to show what works better, but to discover in what ways the context shapes the diversity of women’s experiences creating different discourses and ways of communicating them, as well as to show the subversive force of sharing different marginal personal experiences.

After selecting the case studies, to understand how feminist comedians in Spain are using humour as a contestation tool, since standpoint theory is based in personal experiences and affirms that knowledge is situated, interviews were chosen as the research method that would allow to analyse the personal stories of comedians exploring their personal experiences through semi-structured questions. Interviewing has proved to be an excellent tool to gather the stories, opinions and beliefs of the interviewees. The nature of dialogue and less structured style of qualitative interviews leads to this situation of free expression, creating an environment of real communication and dialogue. Therefore, one of the greatest advantages of interviews as a research tool is that they allow to perceive and understand unobservable facts, such as opinions, concepts, feelings and points of view which opened the opportunity to deepen in the different situations and experiences of the selected comedians. Also, other methods of research, interviews allows to understand facts that take place anywhere and without temporal restrictions, since the interviewees could express their opinions about things that
already happened, that are happening or that will happen in the future, as well as hypothesis, which has provided with a great sphere for analysis.

The decision of using semi-structured interviews has allowed to maintain the qualitative aspect of the research, which was especially important to reveal the personal experiences of the comedians, keeping them in the foreground and obtaining a more complete information when necessary by adding questions at some points, but at the same time, using structured questions for all the subjects, so there is a common line in the stories that allows to follow the same structure for the analysis.

Data was collected through recordings and transcribed to develop an analysis for each of the cases. To design the structure and the content of the questions 3 analytic themes were used based on the work of Rakow and Wackwitz (2004) on feminist communication: difference, voice and representation. The theme of difference is related to the concept of situated knowledges, how the relations of the comedians with their different realities shape their experiences in a different way and how they problematize and communicate them. Under this theme the questions were focused on the process of construction of the discourse, the topics selected and the inspiration for choosing those topics, the intentions of their humoristic speeches beyond entertainment. The theme of voice revolves around the possibilities of women to have spaces where their voices are heard and the existing obstacles. In this theme the questions focused on the motivations to work on comedy, the evolution of their careers as comedians and the obstacles they found. Finally, the theme of representation refers to the lack of representation of women in the cultural industries or the lack of a diversity of representation that covers the heterogeneity of women’s realities; therefore, in this case the questions explored the personal process of entering the industry and the situation of feminist comedy in Spain.

Through the different conversations with the comedians, the following analysis explores three different personal stories of women that are using comedy as a tool
to communicate their realities. These conversations show the diversity of women’s experiences and the commonalities under this diversity, analysing how the differences and commonalities shape their humoristic discourses. Their testimonies provide an idea on the power of voicing women’s realities and foregrounding alternative ways of knowledge to point out the inefficiencies in the system.

**ANALYSIS**

As explained by Russell (2002) for comedy to work the audience plays a key role, they need to accept the performer. The process of acceptance comes, as discussed by Gilbert (1997) from an object/subject dichotomy, that has traditionally given men subjectivity as performers of humour and therefore, audiences link the concepts of men and comedian as inherent. For that reason, the process of being a performer, being the subject of the jokes, was not something obvious in the beginning for the three interviewed comedians. It required a process of deconstruction of the established gender roles. E. Soriano (2019, personal interview, 14 May), V. Riezu (2019, personal interview, 17 April) and P. Sornosa (2019, personal interview, 5 May), explained that they started their work in comedy by chance, participating for the first time in a comedy contest that opened up the opportunity of exploring this path. The case of Soriano and Riezu is specially illustrative of the lack of identification of women as subjects of comedy. They explained, during a personal interview on 14 May and 17 April, respectively, that since despite they were studying drama and theatre, and therefore, they had assessed all the possibilities for their future careers, comedy was never on their minds. They linked this to the fact that the only successful comedian references they had were men and, for that reason, they had never pictured themselves entering comedy because it was a man’s world. Both of them separately, mentioned during the personal interviews that the moment when they started to do comedy, there were only a few female comedians with certain voice in media. For that reason, experiencing a position of subjectivity by chance was the only way
to realize that they could also be comedians. Soriano (2019) explained that: “the feeling of adrenaline and of being in my place was all I needed to focus on comedy, for that reason I signed up in a comedy school and started doing stand up comedy in several places”.

