

# **Subvert or Reinforce *Status Quo*?: The Role of Men (vs. Women) as Feminist Joke**

## **Teller and Feminist Identification on Collective action**

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### **Abstract**

Feminist humor aims to redefine gender stereotypes, challenge sexism, and empower women. Previous research suggests that individual (i.e., feminist identity) and situational factors (i.e., humor type and joke teller gender) play an important role in interpreting feminist humor as a tool to subvert sexism and in its subsequent impact. Two studies were conducted to analyze the influence of participants' feminist identification and the joke teller's gender on the appreciation and interpretation of feminist humor (Study 1) and on the proclivity to engage in collective action (Study 2). In Study 1 ( $N = 307$ ), we manipulated humor type (feminist vs. neutral) and gender of the joke teller (woman vs. man). We found that weaker feminist identifiers perceived more criticism of sexism when the feminist (vs. neutral) joke was told by a woman (vs. a man), but no significant differences emerged in appreciation responses (i.e., funniness and aversiveness). In Study 2 ( $N = 200$ ), we extended these findings and found that weaker feminist identifiers reported greater proclivity to engage in collective action after exposure to feminist jokes told by a woman, not by a man. These findings contribute to the understanding of the ways through which feminist humor can raise awareness of sexism, enable the recruitment of activists, and promote mobilization for social change.

*Keywords:* feminist humor, gender, feminist identity, collective action

## **Subvert or Reinforce Status Quo? The Role of Men (vs. Women) as Feminist Joke**

### **Teller and Feminist Identification on Collective action**

“If any movement needs satire, it's feminism. Humour isn't about appeasing the patriarchy, but rolling over it in an armoured car” (McAuliffe, 2013)

In a statement in *The Guardian*, McAuliffe (2013) argued that feminists use humor to challenge sexism not only through irony and play, but also through indignation and anger. Feminist humor not only entertains or captures public attention, but contests the status quo and exposes everyday sexism (McAuliffe, 2023). The use of feminist humor has increased as a means to combat patriarchy in WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialized, rich democracies) countries (Case & Lippard, 2009; Willet et al., 2012), particularly in Spain, where our research was conducted. Spain scores 76.4 out of 100 points on the Gender Equality Index, placing it in fourth place according to the European Institute for Gender Equality (2023). However, despite this progress, gender inequality remains an issue in Spain. For example, in the private sphere, more women than men provide daily care (41% versus 33%), and women also perform more housework daily than men (64% versus 44%) (EIGE, 2023).

Humor has been used as a tool to confront sexism in the Spanish feminist movement through banners, cartoons, and comic elements (Maturana, 2022; Willem & Tortajada, 2021; Willet et al., 2012). In Spain, feminist humor emerged in the 1990s as a reaction to a surge of misogynistic jokes (Ruiz-Gurillo & Linares-Bernabeu, 2020). On December 31, 1990, the comedy duo “Martes y Trece” aired a TV talk show in which they made sexist jokes about women who had experienced abuse. This social context gave rise to a spontaneous movement that began to challenge dominant patriarchal cultural norms through humor (Ruiz-Gurillo & Linares-Bernabeu, 2020). Over the last decade, the feminist movement in Spain has gained considerable strength.

Notable examples include the demonstrations supported by the Spanish Government Delegation and feminist organizations on March 8, 2019, as well as the 24-hour strikes that same year, in which six million people participated. The objectives were to achieve a multidimensional stoppage—in labor, caregiving, consumer activity, and education—to make reproductive work and the unequal burden of domestic tasks visible, as well as to denounce the patriarchal, sexist, and racist system that perpetuates gender inequality.

Given the potentially positive role of feminist humor in motivating collective action for gender equality (e.g., Riquelme et al., 2021b), we investigated how humor type (i.e., feminist or neutral) may affect its appreciation (i.e., funniness and aversiveness), interpretation (i.e., perceptions of woman disparagement, man disparagement, or criticism of sexism), and collective action for gender equality. Further, we examined how individual-level variables (i.e., feminist attitudes) and contextual cues (i.e., joke teller gender) may moderate these associations.

### **Feminist Humor: Appreciation, Interpretation, and Potential for Collective Action**

Feminist humor or subversive humor against sexism is characterized by two key aspects: (a) it is primarily created and shared by women, and (b) it aims to subvert the status quo and challenge sexism (Riquelme et al., 2019). Kuhar and Paternotte (2018) argued that, compared to humorous feminist content, more serious feminist content may be resisted or readily dismissed by individuals. Moreover, in some cases, serious feminist content can elicit negative emotional responses, such as discomfort or aversion, particularly among audiences who feel personally challenged or targeted (Flood et al., 2021; Verloo, 2018).

On the other hand, research has found that feminist messages delivered humorously may offer specific advantages for particular audiences in promoting attitude change and resistance to gender inequality. Compared to serious formats, feminist

humor is seen as more light-hearted and playful and is perceived as less aversive (Vizcaíno-Cuenca et al., 2024). This can be crucial for engaging individuals who may otherwise respond negatively to feminist messages (Flood et al., 2021; Verloo, 2018). In other words, feminist humor may serve as a “standard of lightness”, enabling reflection on sexist attitudes in a less confrontational context.

Furthermore, feminist humor can serve as a tool to challenge the structural conditions that sustain gender-based power imbalances (Estevan-Reina et al., 2020) and motivate collective action (Becker et al., 2014). Collective action for gender equality refers to behaviors carried out either individually (e.g., signing a petition in favor of pay equity) or collectively (e.g., protesting against sexual harassment) with the goal of improving the disadvantaged status of women (van Zomeren et al., 2008). Guizzo et al. (2017) found that exposure to feminist messages (vs. sexist messages) framed in a serious tone were less effective at motivating men in contrast to women to engage in collective action, suggesting that the tone of the feminist message, indeed, matters. Riquelme et al. (2021b) found that exposure to feminist humor increased the proclivity to participate in collective action for gender equality, as well as behavioral intentions to support various petitions promoted by a feminist organization. Moreover, Vizcaíno-Cuenca et al. (2024) examined how different types of feminist messages influenced the motivation to engage in collective action. Humorous feminist messages were more effective than serious ones at motivating individuals to engage in collective action, although feminist identification qualified this relation.

Notably, feminist humor is a social satire and accordingly may be interpreted ambiguously (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Strain et al., 2016). Feminist humor can be interpreted as: (a) disparaging women, by depicting sexist behavior of a privileged group member (i.e., a man); (b) critical of sexism, with a woman confronting

sexism through humor; or (c) disparaging men, by exposing the sexism of a privileged group member (i.e., a man). As such, attitudinal variables, such as feminist identity, may play an essential role in how feminist humor is interpreted (Miller et al., 2019) and its potential for motivating collective action.

### **Feminist Humor and Feminist Identification**

The gender-related attitudes (i.e., feminist attitudes) of humor recipients play a crucial role in interpreting feminist humor as a critique of sexism (Riquelme et al., 2021a). Riquelme et al. (2021a) found that appreciation—defined as greater funniness and lower aversiveness—of feminist humor was higher among participants with stronger feminist identification, whereas appreciation of sexist humor was higher among those with greater adherence to hostile sexism. Participants with higher feminist identification and lower hostile sexism also perceived stronger criticism of sexism in feminist humor and greater disparagement of women in sexist humor. These findings suggest that, for feminist humor to be a tool that promotes the fight against gender inequality, it must first be interpreted as material that questions and criticizes such inequality (Riquelme et al., 2019), which may require a feminist lens.

