

Minority Report

Joking About the Other

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Introduction

Fairly standard for the venue even on a Tuesday night, I was tightly sandwiched between a friend and a stranger at the Comedy Cellar in New York City. One drink into the two-drink minimum, Jessica Kirson, a white Jewish lesbian took the stage. I had seen her only in small doses on television, five to seven minutes maximum, so this stage performance took me by surprise. That night her comedy was feisty, fast-paced, and aggressive; she had the audience rolling with laughter seconds after taking command of the microphone. About halfway through her fifteen-minute set, after making fun of Jewish folks, a group to which she belongs, she moved on to a story about ordering Chinese take-out. The audience responded most favorably to her impressions of the Chinese-American restaurant staff that positioned them as alternately inscrutable and ignorant. Cultural idioms and language barriers have long been the stuff of comedy in the U.S., and Kirson cashed in on such cultural differences that night. She is not alone, and the frequency of jokes that target and end up disparaging marginalized identities, or what I will also refer to as the Other, indicate their commercial viability.

Peddling divisiveness and prejudice that appears authentic is not generally good for business. Comics defend questionable jokes by citing intentionality. If the intent is to be funny, not harmful, then comics should have a right to share the joke. Stand-up comedy has a unique built-in mechanism for challenging reproach, i.e., “It’s just a joke.” Joanna Gilbert writes that “humor simultaneously advances agendas and disavows its own impact” (57). Assuming comics’ intentions are good renders moot any criticism leveled by fans and/or fellow comics that some jokes *do* harm and are themselves hateful

reinforcement of the most insidious beliefs we have conjured about Others. It is a conversation stopper and stifles serious inquiry into how and why jokes ridiculing marginalized communities continue to proliferate and meet with such success. And they do. Rhetorical strategies for joking disparagingly about race, sexuality, and other indices of identity are plentiful and cleverly crafted to mitigate audience disapproval and instead evoke pleasure. In general, the use of these tried and true linguistic mechanisms ensures positive audience reception. Herein, I identify a broad array of rhetorical strategies used to broach topics about identity and examine how stand-up comics navigate discussions and portrayals of the Other in their performances.

The invaluable scholarship of Raúl Pérez and Simon Weaver frame this project, in which I identify the ways that stand-up comics can and do joke about marginalized identities. I broaden current scholarship on the topic to be inclusive of multiple (and intersecting) identity categories. There is no single identity or confluence of identity categories—male, female, black, Jewish, queer, wealthy, or differently abled—from which such humor originates. There is also no single target or mode of attack. Comics employ these strategies in order to introduce bigoted beliefs about minorities. These strategies demonstrate the rhetorical patterns that make bigotry acceptable, which could include but would certainly not be limited to prejudices based on race/ethnicity, sexuality, religion, class, ability, nationality, and gender. Joking about Others can be done in ways that reinforce stereotypes and stock characters but can also be done in ways that challenge those stereotypes, for instance by deploying charged humor, a type of humor aimed at confronting social inequalities while simultaneously stoking cultural community and offering solutions for redress (Krefting). This is where possibilities for subversion abound.

Mapping Rhetorical Strategies

When it comes to joking about identity in the latter 21st century, the content and intent of the comic performer are characterized by ambiguity. This makes the task of interpreting jokes all the more difficult and offers comics greater leeway for dodging accusations leveled by listeners. To that effect, Giseline Kuipers writes: “The polysemy of a joke makes it impossible to say with certainty which function it fulfills or what the joke teller meant: humor is by definition an ambivalent form of communication” (9). Humor exhorts ambivalence because it exists within a play frame—a comic may or may not mean what he says and audience members may or may not agree with a joke’s premise just because they are laughing. Within comic frames exists coding mechanisms, what I am calling rhetorical strategies that cue

audiences when it is appropriate or acceptable to laugh. Simon Weaver examines the ways racism abounds in British humor, paying attention to recent coding mechanisms for joking about the racial Other. He argues that racist humor is successful for a couple reasons: “First, there is the placement of cultural racism in a comic frame that is not serious and so, to employ Freud’s terminology, an expression of tendentious discourse with a lower level of social disapprobation. Second, the rhetorical devices of humour provide key coding mechanisms which confuse and multiply meaning and interpretation, and so help to hide racism” (Weaver 104). Comic frames work to situate who does and does not get the joke; it is only funny if you have the requisite knowledge—social, political, cultural, etc.—to successfully interpret the joke (Eco). Comic frames allow for bigoted joking because it is always just a joke and coding mechanisms exacerbate uncertainty about the appropriate way to interpret it.

Common Sense Strategies

Raúl Pérez identifies what he calls the “*racial common sense* strategy—that is, acknowledging the pitfalls of engaging in discourse ‘about a group you don’t represent’” (“Learning” 488). More specifically, I argue that this entails a number of strategies that make allowances for jokes about Others, including: (1) establishing ally or insider status, (2) prolepsis or contextualizing jokes enough to position the comic as aware of and sympathetic to histories of oppression/subordination; this is preemptive work that identifies why listeners may be offended in order to ameliorate the offense before it happens, and (3) linguistic choices that establish a homogenous audience willing to assent to the premise of the joke. These strategies can be used independently of one another or in concert with any other strategies.