The process of regaining subjectivity is not immediate, as it requires contesting traditional structures and ideas embedded in society. Menéndez (2017) emphasizes how recent literature, mainly through the popularity of Cultural Studies in the second half of the 20th century has affirmed the influence of the cultural industries in shaping social identities. Galán Fajardo (2007) analysing the representation of women in TV fiction during the first decade of the 2000s concludes that women are represented through stereotypes that link them with “emotions, passivity, maternity and sexuality [...] while men continues to be represented, generally, with attributes such as reasoning, leadership and action” (p. 229). Moreover, Galán Fajardo (2007) explains the importance of specific physical attributes in fictional programs, as one of the main common characteristics to all the actresses. In this context, Riezu (2019), explained that her personal experience trying to work on TV in that same decade collided with the established canons for a woman necessary to enter the cultural industry. She also mentioned that all the casting directors were men and feminism in Spain was not yet on the rise, therefore, there were not opportunities for diverse types of women. Tired of trying she explored comedy again, years after the first experience in the contest. She thought that comedy could give her the option of communicating something without an established script, with total freedom. As she stated: “I wanted to tell my personal stories and experiences as a woman, someone that sometimes loses but other times wins. I did not find representation in other women, our stories were not being told, there was a lack of representation of the diversity of women, not enough variety of references. For all that, when I started doing comedy there was anger, rebellion and a personal story to tell” (V. Riezu, 2019, personal interview, 17 April). This statement illustrates the concept of marginal comedy developed by Gilbert (1997). Riezu started to focus on comedy as
a consequence of marginality and therefore, as discussed by Gilbert (1997), when humor operates from marginality it does so with a subversive aim. Riezu’s anger comes from a situation of marginality as a consequence of the established gender roles. This struggle made her conscious of the realities of women in the cultural industry, the lack of representation and the lack of female voices, which led her to achieve a self-identity that represents an alternative to hegemonic identities and definitions, which is a necessary start to contribute to the emergence of feminist standpoints that could challenge power structures (Harding, 2004). Smith (1997), one of the main representatives of feminist standpoint theory, explains that feminist standpoints start from personal experiences and its marginal and local nature imply alternatives to general knowledge. Comedy could provide this alternative space where Riezu could develop her passion without needing to comply with established behaviours and appearances, but more important, comedy could serve as a communicative tool to share her experiences. As explained by Harding (2004), the process of sharing is necessary for standpoints to emerge, as it is through a collective process of identification and acknowledgment of others experiences that a collective consciousness of the struggles emerges. The deep analysis on the effects of comedy for social change developed by Borum Chattoo (2017) concludes how comedy is able to be used as a tool to introduce new people and ideas in non-threatening ways. The entertaining aspect of comedy helps audiences to welcome alternative messages and unfamiliar people. She explains this fact through the social psychology parasocial contact hypothesis, which discusses that stereotypical attitudes towards otherness could be reduced through contact with mediated characters and, therefore, “encountering social issues and norms through light-hearted entertainment and comedy portrayals can be a pathway to breaking down barriers to acceptance” (Borum Chattoo, 2017, p. 3). Although this theory is usually applied to racial differences, it could be well applied to women in this case, since the contact of the audience with diverse portrayals of women through entertainment could help to accept other representations of women and break down gender stereotypes. Borum Chattoo (2017) also specifies how specially stand-up comedy “finds its humor in
observational commentary and social critique. Stand-up comedy is able to occupy a “marginal safe place” in which normally “subversive ideas” are granted license to be openly heard and discussed” (p. 5). For that reason, Riezu found in stand-up comedy a safe space where she could share her experiences of oppression with audiences that were predisposed to welcome them due to its entertaining tone, despite doing so in a society where feminism was not yet a generalized issue.