According to the *Social Identity Model of Collective Action* (SIMCA; van Zomeren et al., 2008), group identity, or in this case feminist identity, is a robust predictor of collective action intentions identification (Radke et al., 2018; Redford et al., 2018; Weis et al., 2018). We suggest that those with *weaker* feminist identification may be more motivated by humorous versus serious content. Those who more strongly identify as feminist may engage in collective action for gender equality, regardless of the type of feminist messaging (e.g., humorous or serious). Conversely, those with weaker feminist identification may feel less threatened by more humorous feminist content and may be more likely to engage in collective action as a result.

Indeed, research has found that feminist identification may qualify the association between feminist humor and collective action. For example, among participants with lower feminist identification, exposure to feminist humor increased the proclivity to participate in collective action for gender equality (Riquelme et al., 2021b). Additionally, among participants with weaker feminist identification, humorous feminist messages were more effective than serious ones at motivating individuals with weaker feminist identification to engage in collective action (Vizcaíno-Cuenca et al., 2024). These findings suggest that feminist humor may be particularly disarming for those with weaker feminist identification and provide an effective mode of delivering feminist content. Beyond feminist attitudes, it is important to identify additional variables that may influence the relation between feminist humor and collective action for gender equality.

### **Feminist Humor and Gender of the Feminist Joke Teller**

Research on feminist humor for social change highlights the role of the joke-teller's gender, particularly in terms of how this type of humor is appreciated and interpreted (Ford, 200; Romero-Sánchez et al., 2017). Feminist humor may generate more aversiveness and less funniness when delivered by a woman as opposed to when delivered by a man. On the other hand, although some authors argued that men may be perceived as more legitimate in the fight against sexism due to their lack of direct benefit from it—and even the potential conflict with their interests (Drury & Kaiser, 2014)—there is also concern that men's leadership and support in feminist mobilization could be seen as reinforcing gender inequality. This could occur by allowing men to monopolize power, thereby positioning women in a state of weakness and dependence (Estevan-Reina et al., 2020; Nadler & Chernyak-Hai, 2014). For example, Coolidge (2020) demonstrated that both feminist and sexist humor were perceived as more

offensive when delivered by a man (vs. a woman). However, Coolidge (2020) did not provide validity evidence to suggest that the jokes accurately and distinctly represented the types of humor intended for study (feminist or sexist). Thus, the role of joke teller's gender on feminist humor interpretation and collective action is unclear and remains an important area of investigation.

Beyond appreciation and humor, feminist identification and joke teller gender may also influence the relation between humor type and collective action for gender equality. For instance, some studies suggest that feminist messages delivered by men (vs. women) can be more effective in encouraging mobilization for women's rights (Subašić et al., 2018), as they are often perceived as more persuasive and credible and encounter fewer social costs for delivering the messages (Cihangir et al., 2014; Drury & Kaiser, 2014; Estevan-Reina et al., 2020; Gervais & Hillard, 2014). Conversely, other studies argue that men's involvement may be seen as reinforcing male dominance and the status quo (Hässler et al., 2021).

In this regard, *role congruity theory* (Eagly & Karau, 2002) may explain how gender influences the perceived efficacy of movement leaders, and accordingly, the perception of feminist humor. Eagly and Karau (2002) suggested that, compared to men, when women assume leadership roles, they receive poorer evaluations and experience greater bias due to the perceived incongruity between their gender and leadership role. Additionally, compared to women, men are often seen as more persuasive in mobilizing others in political or organizational settings (Drury & Kaiser, 2014). Supporting this, Subašić et al. (2018) found that men were more engaged in collective action for gender equality when the messenger addressing sexism was a man rather than a woman. Women's confrontations, in contrast, are often seen as less



reasonable (Parker et al., 2018) and more likely to be derogated in general by men and women (Eliezer & Major, 2012).

Moreover, it is possible that those with weaker feminist identification may be more influenced by joke teller gender (Vizcaíno-Cuenca et al., 2024). In particular, these individuals might perceive that feminist jokes told by men (versus women) do not fundamentally confront sexism, ultimately failing to motivate people to engage in the feminist struggle (Bullock & Fernald, 2003; Hässler et al., 2021). In contrast, for those with stronger feminist identification, the type of humor or gender of the messenger may be irrelevant. Their motivation for collective action may be driven by the content of the feminist message itself, as they are more attuned to recognizing gender and sexist inequalities and are therefore more motivated to act for gender equality (Willet et al., 2012).

### **The Present Research**

As noted above, compared to those with greater feminist identification, contextual cues (i.e., humor type and joke teller gender) may be particularly beneficial for participants with lower feminist identification, who may be less engaged, have weaker arguments, or be hesitant to critically assess the feminist message. An additional relevant factor in determining how perceivers interpret disparagement and subversive humor is the gender of those who tell and/or disseminate feminist humor (Coolidge, 2020; Ford, 2000). Given that feminist humor has been defined as a tool used by women to subvert gender inequality (Riquelme et al., 2019), perceivers may interpret it differently when the joke teller is a man (vs. a woman). Considering this, we conducted a preliminary study (Study 1) aimed at understanding the appreciation and interpretation of feminist humor (vs. neutral humor) based on the gender of the joke teller (man vs. woman) and the feminist identification of the perceiver.

Additionally, considering previous studies that have shown that the gender of the teller of sexist jokes can have a subsequent effect on the behavior of perceivers (Romero-Sánchez et al., 2017), we conducted a second study (Study 2). The purpose of this study was to explore whether the gender of the joke teller (man vs. woman) could have an effect on humor recipients' inclination towards collective action for gender equality.

### **Study 1**

The main objective of Study 1 was to examine the effect of humor type (feminist vs. neutral) on joke appreciation and interpretation, and how this effect may be moderated by both the joke teller's gender (woman vs. man) and participants' feminist identification. In this study, we defined neutral humor as being unrelated to social issues and not disparaging, confrontational, hostile, ironic, dark, or sexual in nature (e.g., Riquelme et al., 2019). In contrast, we defined feminist humor as aiming to raise awareness and criticize sexist behaviors and situations against women, evincing and questioning situations of inequality and discrimination against them in various fields (e.g., housework) (Riquelme et al., 2019). To measure humor appreciation, we followed previous contributions (Carretero-Dios & Ruch, 2010; Ruch & Hehl, 1998) that defined it in terms of two orthogonal dimensions: funniness (positive valence) and aversiveness (negative valence). For the interpretation of humor, we asked participants to what extent they perceived the jokes as disparaging of women, disparaging of men, or critical of sexism (e.g., Riquelme et al., 2021a).

Based on previous studies regarding the effects of humor type (i.e., feminist versus neutral; Riquelme et al., 2019; Riquelme et al., 2021b), we expected no differences in funniness based on the humor type (feminist vs. neutral; Hypothesis 1a). However, due to the interpretive ambiguity of feminist humor, we hypothesized that

feminist humor would be interpreted as more aversive (Hypothesis 1b; e.g., Riquelme et al., 2019), more critical of sexism (Hypothesis 1c), more disparaging of women (Hypothesis 1d), and more disparaging of men (Hypothesis 1e) compared to neutral humor.

Considering gender stereotypes (e.g., men are agentic, and women are communal), and the notion that feminist humor breaks with gender roles and stereotypes about humor (i.e., men produce better and more humor; Evans, 2023), we expected that a woman joke teller would be perceived as less funny (Hypothesis 2a), more aversive (Hypothesis 2b), more critical of sexism (Hypothesis 2c), less disparaging of women (Hypothesis 2d), and more disparaging of men (Hypothesis 2e) compared to a man joke teller (e.g., Coolidge, 2020).

