

## **Written evidence submitted by Miss Joy Carter [COM0021]**

### **Evidence in comedy in misogyny.**

I started my stand up career back in 2000 working my way up from local gigs, to eventually getting my first agent in 2007 then in 2015. I have toured the UK with my stand up shows and worked in every type of TV venue to radio to festivals, corporate and charity shows. During lockdown I set up 'JoyTalk' to help companies and charities unpack the healing power of humour online and now as a training workshop and talk. I work with Craic.healh as a comedy practitioner with comedy-on-prescription. Joy Light Zone is my company.

### **1.Barriers and challenges**

As a black female comedian the main challenge I believe we face is the booker not booking more than 1 female comedian often on a bill, and yet there are numerous all male bills as standard. This always creates a 'women are rare or special' narrative rather than just booking the best people for the night. This mindset is also a staple on TV with the male comedians always being booked first then women slotted in as an after thought.

Representation is important as there are still few black female comedians and if the next generation don't see diverse representation then it becomes again 'rare' when actually there are over 150 professional women comedians.

Payment is still a rude word as female comedians are not just not represented but are still paid less than the male equivalent. Safety also is a question as with my first agent i was driving over 2,000 miles a week and doing 8 shows and doubling and I still struggled to earn a living wage. Often the amount of professional 'free' gigs or low paid work is still un-acceptable with he bias on men booking there 'friends' still existing.

The stranglehold of being paid late and not being able to challenge money owed is still terrible with so much financial misconduct around being paid late sometimes 18 months after a job, constantly chasing money, always having to 'heckle' your self worth as clients undervalue your comedy service.

### **2. Ethnic minority barriers**

Race is still an issue as it is in the country, I find that audiences love to see diversity but it is the bookers and agents that are often 'as gods' that are the gatekeepers that can create the glass ceiling effect. The internet as helped create new opportunities for comedians but the atmosphere in the comedy circuit is still like the 'wild west', not rules just a question to who you call 'friend or foe'. There is currently no official body or PR company to complain about racism in comedy, no support and no mental health help. Racism in sport has a system but comedy does not.

### **3. Prevalence of abuse**

I believe that there is still much misconduct and abuse of position, even today. It is still acceptable to be asked to 'go out' with an agent inappropriately when male comedians would never have to undergo such 'weird' attentions. There is still the 'offer' of 'work' for 'friendships' that puts pressure on a professional working environment and the constant knowledge that if a woman refuses such attentions there are many women who will agree. This is still an issue in all creative fields I am sad it is still prevalent in comedy.

### **4. How are disclosure of abuse or harassment handed within the live comedy sector.**

'Get Off' is the only HR company established in 2021 that supports anyone suffering harassment or abuse. It is terrible that there is only one and the amazing work they do comes from donations and is self-funding. I have spoken to them several times and wanted to warn other comedians of situations that either I have heard about or experienced myself but due to data and privacy laws perpetrators face little or no consequences and continue to harness their victims. There needs so much more work in this area to create a safe structure to complain and challenge malpractice. I would like to see better training for all new comedians in how to protect themselves and others and manage this difficult subject matter. I would also like to see clubs and venues agree to the formation of a 'kite mark' of safety and the creation of better working standards for all. The government could help fund and support this work as currently there are no laws or legislation in place.

## **5. What challenges do women face in the comedy sector as freelancer and or self-employed.**

I believe that women are often marginalised, not given the opportunities that their male counterparts have and little or no pension at the end of their careers. There is no support during pregnancy, childcare or sickness and the struggle to survive is harsh. It is still a very 'male' dominated area and women are having to struggle. I believe still to be taken seriously. There is still not enough diversity of female talent on offer, women are not all the same and their characters can still be stereotyped. When issues arise there is no real HR department to complain to, so the industry never improves, learns or grows. There is no best practice conversation or conferences and no sense of evolution and the changes that are made are very slow. There needs to be more funding to support female comedians and help this industry grow that benefits everyone.

## **6. The role of Government.**

I would like to see the UK Government start to help comedians establish a flourishing working sector through legislation and communication with the comedy industry. There needs to be a minimum wage set up, tax breaks to help comedians establish their work, more opportunities to help create diversity and opportunities for new comedians.

More comedy in schools and help comedians share their wellbeing humour knowledge with those who are struggling. Money and support for innovation to help comedians create better wellbeing outcomes and shared platforms to help society engage with comedy.

There needs to be the formation of a professional working infrastructure from grassroots to the top earners and more work with agents and promoters to protect this volatile, unpredictable and yet lucrative industry. The spread of wealth tends to be like a stagnant pond where the money and comedy investment is locked into the pockets of the few.

I would like to see more consultations, surveys and talks with government to create a better future for the comedy industry in the UK and it starts with it being recognised as an 'art form'. This billion pound industry is being farmed by the unregulated kings who love money over the creative gift that comedy should be for all.

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