As it is discussed by feminist standpoint theory, the situated aspect of knowledge, has implications that shape the different experiences of the comedians. In this case the comedians are understood as epistemic agents, whose social reality influences their epistemic capacities (Harding, 2004). It is illustrative to this end the comparison between Soriano and Riezu, that despite being in the same situation and doing the same analysis about the realities that prevented them from working in comedy, experienced a big contextual difference that shaped their realities in a different way. They are from different generations, and while Riezu’s first experience in that comedy contest took place more than 10 years ago, for Soriano it happened just 4 years ago. Although in any of the two moments there were a great amount of female comedians in Spain, when Soriano started to do comedy it was a moment when feminism in Spain started to grow exponentially until now, as it is shown in the poll by El País (2019), that measures the increase of people from 2014 to 2019 that consider themselves as feminists differentiated by age range:
The rise of feminism had, and is having, as a consequence more representation and understanding of the oppressions that affect women at different levels of society, and therefore, it also influenced the cultural industry, that needed to increase the number of women participating in different media programs, as well as to diversify the type of women, to satisfy the new needs of more than half of the population that consider themselves as feminists.

The diverse experiences and contextual differences shaped also the approaches to comedy as a communicative contestation tool of the three interviewed comedians, as well as the type of humoristic resources they use to communicate.

As mentioned, for Riezu the shift from other cultural formats to comedy happened as a consequence of a struggle due to the lack of feminist consciousness in society at that time. The aspect of marginality in her comedy had as a consequence that she started doing comedy with a subversive aim, nevertheless, as she did so inside the same structures that had oppressed her in a moment when feminism in Spain was not still a phenomenon, she explained during the interview how there had been a clear evolution in the way she communicates her humoristic discourse: “in the first years of my career as a comedian, I tried not to put myself in danger with a discourse that could bother someone. Nevertheless, as my career advance and the
context too, I allowed myself to be in danger and instead of being me who adapts to the public, let the public adapt to myself. I allow myself total freedom in that sense in my show *Despite being a woman, you’re pretty funny*, that takes place in a theatre in Madrid, since there I don’t have any external pressures or conditions. However, I am also working as a presenter in the TV program The Comedy Club, where I still have to adapt a bit my performance to the public”, (V. Riezu, 2019, personal interview, 17 April). In the first period, Riezu represented the *professional fool* of Gilbert (1997), at a moment when feminism was not a thing, the only way for her to be heard and regain subjectivity was to send subversive messages in a subtle way that were allowed by the TV producers and accepted by the public, for that reason she made use of self-deprecating humor. The contextual change and the increase of collective consciousness regards oppressions based on gender norms is having as a consequence a generalised swift in female marginal comedy, from trying to be subtle in their subversive messages, so women are allowed to perform in the same mechanisms that oppress them, to more direct and aggressive forms of rhetoric to change the status quo, empowered by the revolution of new media that provides alternative channels of communication and participation. Nevertheless, as she explained, the mainstream media is still resistant to some kind of messages delivered by women through comedy. But, apart from Riezu’s experience, a general shift towards a fumerist kind of humor, can be seen with the appearance of a diverse and great number of comedy projects in Spain, both in and outside mainstream media, where women are the main characters and feminist is at the core of their performances. Outside mainstream media, it is illustrative to mention the famous feminist collective Riot Comedy, which performs stand-up comedy shows in different cities all over Spain. In each show a great variety of female comedians from different ages and backgrounds perform their personal stand-ups with clear subversive messages and personal female experiences. Inside mainstream media, one of the main TV channels has launched this year the program *Las que faltaban* (Those who were missing) a late night show leaded by women comedians with a clear feminist aim.
Following the effect of situated knowledge in the interviewees for this analysis, the case of Sornosa is different than Riezu’s since, despite they started in comedy at the same moment, P. Sornosa explained during a personal interview on 5 May, 2019, that she had never wanted to participate in mainstream media, and also with stand-up comedy she did it just as a side activity that she enjoyed, and still today she is doing comedy in that way. For this reason, she did not experienced the struggle Riezu did. During the same interview, Sornosa (2019) explained that when she started doing comedy she performed mainly in alternative spaces, far from mainstream media, mainly in cultural centers, bars, small theatres, etc, where her performance was generally very welcomed. She added that she is still doing so, but in the last four years she also had found greater acceptance, although limited yet, from mainstream media to perform in other spaces, such as TV programs, where she considers she did not fit before because her message was too strong, too direct for the previous context when feminism in Spain was not even a reality. At the same time, the feminism explosion in the recent years, has given her more presence in the same alternative spaces where she usually performs in.