Based on prior literature on the effects of feminist identification (Riquelme et al., 2019, 2021a), and considering that individuals with stronger feminist identification tend to be more aware of gender discrimination (Redford et al., 2018), we expected a significant interaction between humor type and feminist identification on criticism of sexism, such that greater feminist identification would be associated with greater criticism of sexism in feminist (vs. neutral) humor (Hypothesis 3a). In contrast, based on the findings of Riquelme et al., (2021a), we expected null interaction effects between humor type and feminist identification on the disparagement of women (Hypothesis 3b) and men (Hypothesis 3c).

Consistent with prior research (Coolidge, 2020; Willem & Tortajada, 2021), we hypothesized a significant interaction between humor type and gender of joke teller, such that feminist (vs. neutral) humor would be perceived as more critical of sexism (Hypothesis 4a) and disparaging of men (Hypothesis 4c) when delivered by a woman

versus man. We did not expect an interaction between humor type and joke teller gender on the perceived disparagement of women (Hypothesis 4b).

Finally, given that those with lower feminist identification may find it more challenging to identify the theoretical function of feminist humor (Riquelme et al., 2021a), we expected to find a significant three-way interaction between humor type, feminist identification, and joke teller gender in the criticism of sexism. We believed that individuals with higher feminist identification would not be affected by contextual cues, including gender of joke teller. By contrast, we expected that individuals with lower feminist identification would be more influenced by joke teller gender, perceiving greater criticism of sexism when feminist (vs. neutral) humor was posted by a woman (vs. a man) (Hypothesis 5a). As a result, we anticipated that participants with lower feminist identification would perceive less disparagement of women (Hypothesis 5b) and more disparagement of men (Hypothesis 5c) when the feminist humor was posted by a woman rather than a man.

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

Following data cleaning procedures, the final sample consisted of 307 Spanish participants (145 men [47.2%] and 162 women [52.8%]). Men's ages ranged between 18 and 60 years ( $M = 29.65$ ,  $SD = 9.87$ ) and women's ages ranged between 18 and 65 years ( $M = 31.81$ ,  $SD = 10.72$ ). A total of 233 participants identified as heterosexual (75.9%), 47 as bisexual (15.3%), 21 as gay or lesbian (6.8%), 4 as having another sexual orientation (1.3%), and 2 did not report their sexual orientation (0.7%). Regarding educational level, 216 participants had completed or were pursuing undergraduate studies (70.4%), while 91 had not (29.6%).

### ***Procedure***

Following institutional review board approval, the sample was recruited through various social media platforms (e.g., WhatsApp, Twitter, Telegram, Instagram). The inclusion criteria required participants to be over 18 years old and Spanish speakers. Recruitment was done by posting announcements and links to the online survey on these platforms, inviting people to participate. No objectives or hypotheses regarding feminism were communicated to avoid response biases.

After consenting to participate, participants completed an online survey (estimated duration ~ 15 min). First, participants completed two measures: one assessing the strength of feminist identification and the other measuring social desirability. After completing these measures, participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions, based on two between-subject variables: the gender of the joke teller (man vs. woman) and the type of humor (neutral vs. feminist). Within their respective conditions, participants read four vignettes and were asked to provide responses regarding their appreciation and interpretation of each vignette. Finally, participants provided sociodemographic information and were debriefed about the study's purpose. As a token of appreciation, participants were informed they could enter a raffle to win €50 upon completing the study.

### ***Measures and Materials***

**Feminist Identification.** Strength of feminist identification was assessed using a Spanish adaptation of the In-Group Identification Scale (Leach et al., 2008; Spanish adaptation by Estevan-Reina et al., 2020). Participants answered six items regarding solidarity (i.e., the feeling of a psychological link with ingroup members) and centrality (i.e., the centrality of the ingroup aspect to self-concept) with feminists on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*totally agree*). An overall mean score of feminist identification was used ( $\alpha = .95$ ), with higher scores indicating higher feminist

identification. Similar to prior studies (Estevan-Reina et al., 2020; Riquelme et al., 2019), Cronbach's  $\alpha$  in this study was .95. The validity of its scores was supported by its negative correlations with hostile and benevolent sexism (Estevan-Reina et al., 2020; Riquelme et al., 2021a).

**Social Desirability.** We used the 13-item (e.g., “I sometimes feel resentful when I don't get my way”) Spanish adaptation of the short form of the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960; Spanish adaptation by Megías et al., 2018). Items were rated using a true-false format ( $\alpha = .64$ ) and a sum score was computed, with higher total scores indicating greater social desirability. Internal consistency reliability value in the present research was .64, similar to the values of the original Spanish version (Megías et al., 2018). Scores on this scale have been found to positively correlate with agreeableness and responsibility, and to negatively correlate with hostility and neuroticism (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960).

**Experimental Stimuli.** Participants were randomly assigned to the experimental conditions: 1) neutral humor and woman joke teller (30 men and 41 women); 2) neutral humor and man joke teller (35 men and 39 women); 3) feminist humor and woman joke teller (47 men and 49 women); and 4) feminist humor and man joke teller (33 men and 33 women). First, they looked at a profile on social media whose *user profile gender* had been manipulated: man (Juan) vs. woman (Alicia) (see the experimental manipulation in the Online Supplementary Material A). Next, they read four jokes that were posted on the social media profile in which humor type (feminist vs. neutral) had been manipulated (see the Online Supplementary Material B). The feminist and neutral jokes were extracted from the study by Vizcaíno-Cuenca et al. (2024), which found that. Previous research has shown that both funniness and aversiveness scores for feminist

humor were positively correlated with responses to neutral humor (Riquelme et al., 2019; Vizcaíno-Cuenca et al., 2024).

**Humor Appreciation & Interpretation.** Following prior research (e.g., Vizcaíno-Cuenca et al., 2024), participants were exposed to four jokes or vignettes in each condition. For each joke, they responded to five items assessing humor appreciation and interpretation: funniness, aversiveness, perceived criticism of sexism, perceived disparagement of women, and perceived disparagement of men. *Funniness* (i.e., indicate the degree to which the joke was perceived as funny) and *aversiveness* (i.e., indicate the degree to which the joke was perceived as aversive) were assessed using two 5-point Likert scales ranging from 0 (*not at all funny/not at all aversive*) to 4 (*very funny/very aversive*). A mean index for funniness (neutral humor:  $\alpha = .77$ ; feminist humor:  $\alpha = .76$ ) and aversiveness (neutral humor:  $\alpha = .80$ ; feminist humor:  $\alpha = .74$ ) was computed for each variable across the jokes in each humor condition.

In addition, for each joke or vignette, participants rated their agreement with statements regarding perceived criticism of sexism (i.e., “In this vignette, sexism against women is criticized”), disparagement of women (i.e., “In this vignette, women are denigrated”), and disparagement of men (i.e., “In this vignette, men are denigrated”), using a 5-point Likert scale from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Again, a mean index of criticism of sexism (neutral humor:  $\alpha = .75$ ; feminist humor:  $\alpha = .83$ ), women disparagement (neutral humor:  $\alpha = .67$ ; feminist humor:  $\alpha = .83$ ) and men disparagement (neutral humor:  $\alpha = .67$ ; feminist humor:  $\alpha = .74$ ) were calculated for each humor condition (i.e., neutral and feminist humor). Internal consistency values for appreciation and interpretation variables were similar in prior research ( $\alpha$  between .66–.93; e.g., Riquelme et al., 2021a, 2021b; Vizcaíno-Cuenca et al., 2024).

