



# Pretty/Funny: Women Comedians and Body Politics

*Linda Mizejewski*

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Women in comedy have traditionally been pegged as either "pretty" or "funny." Attractive actresses with good comic timing such as Katherine Hepburn, Lucille Ball, and Julia Roberts have always gotten plum roles as the heroines of romantic comedies and television sitcoms. But fewer women who write and perform their own comedy have become stars, and, most often, they've been successful because they were willing to be funny-looking, from Fanny Brice and Phyllis Diller to Lily Tomlin and Carol Burnett. In this pretty-versus-funny history, women writer-comedians—no matter what they look like—have ended up on the other side of "pretty," enabling them to make it the topic and butt of the joke, the ideal that is exposed as funny.

*Pretty/Funny* focuses on Kathy Griffin, Tina Fey, Sarah Silverman, Margaret Cho, Wanda Sykes, and Ellen DeGeneres, the groundbreaking women comics who flout the pretty-versus-funny dynamic by targeting glamour, postfeminist girliness, the Hollywood A-list, and feminine whiteness with their wit and biting satire. Linda Mizejewski demonstrates that while these comics don't all identify as feminists or take politically correct positions, their work on gender, sexuality, and race has a political impact. The first major study of women and humor in twenty years, *Pretty/Funny* makes a convincing case that women's comedy has become a prime site for feminism to speak, talk back, and be contested in the twenty-first century.

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