As Sornosa never tried to fit in the mainstream cultural industry, she could allow her discourse to be much more critical with the structures of power and their influence in women’s lives, even in the moments when feminism had a small presence in Spanish society. For this reason, Sornosa falls, already since her beginning in comedy, in the fumerist category of Clinton (as cited in Waugh and Crasnow, 2013) which, as mentioned, is becoming the general trend, since her stand-up performance goes against conventional moralities, talking directly about inequalities in the social system that affect women. She used comedy not as a tool that allowed her to send subtle subversive messages that she could not send otherwise, as it was the case of Riezu, but since she was performing in spaces where subtlety was not needed, she used comedy as a transformation tool itself but valuing the advantages of comedy to communicate these ideas. As she explained “comedy is a way to communicate the inequalities that women experience in their daily lives in a different way” (2019). Being a fumerist in a time
when feminism was not a trend was for Sornosa a question of choice. She explained that: “a feminist comedian should be aware that it has a speaker, a power to use the discourse in a transformative way, with a subversive intention that questions power. The difference lies on what you use that personal power for: if you use it for your own benefit working in mainstream media channels to earn money, then your discourse has to adapt to the power structures so they do not get angry and they keep hiring you, if contrary you use the personal power to serve women’s rights, then you have to operate outside those channels” (2019).

Both Sornosa and Riezu contested established hegemonic ideas and gender stereotypes. The difference in their approaches of comedy emanates from the relationship each of them have with the mainstream cultural industries.

In the case of Soriano (2019) the growing presence of feminism since the moment she started to do comedy allowed her to have a much more organic experience and, as she explained during the mentioned personal interview on 14 May, once she discovered she could work in comedy, she did not doubt about it. In the same interview she explained that in the current context in Spain, being a woman had been an opportunity for her as a comedian: “despite more and more women are doing comedy now, there are far fewer women than men in the industry yet. Now we are a moment of feminist growth and the media producers cannot stay behind, they have realized that they needed to include women to please the audience and that it could work as a good marketing strategy. At that point, I was just at a good moment in my career, and therefore, I experienced less competition than other male colleagues that started when I did. It was the correct time and place” (Soriano, 2019). In a very different way than Sornosa and Riezu, millennial comedian Soriano, started doing comedy in a moment of generalized feminist consciousness, as she explained during the same personal interview on 14 May 2019, her understanding of the struggles of women is something natural, not achieved, due to the fact that her own experiences as a woman are shared and connected with the experiences of other women everywhere. Differently from
Riezu and Sornosa, she added that she had never tried to send a moral message through her stand-up. However, as she explained, despite this fact, there was a turning point in her work as a comedian through one of her stand-up pieces. She got to perform in a very famous late night show, where she did a stand-up performance of her personal experience with oral sex and female genital hair removal. The performance explained all the adventures a woman has to go through just to receive some oral sex. The recording of the program in YouTube had almost half million views (La Resistencia, 2018) and a lot of repercussion in different journals that dedicated articles to the issue. Soriano suddenly became a reference for feminism and her stand-up performance a cry for women’s power. Soriano affirmed that: “the effect that the performance had in the audience gave me a real consciousness of the implications of the collective struggles of women and how silenced they are. I have received lots of messages from women since then, just to say thank you for telling that story in a very straight way. One of the messages that surprised me the most was from a woman saying that thanks to watching the stand-up in the late night show with her boyfriend he did oral sex to her for the first time. What am I? A superhero? At that moment, I began to think about the opportunities that comedy offered to talk about the silenced personal experiences of women” (Soriano, 2019).