**Demographics.** Participants provided sociodemographic information (i.e., age, gender, sexual orientation, level of education, occupation, nationality, and native language).

### ***Data Cleaning and Analytic Plan***

Initially, 366 participants accessed the survey. Participants were excluded if they failed a manipulation check (i.e., Please answer who [*Alicia* or *Juan*] posted the jokes and vignettes on his/her social media profile) ( $N = 39$ ). We also removed the data of participants who did not complete the survey ( $N = 11$ ) or reported that Spanish was not their native language ( $N = 9$ ). After removing data from participants based on these criteria, we ended with a final sample of 307.

We previously determined that a sample of 128 participants was needed for a small or moderate effect size ( $d = .50$ ;  $\alpha = .05$ ) with a power of .80 to perform a 2 (type of humor: feminist vs. neutral) x 2 (joke teller's gender: man vs. woman) ANOVA. These effect sizes were similar to those obtained in earlier research on feminist humor appreciation and interpretation (Riquelme et al., 2021a). Considering feminist identification as a moderator in our analysis, a minimum of 30 participants per cell was required to test predicted interactions (Simmons et al., 2011).

To verify that there were no preexisting differences in feminist identification between groups before the experimental manipulation, we conducted a one-way ANOVA of feminist identification (as continuous variable), considering type of humor (neutral vs. feminist), joke teller's gender (man vs. woman), and participant gender (man vs. woman) as between-subject factors. We calculated partial eta-squared ( $\eta_p^2 \geq .01 / .06 / .13$  indicate small/medium/large effects; Cohen, 1988) to estimate the magnitude of effects.



For the main analyses, we followed Riquelme et al. (2021a) and performed several moderation analyses (Model 3 of PROCESS; Hayes, 2013) with humor type as an independent variable and joke teller's gender and feminist identification as moderator variables. Humor type (neutral = 0, feminist = 1) and joke teller's gender (man = 0, woman = 1) were dummy-coded. Dependent variables were scores in funniness, aversiveness, criticism of sexism, woman disparagement, and man disparagement. We repeated the analyses including participant gender and social desirability as covariates. We used bootstrap sampling with 5,000 iterations to obtain bias-corrected confidence intervals for the interaction effects. In addition, to control for Type I error, the Benjamini–Hochberg False Discovery Rate (FDR) correction procedure was applied to the set of obtained *p*-values using the *stats* package in R (Li & Barber, 2019). We calculated the standardized effect size  $f^2$  for the interaction between type of vignette and feminist identification ( $f^2 \geq .02/.15/.35$  indicate small/medium/large effects; Cohen, 1988) based on the change in  $R^2$  ( $\Delta f^2$ ). In the presence of a significant interaction, we selected simple slopes analyses to test the effect of type of humor at high (84<sup>th</sup>) and low (16<sup>th</sup>) values of feminist identification. In accordance with the guidance provided by Hayes and Rockwood (2017), and following previous studies (Vizcaíno-Cuenca et al., 2024), we selected percentiles as conditioning values (i.e., above the maximum or below the minimum of observed values) to avoid including values outside the range of the data sample.

## Results

### *Preliminary Analyses*

Results revealed no statistically significant differences in feminist identification scores between humor type conditions (neutral humor:  $M = 4.38$ ,  $SD = 1.82$ ; feminist humor:  $M = 4.70$ ,  $SD = 1.76$ ,  $F[1, 299] = 2.88$ ,  $p = .09$ ) or between joke teller's gender

conditions (man:  $M = 4.53$ ,  $SD = 1.83$ ; woman:  $M = 4.57$ ,  $SD = 1.77$ ,  $F[1, 299] = 0.01$ ,  $p = .913$ ). Women ( $M = 4.97$ ,  $SD = 1.77$ ) reported stronger feminist identification than men ( $M = 4.07$ ,  $SD = 1.71$ ),  $F(1, 299) = 2.88$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .07$ . No interactions between humor type, joke teller's gender and participant gender were found,  $F(1, 299) = 3.06$ ,  $p = .08$ .

### ***Appreciation of Humor as a Function of Joke Teller's Gender and Feminist***

#### ***Identification***

Table 1 shows the effect of humor type and joke teller's gender as moderated by feminist identification on funniness and aversiveness. First, there was no significant effect of humor type on funniness (Hypothesis 1a), although feminist humor evoked greater aversiveness than neutral humor (Hypothesis 1b). Secondly, there was no main effect of joke teller's gender on funniness (Hypothesis 2a) or aversiveness (Hypothesis 2b). Additionally, the following interaction effects on funniness and aversiveness were non-significant: humor type x feminist identification, humor type x joke teller's gender, and humor type x joke teller gender x feminist identification. These results held when participant gender and social desirability were included as covariates.

PLEASE INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

### ***Interpretation of Humor as a Function of Joke Teller's Gender and Feminist***

#### ***Identification***

Table 2 shows the main and interaction effects of humor type, joke teller's gender, and feminist identification on criticism of sexism, disparagement of women, and disparagement of men. First, as expected, feminist humor was seen as more critical of sexism (Hypothesis 1c), more disparaging of women (Hypothesis 1d), and more disparaging of men (Hypothesis 1e) than neutral humor. Second, as hypothesized, joke teller gender did not demonstrate a significant effect on criticism of sexism (Hypothesis

2c), disparagement of women (Hypothesis 2d), or disparagement of men (Hypothesis 2d).

Third, a significant interaction between humor type and feminist identification was found for criticism of sexism (Hypothesis 3a;  $f^2 = .21$ ) and for disparagement of men (Hypothesis 3c;  $f^2 = .04$ ), but not for disparagement of women (Hypothesis 3b). Specifically, feminist humor predicted greater criticism of sexism among participants with both high and low levels of feminist identification. However, the effect was more pronounced for those higher in feminist identification ( $b = 3.49$ ,  $SE = .11$ ,  $t = 31.90$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [3.27, 3.70]), compared to those lower in feminist identification ( $b = 2.09$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $t = 18.11$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [1.86, 2.31]). Specifically, men disparagement humor predicted stronger outcomes across levels of feminist identification, but the effect was more pronounced among those lower in feminist identification. At low levels of feminist identification, men disparagement humor was a stronger predictor ( $b = 0.93$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ,  $t = 8.96$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [0.72, 1.13]), whereas at high levels of feminist identification, the effect was weaker though still significant ( $b = 0.43$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ,  $t = 4.41$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [0.24, 0.63]).

We also found a significant interaction between humor type and joke teller's gender on criticism of sexism (Hypothesis 4a;  $f^2 = .02$ ). Specifically, feminist (vs. neutral) humor was associated with greater criticism of sexism when told by both women and men, but the effect was stronger when the joke was told by a woman ( $b = 3.05$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $t = 25.57$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [2.82, 3.29]) compared to a man ( $b = 2.62$ ,  $SE = .13$ ,  $t = 20.27$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [2.37, 2.87]). No interactions were observed between humor type and joke teller's gender regarding disparagement of women (Hypothesis 4b) or disparagement of men (Hypothesis 4c). There were no significant main effects of joke teller's gender on disparagement of women or men.

