What makes a Comedian Successful? – Female and Male Comedian’s Positioning in Humorous Discourses

Women have traditionally been seen as lacking humor (Lakoff, 2004). Men have been dominating humorous discourses the last century (Crawford, 1995). Are these conditions still reinforced in humour discourses or do female and male comedians have about the same opportunities to do humour?

In my doctoral project I am studying how female and male comedians negotiate and perform gender in humorous discourses on TV. The material I am using is a Swedish humorous panel-show and my research question is:

- How do female and male comedians position themselves in humorous discourses, how are they positioned by the moderator and the other comedians, and how does that relate to their possibilities to be humorous?

To make their own and others jokes successful comedians may use various strategies. I use a theoretical framework based on Feminist Post-structuralist Discourse Analysis (Baxter, 2003), combined with Conversation Analysis to analyse the comedian’s positioning relating to how well their jokes are responded to by the other comedians and the moderator. Responses as laughter or topic development makes a successful joke which gives a powerful position, whereas no laughter or response at all makes an unsuccessful joke which gives a less powerful position. In my conclusions I will talk about how female and male comedians have different opportunities to do humour in humorous discourses and that different kinds of responses affects what makes a good joke.