The generational change between Riezu and Soriano had as a consequence that despite both of them performed in mainstream cultural industries in their beginnings, while Riezu had to analyse the way she explained her personal struggles in a way that was not against the interests of the producers, Soriano, despite also talking about her personal struggles as a woman, she did not even need to think about how to communicate them in a way that was acceptable, since the spectrum of acceptability has expanded a lot.

From a feminist standpoint perspective, the contextual difference marked by the growing presence of feminism is having an impact in the way women achieve consciousness and, also, in the way they communicate, in this case through
comedy. As explained by Hartsock (1983), although the social position of women provides a starting point to achieve a standpoint, it is in struggle where this privilege lies. Due to the oppressions women suffer in patriarchal societies, they are in a better position for epistemic advantage, but this is not inherent to women but inherent to marginality. Hartsock, following Marxist theory, explains the need to experience struggle to achieve the consciousness that allows to understand the contradictions in society and get a more complete understanding of reality. Both Riezu and Sornosa had experienced struggle in a direct way when they started their work in comedy, due to a strong patriarchal system, where inequalities suffered by women were silenced and not clearly displayed. Struggles were higher because the context was tougher, this allowed them to be conscious of the oppressions of women that were finally communicated in different ways through comedy also due to the barriers of the system. The big collision between their experiences and the hegemonic structures, the fact that they were clearly an alternative to the generalized knowledge in society, motivated them to communicate this knowledge through comedy. They achieved the strong objectivity of Harding (1995), which means that the situated feature of knowledge caused that the experiences of Riezu and Sornosa from an oppressed perspective allowed the construction of a less partial knowledge of reality, therefore the construction of knowledge from their marginalized perspectives allowed the creation of a more diverse and objective knowledge than the one of the dominant groups. For this reason, as defended by standpoint feminist theory, knowledge is not neutral and, therefore, the marginal experiences comedians communicate through comedy, have the potential to contest the traditional universal feature of knowledge and claim for the inclusion of additional perspectives. Following the same Marxist premises about the revolutionary potential of the proletariat, feminist standpoint discusses that power tensions established by patriarchal systems generate the emergence of a distinctive view from below, from women, which has a revolutionary potential since it is capable of revealing the contradictions in the system (Harding, 1991; Hartsock, 1983). This entitled Riezu and Sornosa to share their experiences through comedy with a subversive aim.
In the recent context where Soriano started to work in comedy, there was a more generalized consciousness of the oppressions of women due to the growing presence of feminism in society. This meant that in the beginning she did not understand that she could provide an alternative vision, because the difference between her experiences and reality was apparently smaller. For that reason, Soriano’s performance did not have a subversive aim, but it was when she shared her struggles that she got conscious about the generalized oppressions of women and the implications of sharing them to achieve collective standpoints. This is also illustrated in the evolution of standpoint feminist theory, that took into account these contextual differences and has put emphasis in recent years in the collective importance of standpoints. Therefore, as discussed by Harding (2004) a standpoint is not achieved individually, it is in the diversity of experiences and in the process of sharing them where alternative knowledges with capacity to challenge established structures of power emerge.