Moreover, as expected, a significant three-way interaction among type of humor, joke teller's gender, and feminist identification emerged on criticism of sexism ( $f^2 = .21$ ; Figure 1). Specifically, the interaction between type of humor and joke teller's gender was significant among participants with lower levels of feminist identification ( $b = .82$ ,  $F[1, 299] = 13.45$ ,  $p < .001$ ) but not among those with higher levels of feminist identification ( $b = .12$ ,  $F[1, 299] = .30$ ,  $p = .587$ ). Supporting Hypothesis 5a, participants with lower feminist identification perceived greater criticism of sexism when exposed to feminist (vs. neutral) humor, regardless of whether it was posted by a woman or a man. However, the effect was significantly stronger when the humor was posted by a woman. Specifically, among participants lower in feminist identification, feminist humor posted by a woman was perceived as more critical of sexism ( $b = 2.46$ ,  $SE = .15$ ,  $t = 16.10$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [2.16, 2.76]) versus a man ( $b = 1.64$ ,  $SE = .16$ ,  $t = 10.10$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [1.32, 1.96]). However, no significant three-way interaction emerged for perceived disparagement of women (Hypothesis 5b) or men (Hypothesis 5c). All results held when participant gender and social desirability were included as covariates.

PLEASE INSERT TABLE 2 AND FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

## Discussion

In Study 1, funniness ratings did not differ by humor type, but feminist humor was perceived as more aversive than neutral humor. Consistent with expectations, feminist humor was also interpreted as more critical of sexism, and more disparaging of both women and men, than neutral humor. In contrast, the joke teller's gender did not exert significant main effects on perceptions of criticism of sexism or disparagement of women or men.

More importantly, the interaction effects highlighted the role of feminist identification. Feminist humor predicted greater criticism of sexism among participants across the spectrum of feminist identification, but the effect was stronger among those higher in feminist identification. This suggests that individuals with stronger feminist identification may be especially attuned to the critical function of feminist humor. Conversely, in the case of men disparagement humor, participants lower in feminist identification showed stronger responses, whereas the effect was weaker though still significant among those higher in feminist identification. This pattern indicates that disparagement of men may resonate more strongly among those less aligned with feminist beliefs.

We also found evidence for the role of contextual cues. A significant interaction emerged between humor type and joke teller's gender, such that feminist humor was perceived as more critical of sexism when told by both women and men, but the effect was stronger when the humor was told by a woman. Extending this, a three-way interaction revealed that this effect of the joke teller's gender was qualified by participants' feminist identification: for those higher in feminist identification, perceptions of criticism did not differ by the gender of the joke teller, whereas for those lower in feminist identification, feminist humor was perceived as more critical of sexism when told by a woman than when told by a man. This suggests that individuals with weaker feminist identification rely more on contextual cues—such as the joke teller's gender—when interpreting feminist humor, consistent with dual-process models of persuasion, which propose that individuals who are less motivated or less aligned with a message are more responsive to peripheral cues (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). One possible explanation is that feminist humor told by women is seen as more congruent

with the subversion of sexism, whereas men's use of feminist humor may invite skepticism or raise doubts about their motives.

Taken together, these findings support our hypotheses that humor type and feminist identification jointly shape interpretations of feminist humor, and that the joke teller's gender matters particularly for individuals lower in feminist identification. By highlighting how both individual differences and contextual cues influence interpretation, these results provide a foundation for Study 2, where we examined whether such dynamics extend to collective action outcomes.

## Study 2

Study 2 built on the findings from Study 1, which indicated that participants with weaker feminist identification perceived greater criticism of sexism in feminist humor shared by a woman (vs. a man). Because feminist jokes shared by a woman were perceived as more critical of sexism, we expected this enhanced interpretation of the jokes to raise awareness of sexism and motivate participants to combat it to a greater extent. In this study, participants were exposed exclusively to feminist humor and we manipulated the gender of the person who posted the jokes or vignettes (woman vs. man). Later, we assessed participants' proclivity for collective action.

We hypothesized that participants' proclivity for collective action would be higher after exposure to feminist humor posted by a woman (vs. a man) (Hypothesis 1). Additionally, drawing on previous studies (Riquelme et al., 2019), we expected to find a positive relation between feminist identification and collective action (Hypothesis 2), and an interaction between the gender of the feminist joke teller and feminist identification. Specifically, based on the findings from Study 1, we hypothesized that collective action intentions would be greater when feminist humor was posted by a woman (vs. a man) for participants with lower feminist identification (Hypothesis 3).

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

The final sample was composed of 200 Spanish participants (79 men [39.5%] and 121 women [60.5%]) with an age range between 18 and 65 years (men:  $M_{\text{age}} = 25.78$  years,  $SD = 10.02$ , range = 18–63; women:  $M_{\text{age}} = 29.21$  years,  $SD = 10.46$ , range = 18–65). Regarding sexual orientation, 148 participants identified as heterosexual (74%), 29 as bisexual (14.5%), 7 as gay or lesbian (3.5%), and 2 as having another orientation (1%). A total of 14 participants (7%) preferred not to disclose their sexual orientation. Regarding educational level, 155 had completed or were pursuing undergraduate studies (77.5%), whereas 45 had not (22.5%).

### ***Procedure***

Again, the sample was recruited through social media platforms (e.g., WhatsApp, Twitter, Telegram, Instagram) and the inclusion criteria were similar to Study 1. Once the participants agreed to participate in an online survey (estimated duration  $\sim 15$  min), they were informed about the instructions of the research. Participants first completed a measure of feminist identification and social desirability. Next, they were randomly assigned to one of two conditions with joke teller's gender as a between-subjects factor: (1) man (35 men and 58 women); and (2) woman (44 men and 63 women). After viewing an image of the user profile and reading jokes, participants completed the same measures of funniness, aversiveness, and collective action as in Study 1. At the end, participants were debriefed about the study's purpose and could enter a raffle to win €50

### ***Materials***

As before, participants completed the same measures of feminist identification (Estevan-Reina et al., 2020,  $\alpha = .95$ ), social desirability (Megías et al., 2018,  $\alpha = .67$ ), funniness ( $\alpha = .76$ ), and aversiveness ( $\alpha = .75$ ).

**Experimental Stimuli.** Similar to Study 1, participants were exposed to a fictitious social media profile in which we manipulated the *gender of the user profile*: man (Juan) vs. woman (Alicia). Participants read the same feminist jokes used in Study 1.

**Collective Action.** Participants' proclivity for collective action regarding gender equality was assessed using a Spanish adaptation of a general measure of collective action proclivity (van Zomeren et al., 2008; Spanish adaptation from Riquelme et al., 2019). Participants rated their likelihood of engaging in these behaviors on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) (e.g., "going on strike to address the wage gap between men and women"). Consistent with previous research (Riquelme et al., 2019, 2021b), the scale demonstrated good reliability ( $\alpha = .85$ ). We then computed an average index of proclivity for collective action, with higher scores reflecting a stronger inclination toward such behaviors. Scores on this scale have been found to positively correlate with proclivity to collective action (van Zomeren et al., 2004) and feminist identification (Riquelme et al., 2019).

**Demographics.** Participants also provided sociodemographic information on the following variables: age, gender, sexual orientation, level of education, occupation, nationality, and native language.

### ***Data Cleaning & Analytic Plan***

As in Study 1, optimal sample size was estimated before data collection and data analyses by performing statistical power analyses using G\*Power software. A priori power analyses suggested that a minimum of 128 participants would detect a small-to-



medium effect size ( $f^2 = .25$ ;  $\alpha = .05$ ) with a power greater of 80% (two groups, between-subject design). Again, following the guidelines of Simmons et al. (2011), we considered 30 participants per cell to test predicted interactions. An initial sample of 243 Spanish participants was recruited through social media platforms (e.g., WhatsApp, Twitter, Telegram, Instagram). We removed data from 43 participants: 33 failed the manipulation check, 3 reported that Spanish was not their native language, and 7 did not complete the survey.

To verify that there were no preexisting differences in feminist identification (as a continuous variable) between groups before the experimental manipulation, we conducted a one-way ANOVA of the feminist identification scores, considering joke teller's gender (man vs. woman) and participant gender (man vs. woman) as between-subject factors. As in Study 1, to estimate the magnitude of effects, we calculated partial eta-squared ( $\eta_p^2 \geq .01 / .06 / .13$  indicate small/medium/large effects; Cohen, 1988).

For our hypotheses, we first conducted separate one-way ANOVAs examining the effects of joke teller's gender (man vs. woman) on funniness and aversiveness. Next, we performed a moderation analysis (Model 1 of PROCESS; Hayes, 2013) with joke teller's gender as an independent variable, collective action as a dependent variable and feminist identification (a continuous variable) as a moderator variable. Again, joke teller's gender (man = 0, woman = 1) was dummy-coded. Gender and social desirability were included as covariates. We computed the standardized effect size  $f^2$  of the interaction between joke teller's gender and feminist identification ( $f^2 \geq .02 / .15 / .35$  indicate small/medium/large effects; Cohen, 1988) based on the change in  $R^2$  ( $\Delta f^2$ ).

## **Results**

### ***Preliminary Analyses***

Results showed that feminist identification did not differ between experimental conditions (woman joke teller:  $M = 4.54$ ,  $SD = 1.78$ ; man joke teller:  $M = 4.68$ ,  $SD = 1.81$ ),  $F(1, 196) = .01$ ,  $p = .93$ . As expected, women ( $M = 5.18$ ,  $SD = 1.61$ ) reported stronger feminist identification than men ( $M = 3.73$ ,  $SD = 1.71$ ),  $F(1, 196) = 37.58$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .16$ . There was no interaction between joke teller's gender and participant gender on feminist identification,  $F(1, 196) = 1.46$ ,  $p = .23$ .

There were no significant differences in funniness between experimental conditions,  $F(1, 198) = .25$ ,  $p = .62$  (men:  $M = 1.86$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ; women:  $M = 1.78$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ). Additionally, feminist humor told by a man ( $M = 1.23$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ) was perceived as being as aversive as feminist humor told by a woman ( $M = .95$ ,  $SD = .96$ ),  $F(1, 198) = 3.68$ ,  $p = .06$ .

### ***Proclivity to Collective Action***

In contrast to Hypothesis 1, results did not reveal a main effect of joke teller's gender on proclivity to engage in collective action for gender equality ( $b = .11$ ,  $SE = .17$ ,  $t = .61$ ,  $p = .55$ , 95% CI [-.24, .45]). However, in line with Hypothesis 2, higher feminist identification scores predicted a greater tendency to engage in collective action ( $b = .62$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $t = 8.36$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.48, .77]).

In line with Hypothesis 3, a significant interaction between joke teller's gender and feminist identification was found ( $b = -.22$ ,  $SE = .10$ ,  $t = -2.28$ ,  $p = .02$ , 95% CI [-.41, -.03];  $\Delta f^2 = .02$ ). As shown in Figure 3, exposure to feminist humor shared by women (vs. shared by men) increased proclivity to engage in collective action, but only in participants with lower feminist identification ( $b = .60$ ,  $SE = .28$ ,  $t = 2.15$ ,  $p = .03$ , 95% CI [.05, 1.15]), not in participants with higher feminist identification ( $b = -.35$ ,  $SE = .26$ ,  $t = -1.33$ ,  $p = .19$ , 95% CI [-.87, .17]).

PLEASE INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

## Discussion

The results of Study 2 reflect the role that the feminist humor joke teller's gender can play in feminist mobilization. Although we did not find a main effect of joke teller's gender on collective action for gender equality, our results showed that feminist identification had a main effect on collective action for gender equality and a moderating effect on the relation between joke teller's gender and collective action. Specifically, Study 2 showed that feminist humor posted by a woman (vs. a man) was more effective at motivating participation in collective action among weaker feminist identifiers. However, it is important to realize the magnitude of the means in the context of the scale used. First, the level of collective action proclivity among weaker feminist identifiers was above the midpoint of the scale (4.5 out of 7), while it was considerably higher among high feminist identifiers (6.5 out of 7). The mean level of collective action for participants exposed to a male joke teller was 4.0, compared to 4.5 for those exposed to a female joke teller. These differences suggest that the variation between weaker and stronger feminist identifiers is important to consider when interpreting the magnitude and implications of the results, especially since the higher feminist identifiers may exhibit a ceiling effect on collective action due to their scores approaching the scale maximum.

## General Discussion

The primary aim of this research was to analyze the effect of the joke teller's gender on the appreciation and interpretation of feminist humor, and on the motivation to participate in collective action for gender equality. Results of Study 1 replicated prior research on feminist humor (Riquelme et al., 2019, 2021a), showing that, compared to neutral humor, feminist humor was perceived as a tool for criticizing sexism, especially among individuals with higher feminist identification. More importantly, these results

highlighted that feminist humor was perceived as more critical of sexism when told by both women and men, but the effect was stronger when the teller was a woman. This difference was particularly evident among participants with lower feminist identification, for whom the gender of the joke teller shaped perceptions of criticism of sexism, whereas among those higher in feminist identification, the effect of teller gender was negligible. However, we did not find significant differences in appreciation responses (i.e., funniness and aversiveness) based on the gender of the joke teller or feminist identification. In Study 2, exposure to feminist humor posted by a woman (vs. a man) also led to a stronger proclivity to collective action among participants with lower feminist identification.

These findings once again highlight the contextual nature of humor in its appreciation and interpretation, but also in its psychosocial consequences and implications. The relation between joke teller's gender and the interpretation of humor by perceivers has been thoroughly addressed in studies about sexist humor (e.g., Ford, 2000). Although some studies have analyzed the perceived funniness and rejection of neutral humor told by men (vs. women; Coolidge, 2020), to our knowledge, no studies have specifically explored the effects of the gender of the joke teller in feminist humor.

In this regard, the *elaboration likelihood model* (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) provides an interpretive framework for analyzing how individual differences can influence the interpretation of feminist humor based on the gender of the joke teller, leading to diverse psychosocial effects. According to this model, two distinct routes of persuasion may be triggered based on the individual differences of the message recipients: the central route and the peripheral route. The central route is activated in individuals who hold strong and committed beliefs about the arguments of the persuasive message, think about the message, critically and carefully analyze the

presented arguments, and evaluate its possible consequences (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Consistent with the findings of Study 1, participants with higher feminist identification perceived feminist humor as more critical, likely conceiving it as a type of humor focused on criticism of sexism, not disparagement. This means that participants with higher feminist identification, who are more aware of gender inequity, readily discern sexism (Redford et al., 2018), focus more on the content of confrontation messages, and are unaffected by contextual cues (e.g., joke teller's gender) to reach interpretive conclusions.

The peripheral route is more likely to be activated in individuals who are not committed to the message, lack motivation for critical reflection, and whose attitudes are more influenced by elements unrelated to the argument itself, such as external signals like gender of the joke teller. Thus, according to the possible ways of interpreting this type of humor (Study 1), individuals with weaker feminist identification may have more difficulty detecting sexism, hold less aligned beliefs regarding feminist goals, and exhibit less motivation to deeply analyze the message. Ultimately, people with weaker feminist identification are likely not to focus as much on the critical content of the humorous material to draw an interpretive conclusion but rather on the format, the use of heuristics, or contextual cues (e.g., gender of the joke teller; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

In this regard, weaker feminist identifiers may perceive men who share feminist humor as protectors of women, keeping them in a position of dependence and weakness but without a vindicating function against sexism (Estevan-Reina et al., 2020). In turn, it might seem incongruent for them to perceive a man using humor to confront sexism since men have historically been agents in producing humor against women, reinforcing sexism and violence, with women as a passive audience (Willet et al., 2012).