Same as Soriano, comedians Sornosa and Riezu, also had transformative experiences through identification processes with their comedy and both emphasize the importance of achieving one’s own consciousness for the stories to have an effect in others. Sornosa (2019) explained that from her experience, change begins individually and continues with others through identification of that personal change. She told that one of the most shocking cases was a woman that thanked her because of her stand-up she got the courage to leave her partner that was mistreating her. In a similar way, Riezu (2019) explained that she had received lots of messages from people that thanked her for talking about certain topics with which they identify, personal and day-to-day struggles that they had never heard to be discussed before in public, which empowered them to analyse them deeply. At the same interview Riezu added that comedy had also changed her at a personal level, through the creation process of the stories she uses for the speech, she is analysing also at the same time certain issues that allowed her to achieve consciousness: “sometimes we think that our stories are not important but
I create my comedy work from personal prejudices and fears that I had to deconstruct, therefore, someone who makes you laugh through personal stories that represent another point of view allows you to feel identified and move forward, not to be afraid” (Riezu, 2019). Feminist standpoint theorist Smith (1997) explains the importance of local and personal experiences of women, since she argues standpoints start with people’s experiences that are able to contest existing social realities through individual analysis. The additional advantage that comedy adds over this, is what Waugh and Crasnow (2013) argue, that laughter has the power to create common spaces of understanding.

Connections are one of the main pillars of old and new forms of activism. Scholars like Castells (2012) explain that specially today’s activism takes place in a culture of sharing promoted by social networks. This culture creates horizontal networks that promote activism but more important they create togetherness. In Castells words, this togetherness allows people to “overcome fear and discover hope” (as cited in Poell and Van Dijck, 2018). The communication of personal experiences promote the connection of individuals and can therefore create togetherness, allowing people to discover their oppressions and fight for their rights, achieving collective standpoints.

Stand-up comedy could perform as a mechanism of identification to build a joint story. Women recognize each other in the experiences of other women and create a sorority movement. These communication processes put in common different stories, different perspectives, which have the power to break with the idea of the feminism of classes, allowing feminism to reach all types of collectives and social classes (Ngozi Adichie, 2012).

Following this, diversity is a key element for feminist comedy to have a transformative effect. The stories, type of humour and channels of communication of the three analysed comedians are very different, and therefore, they reach different audiences that could identify with their stories. The diversity of feminist standpoints from different marginalized experiences that include a plurality of
oppressions, generate both a better understanding of the plurality of oppressive social structures that affect women in different ways taking into account other transversal oppressions such as class and race, as well as it builds a sense of solidarity through the identification of similarities that arise from the contestation of patriarchal systems through the experiences of women (Harding, 2004).

Both Soriano and Riezu reflected during the above mentioned interviews on the feedback received on female comedians talking only about sex and relationships. They explained that there is still a lack of diversity and that male comedians in Spain mainly talk about those two things too, but women received additional pressure, they have to achieve the comedian status with a higher standard than men, because the lack of women comedians still has as a consequence that audience do not identify them as funny. Coming back to the beginning of the analysis, as it was stressed by Gilbert (1997) and Roqué López (2016), this is an effect of the traditionally subject positions given to men, which has as a consequence than in comedy they are seen by the audience as the subject of humor. Having women doing comedy breaks the stereotype that subjectivity is inherent to men, but more important, it requires a great number of women doing comedy to confirm that women can be also subjects in comedy. Diversity of female comedians is also important to dismantle the stereotype that female comedy is all the same. Having a great variety of women doing comedy in different platforms, with different styles, shows the audience that female comedy is very diverse, and more important, that since not all humoristic pieces made by women are the same there is not such thing as female humour, which contributes to reduce inequalities based on gender stereotypes. As Butler(1990) argues, gender is constructed through power relations and it should not be understood as inherent. Diversity of female standpoints, communicated through comedy performance, could help to blur gender lines. At the moment, there is still a lack of presence of female comedians in Spain that gives a strong representation of a diversity of standpoints, nevertheless, accompanied by the growing feminist movements and new
technologies, women representation in comedy is on the rise and it increases even more through identification.

**CONCLUSION**

Focusing on the personal experiences of three Spanish feminist comedians, this research project has discussed the potential of comedy as a contestation communicative tool against hegemonic ideas and values that silence the realities of women. The power of marginal personal experiences and the situated feature of knowledge that is argued by the theoretical framework used for this research, has allowed an analysis of the subversive characteristics of humor used by these comedians.