The results of Study 2 made it possible to expand the effects of feminist humor based on the gender of the joke teller on collective action for gender equality, taking into account individual differences between recipients. First, we did not find a main effect of the gender of the joke teller on participants' propensity for collective action. However, studies on the role of the gender of the teller of non-humorous feminist messages suggest both advantages and disadvantages regarding the role of men as allies in instigating social change. Although some men may be more effective and persuasive than women in advocating for equal rights (Gervais & Hillard, 2014; Subašić et al., 2018), they may also be perceived as intruders who seek to maintain power, leadership, and superiority over women (Hässler et al., 2021).

In addition, our results reinforce the relation between higher feminist identification and a greater involvement in collective action for gender equality. Previous research has shown that self-identifying as a feminist is a significant predictor of supporting feminist organizations (Redford et al., 2018), signing online petitions against sexism (Liss et al., 2004), and attending talks or workshops on gender equality (Nelson et al., 2008). Consistent with our findings, individuals who identify more strongly with feminists are those who display greater motivation to advocate for the fight against gender inequity (Radke et al., 2018).

Finally, our results showed that the joke teller's gender played a crucial role in motivating collective action among participants with lower feminist identification. According to Eagly and Karau's (2002) *role congruity theory*, prejudice against women in leadership roles may occur as a result of the perceived incongruity of women occupying leadership roles. In the case of women who create or share feminist jokes, their behavior breaks traditional feminine gender norms. However, their connection to the subversion of sexism (Willet et al., 2012) is often seen as more consistent or

congruent than that of men. Historically, men have been more associated with reinforcing sexism (Jablonka, 2023), especially in humor (Case & Lippard, 2009). Specifically, individuals with weaker feminist identification—who tend to struggle more with detecting sexism, understanding critical messages, and holding strong feminist arguments—are more likely to interpret feminist jokes effectively when they perceive this congruence (i.e., women aligned with subversion). This clearer understanding reduces misunderstandings and can motivate them to support the goals of feminist humor, ultimately encouraging their participation in collective action.

More remarkably, and without neglecting the role of the confronter's gender as a contextual cue, we revisit the *elaboration likelihood model* (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986) to highlight the findings related to weaker feminist identifiers. These participants may have paid more attention to peripheral cues—in this specific case, the gender of the joke teller—to interpret jokes. Previous research has shown that these participants are also more sensitive to other peripheral cues—such as the format of the messages—to reach interpretive conclusions and change their behavior.

Vizcaíno-Cuenca et al. (2024) found that feminist humor, in contrast to serious feminist information, more effectively motivated weaker feminist identifiers to take collective action on gender equality. Consistent with previous research (Riquelme et al., 2021a; Saucier et al., 2018), for this humor to subvert sexism, perceivers must interpret it as being subversive; otherwise, it may reinforce gender inequity. Perceiving that this humor is told by a woman (i.e., a contextual cue or peripheral signal) could align with identifying its subversive function, which is historically congruent with women, ultimately motivating social change through collective action. However, further empirical research on feminist humor and a deeper exploration of its explanatory mechanisms are necessary for confirmation.

## **Limitations and Future Research**

This research is not without limitations. While we examined the effect of joke teller gender in the context of sharing feminist humor on social media, we did not directly investigate the role of women versus men as creators or performers of such humor. Future studies could address this by incorporating real feminist performances (e.g., male vs. female comedians) to assess how delivery and context influence perceptions and reactions. In addition to gender, other transactional variables related to the joke teller may also be relevant, such as gender expression or non-conformity, perceived attractiveness or likability, level of objectification (particularly for female joke tellers), and broader social identity markers such as race/ethnicity or social class.

Likewise, future research should consider a broader spectrum of gender identities among participants, including transgender and non-binary individuals, to gain a more inclusive understanding of audience perceptions and responses. It would also be valuable to explore individual trajectories of change, as well as potential carry-over or cumulative effects across multiple exposures. Moreover, future studies should examine potential indirect effects—such as the interpretation of feminist humor as a critique of sexism—to better understand how these messages may motivate collective action. While our research focused exclusively on feminist humor, incorporating a neutral control condition and examining other types of humor (e.g., sexist or men-disparaging jokes) could offer a more nuanced view of how joke content and joke teller gender interact to shape social and political responses.

Finally, research to date has been limited to exploring the role of sexist attitudes and feminist identification. However, considering the literature on humor, future studies could analyze the role of other potential variables related to the mechanism implicated in its appreciation, interpretation, and psychosocial effects (e.g., confrontation,



collective action). Some examples are attitudes involved in reinforcing or subverting gender inequity (e.g., social dominance, masculinity, gender roles; e.g., Xiaoting & Chenjun, 2023) and personality factors that may be related to the preference or rejection of this type of humor (e.g., conservatism; Plessen et al., 2020).

### **Practical Implications**

Our results showed that women, as disseminators of feminist humor, positively impacted individuals with weaker feminist identification, influencing the interpretation, appreciation of the joke, and collective action. Consequently, these findings contribute to the research of men as allies against sexism and the debate on the question: “men in the feminist struggle?”. In Spain, feminism has gained strength in the last decade. From famous men —actors, politicians or academics— implicated in some campaigns or feminist movements joining the fight against sexism (<https://elpais.com/smoda/hombres-espanoles-feministas-asi-movimiento-he-for-she-espana.html>) to anonymous men who form associations for gender equality (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-48132191>), all can significantly contribute to amplifying the message of gender justice. However, humor is less explored when considering men as disseminators or producers of feminist humor to combat sexism.

Despite men's involvement in denouncing gender inequalities (Tougas & Beaton, 2002) and their potential to motivate feminist mobilization (Drury & Kaiser, 2014), our findings suggest that, among individuals with weaker feminist identification, men may be less effective than women in promoting collective action when sharing feminist humor. Nevertheless, although women joke tellers may facilitate a more favorable interpretation of feminist humor among these individuals—and thus greater engagement in collective action—the active participation of people of all genders, including men, women, transgender, non-binary individuals, and others from

marginalized communities (e.g., sex workers), remains essential to achieving true gender equality. A diverse and inclusive feminist presence is equally crucial among politicians, activists, and other agents of social change involved in efforts to mobilize against gender inequity.

Overall, our research contributes to the growing body of work on humor as a vehicle for social change. Whereas previous studies have emphasized the role of sexist humor in reinforcing gender hierarchies (e.g., Romero-Sánchez et al., 2017), our findings underscore the potential of feminist humor to raise awareness and foster collective mobilization against sexism—particularly in informal, everyday settings such as social media.

## **Conclusions**

Through two studies, we analyzed the role of the gender of the joke teller in the perception of feminist humor, as well as its psychosocial effects in motivating collective action for gender equality. Results showed that when a woman (vs. a man) disseminates feminist humor, individuals with weaker (vs. stronger) feminist identification interpret the jokes as being critical of sexism, and also, these jokes have a potential effect in motivating collective action. These findings provide empirical support for the interpretation of feminist humor in relation to individual differences, while also prompting reflection on the role of men as allies in the fight against sexism through humor. The participation of men in telling feminist jokes may have complex implications for audiences with lower feminist identification, as it may lead them to identify less criticism of sexism in this type of humor.