The autobiographical feature of stand-up comedy values the personal experiences of women, which has several consequences as a feminist contestative tool. By communicating these experiences in an entertaining way, women are breaking with the subject/object established dichotomy that have traditionally provided men with the subjectivity of humor. Moreover, as discussed by standpoint theory, the existence of structures of power has historically created oppressions, placing women's experiences in a silenced and marginal position. Therefore, the communication of personal experiences from women breaks with the homogeneous representation of women from dominant subjects of knowledge, it contests established stereotypes creating alternative knowledge that points out the biases in society. The variety of discourses and ways of making comedy contribute ultimately to the destabilization of gender as a classificatory category. Finally, it also promote connections among women. Through the communication of marginal personal stories, comedy promotes the identification of the oppressions suffered that creates togetherness and contributes to the achievement of feminist standpoints.
The situated aspect of knowledge argued by feminist standpoint theory has shaped the experiences of the different comedians and their approaches to comedy as a contestation tool. Despite of those differences, from Riezu's use of self-deprecating humor to find spaces of subversion from the same structures of power that had oppressed her, to the fumerist humor of Sornosa, comedy, as a cultural representation understood in a constructivist way, has been proved both to be an adaptable tool for a diversity of ways of communicating contesting messages in a safer way than other types of communication and to provide a space inside the cultural industries to regain the subjectivity of women.

The experiences of Riezu and Sornosa showed that, without a feminist context, there was a need of choosing from being direct or sneaky in the way feminist messages were communicated through comedy, which was directly linked to the decision of performing or not in the mainstream cultural industries. The struggle lied in the different communicative resources available and the consequences of choosing one or another. The rise of feminism in Spain has made that decision less important, with much more women participating in comedy with different discourses and opening other spaces outside from mainstream media. But, with feminism more generalized, new challenges appear. The narrower gap between personal experiences and reality could lead, as in the case of Soriano, to a failure to value the importance of our personal experiences and therefore, to lose the understanding of comedy as a contestation tool. As it has been discussed, in the current context, analysing the struggles of women in a collective way is necessary to achieve feminist standpoints that generate alternative ways of knowledge and contribute to break with gender barriers. Soriano’s experience, specially shows the power of sharing marginal and silenced stories through comedy to continue understanding and analysing the oppressions of women.

It is also important to take into account, that although mainstream media has expanded its level of acceptability to more diverse types of feminist humor, there are still barriers to the kind of discourses and direct ways of communicating
female oppressions are still taking place in alternative spaces, as it is shown with the case of Riezu and the different choice of resources for her performances in a theatre and on a TV program. Moreover, these barriers could be now less visible, since producers hide behind the achievement of quotas and the marketing of feminism. The successful stand-up performance of Soriano, although strong in her message, could fit in the neoliberal and postmodern feminist approaches that are argued by several scholars to lack a deeper level of analysis, since it focuses in two of the main topics claimed by these approaches, sex and the individual. For this reason, an interesting further research to complement this project would be to analyse the different discourses that feminist comedians are communicating in different platforms and spaces, to analyse the existing barriers and the gaps for further action. Moreover, it would be also necessary in a further research to transversalize class and race in the analysis of feminist humor, that allows the development of a stronger analysis on the opportunities of comedy as a contestation tool, its accessibility and its margin of adaptability to the communication of different stories.