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**Table 1**

*Funniness and Aversiveness Responses as a Function of Humor Type, Joke Teller Gender, and Feminist Identification*

Predictors	Funniness					Aversiveness				
	Total $R^2$	$F$	$b$	$SE$	95% $CI$	Total $R^2$	$F$	$b$	$SE$	95% $CI$
	.06	2.74**				.14	6.77***			
Humor type			-.15	.17	[-.48, .19]			.45**	.14	[.17, .73]
Joke Teller Gender			.24	.17	[-.09, .56]			-.19	.14	[-.46, .09]
Feminist Identification			-.05	.07	[-.18, .08]			-.01	.06	[-.12, .10]
Humor type X Feminist Identification			.14	.09	[-.04, .32]			-.07	.08	[-.22, .09]
Humor type X Joke Teller Gender			-.33	.23	[-.79, .12]			.34	.20	[-.04, .73]
Joke Teller Gender X Feminist Identification			.12	.09	[-.06, .31]			.00	.08	[-.15, .16]
Humor Type X Joke Teller Gender X Feminist Identification			-.06	.13	[-.31, .20]			.02	.11	[-.20, .23]

*Note.*  $N = 307$ . \*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*  $p < .001$ . Bootstrap sample size = 5,000. Corrected  $p$ -values are reported based on the Benjamini-Hochberg procedure. Humor type was dummy-coded: feminist = 1, neutral = 0.

**Table 2**

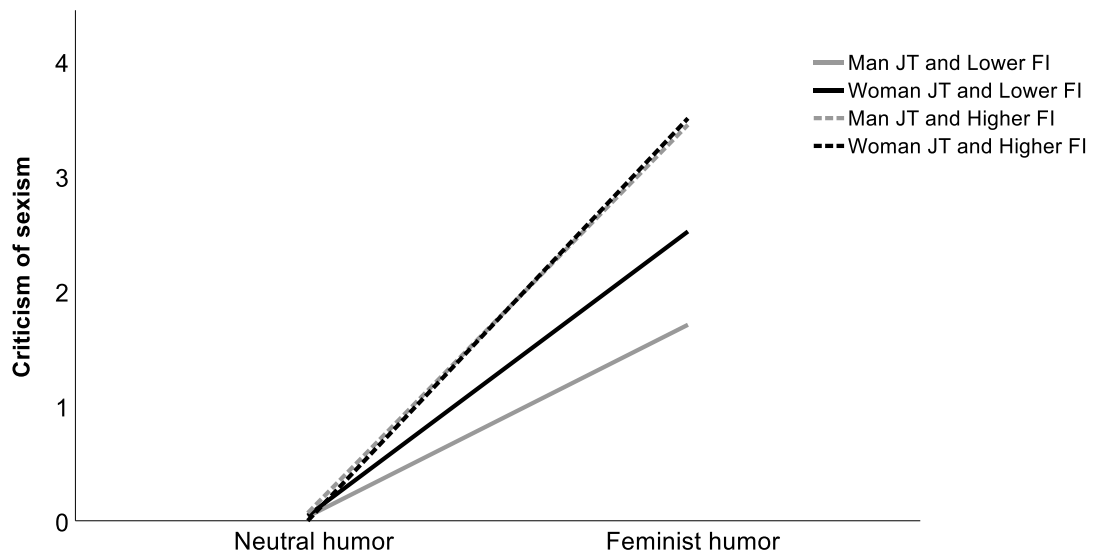
*Perceived Criticism of Sexism and Disparagement of Women and Men as a Function of Humor Type, Joke Teller Gender, and Feminist Identification*

Predictors	Criticism of Sexism					Women Disparagement					Men Disparagement				
	Total $R^2$	$F$	$B$	$SE$	95% $CI$	Total $R^2$	$F$	$b$	$SE$	95% $CI$	Total $R^2$	$F$	$b$	$SE$	95% $CI$
	.86	261.84***				.29	17.59***				.29	17.26***			
Humor type			2.57***	.11	[2.36, 2.77]			.84***	.14	[.58, 1.11]			.66***	.10	[.47, .86]
Gender Joke Teller			-.03	.10	[-.24, .17]			-.01	.13	[-.27, .25]			-.05	.10	[-.24, .14]
Feminist Identification			.01	.04	[-.07, .09]			.01	.05	[-.09, .12]			.01	.04	[-.07, .09]
Humor X Gender Joke Teller			.45**	.14	[.17, .73]			.20	.18	[-.16, .56]			.01	.13	[-.25, .27]
Humor type X Feminist Identification			.43***	.06	[.31, .54]			.12	.07	[-.02, .27]			-.17*	.05	[-.28, -.07]
Gender Joke Teller X Feminist Identification			-.02	.06	[-.13, .09]			-.01	.07	[-.15, .13]			-.02	.05	[-.12, .09]
Humor Type X Gender Joke Teller X Feminist Identification			-.17*	.08	[-.33, -.01]			-.11	.10	[-.31, .09]			.10	.07	[-.05, .24]

*Note.*  $N = 307$ . \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . Bootstrap sample size = 5,000. Corrected  $p$ -values are reported based on the Benjamini-Hochberg procedure. Humor type was dummy-coded: feminist = 1, neutral = 0.

**Figure 1**

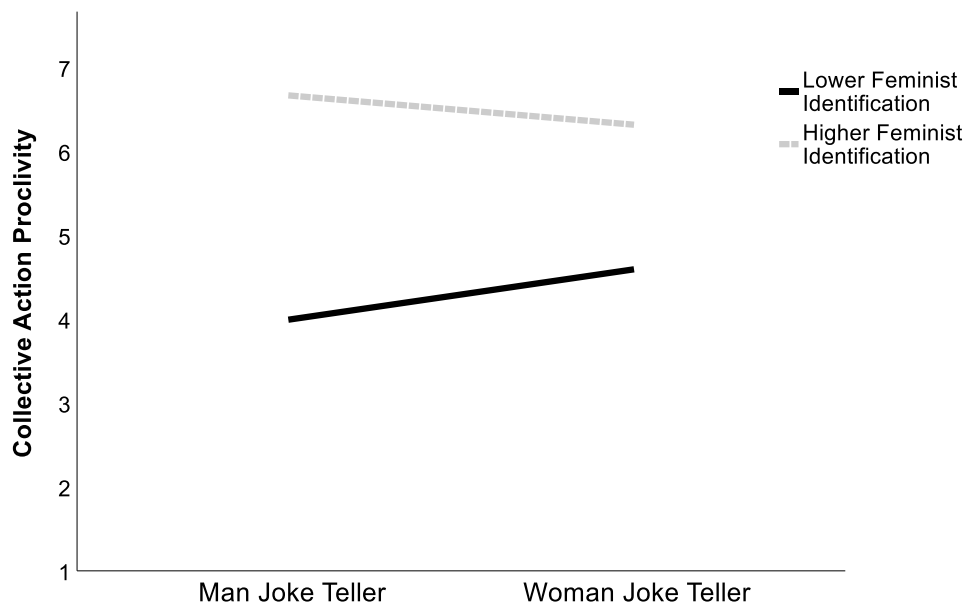
*Criticism of Sexism as a function of Type of Humor, Joke Teller Gender and Feminist Identification*



*Note.* Solid black line indicates significant relation. JT = Joke Teller; FI = Feminist Identification.

**Figure 2**

*Collective Action Proclivity as a function of Joke Teller Gender and Feminist Identification*



*Note.* Solid black line indicates significant relation.