This research has mainly intended to be a contribution to the field of communication, development and social change, exploring one of its more discussed issues lately, which is the importance of culture and its relationship with process of change. Moreover, the main findings of this project, could be applied to other aspects of communication through comedy and it is especially an interesting contribution to communication for development. Same as in feminist comedy, humour that values the perspective of the marginal could raise consciousness and generate a debate that challenges the existing single narratives and representations of marginality in its different forms globally. In this line, comedy has been recently explored as an interesting tool to communicate, with a transformative aim, the challenges of cooperation for development and international aid processes, contributing to understand and analyse the effects of the dissemination of stereotypes and single stories through aid campaigns that adopt a top-down approach. One of the most representative examples is the Africa
for Norway video, that reflects, using satire, on how international aid is usually communicated and how the recipients of aid are generally represented by Western international aid organisations. The video imitates an international aid fundraising campaign, making a call for Africans to donate their radiators to the cold people of Norway. The repercussion was very high, with more than 3,4 million views in Youtube (SAIH Norway, 2012), and it evolved in the Radi-Aid initiative, which, every year, analyses the best and worst charity fundraising videos, giving the Golden Radiator and the Rusty Radiator award (https://www.radiaid.com/).

The use of humour in these cases works as a lessons learned knowledge that motivates the development and transformation of international development itself through the debate of the implications of communication for development processes. As the Radi-Aid campaign explains “[a] tendency in aid organizations' charity campaigns is that poor people are portrayed as passive recipients of help, without the ability or desire to make their country a better place to live. This kind of portrayal creates a significant distinction between us and them” (“RADI-AID”, n.d.). Same as in the case of women, and any other marginal groups, poor people are represented through the external lens that reproduce a single story. Comedy is used also in this case, as a tool to communicate complicated issues providing an alternative vision of reality that could contribute to generate consciousness that has implications in the diagnosis on how development works. Schwarz and Richey (2019) exploring the representation of voluntourism in social media, values the potential of that diagnosis generated through humour but understanding the existence of limitations to its efficacy as an imminent solution.

Specifically in stand-up comedy, one illustrative example of the use of comedy to promote this consciousness with an intercultural aim is the Bill and Melinda Gates funded initiative known as Stand up planet: the revolution will be hilarious, which aims to portray the work of worldwide stand-up comedians from non-Western countries, valuing their local perspectives, same as feminist comedians are able to
be subjects of comedy and communicate their personal stories despite their marginality.

As analysed, marginal stand-up comedy allows to communicate from a bottom-up perspective personal stories that work as a counter-narrative that contributes to regain subjectivity and breaks with the hegemony of a single story and a single representation of communities and collectives, which could have different applications that are worth to be further analysed and utilised for a great variety of development and social change issues.

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Eva Soriano started doing comedy in 2014, after finishing a Performing Arts degree. She started performing in stand-up shows surrounded by well-established (male) comedians. Eva uses a kind of humour that directly addresses the problems of gender inequality, open sexuality and ridiculing cliches with a relaxed and irreverent discourse.

She is currently gaining popularity in different online platforms, mostly after her various appearances in Late Motiv (one of the most famous late night shows in Spain), a stand-up performance in La Resistencia (another popular show that follows a similar structure as Late Motiv but with a younger audience) and another recent late night were women are the main characters. These programs are from a private TV channel in Spain, therefore, the greatest number of views the stand-up comedy of Eva Soriano gets, are from the videos the same channel publishes in YouTube.
PATRICIA SORNOSA
(THE FUMERIST)

Year of birth: 1977
Place of birth: Manises, Valencia

With a long career in theater, Patricia Sornosa started directing and starring her own stand-up pieces in 2004 performing mainly in theaters and local places, such as cultural spaces, high schools...etc. She has recently appeared in some late nights and comedy shows on TV.

With sarcasm, she tries to hold a mirror on society. Feminism is the center of her speech and she usually attacks the sexist practices that have been normalized with lots of funny everyday life examples. Sornosa takes a heavy critic approach, with her speeches dancing between the humour and the lesson.
Just after finish her degree in Engineering, Virginia participated in a comedy contest where she realized her passion was theater and comedy, therefore she left her city, in the North of Spain, to study in Madrid. Since then, she has been working as an actress and comedian in different TV channels, but also in local theatres, universities and cafes.

She mainly uses stand-up comedy through an absurd and irreverent discourse in which she often makes use of self-deprecation to talk about her personal experiences as a woman in an entertaining way.