Stop me if you’ve heard this one: “My best friend is gay or black or Asian or Jewish...” This lead-in to a joke is perhaps the most familiar and popular rhetorical strategy used as preamble to jokes about minorities. These and countless other similar introductions to audiences signal a comic’s quasi-insider status, that he exists in proximity to the group in question reassures listeners that he has a right to say what he is about to say. Black stand-up comic Malik S uses his gay brother as fodder in his routines:

I’m not gay but my brother’s gay. My brother’s in Miami so I called my brother. I was like: “N-slur, you need to move out here. There’s so much dick out here for ya [*laughter*].” And my brother’s really gay. I ain’t making this shit up. He’s a flight attendant so you know I ain’t lying, ya know [*laughter*]. These dudes just walking around [*in a higher octave lisping voice*]: “Peanuts, peanuts!” [*laughter*] ... My brother so gay he texts in cursive. I’m like, “how you text in cursive, goddamn?!” [*laughter*]. But one

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thing about gay dudes, you got to give them props. They always got money. You've never met a broke gay dude, have you? If you meet a broke gay dude, it's his first week, he just started, that's why. That's why [laughter]. His paperwork ain't go through yet [laughter].

Positioning himself as familial insider, close to, but not “of” the group, the audience grants Malik an allowance to make fun of his brother. But his brother is not the only butt of this joke—all gay men are—and the source of humor derives from stereotypes circulating about gay men: fey affects, pre-occupations with sex and money, and pink-collar professions that immediately identify queer men entering the field, e.g., nursing, teaching, and administrative work. Positing degrees of intimacy with the targeted group can justify what comics pass off as benign derision, particularly when situated in a comic frame.

The second strategy, prolepsis, or situating oneself as anti-bigoted before and/or after joking about an Other, reduces the likelihood of negative feedback from audience members. Herein, the comic operates in “anticipation of criticism” (Weaver 105). For example, this may entail bookending such humor with disclaimers situating the comic as anti-racist and knowledgeable about the legacy of racism, even as they make racist jokes. White stand-up comic Bill Dawes does precisely this, citing his own relationships with black women (signaling proximity) then criticizing his father for racist beliefs.

See, it's fucked up because my first girlfriend was black ... and uh ... she still is. But I grew up in a very racist area called the United States [laughter]. And my dad was ... my dad's a Republican. Spoiler alert! Racist [laughter]! ... My dad told me—I swear this is true, I'm just sharing with you guys—my dad said: “You know, Bill, in the Bible, God separated the races. He didn't think that white people should commune with black people.” [Whispers softly] My dad told me that; that's fucked up right? That's weird. I know that's awkward [laughter]. [Resumes normal voice] First of all, the Bible is black, and there's proof in it that Adam and Eve were also black. You know Eve was a black woman. And I'm not just saying that because she was made from a rib [sounds of disapproval from the crowd]. NO! That's not—[laughter; points to the Laugh Factory sign behind him, then gives middle finger to the crowd in a sweeping gesture from side to side]. I'm saying because she was a strong, independent woman! She was in the garden, she was hungry. She saw the apple. She took it [reaches for imaginary apple and bites into it]. [Assumes a sassy feminine voice] Give me that apple, snake! [Resuming normal voice] It wasn't a white ... you know it wasn't an Asian, even. An Asian would've eaten the snake [laughter]. [Assumes an “Asian” accent] Oh, put some duck sauce on that serpent. Gonna be delicious! Sweet and sour serpent! One special, number thirty-nine [laughter].

Prolepsis offers information about a comic's ideological leanings and confronts potential counterarguments in advance of telling a joke that could be read as insensitive. Here, Dawes positions his father's beliefs about interracial marriage as racist, and when the audience audibly objects to his claims that

Eve was a black woman because she was made from a rib, he attempts to recover by insisting Eve was black *because* she “was a strong, independent woman.” Not a single objection can be heard following his mimicry of an Asian woman. He primed the audience for this joke’s success while also cashing in on the public’s high threshold for mockery of the Asian Other.

The third common sense strategy for entertaining audiences with jokes about groups to whom you don’t belong establishes the audience as homogenous, like-minded enough to appreciate the jokes being dispensed. Comics achieve this through the “use of the verbal cues or ‘keys’ that signal[s] to the audience that they [are] a ‘group’” and through oscillation between serious and humorous modes of discourse, remind listeners that any insults leveled are merely jokes (Pérez, “Rhetoric” 81,85). About this strategy, Pérez argues: “These strategies [work] to homogenize the audience while insulting them, and creat[e] a ‘community of laughter’ that [will] tolerate racial and ethnic ridicule” (“Rhetoric” 85). Verbal cueing remains a choice way of framing the performance as all in good fun amongst a community the comic works hard to establish as ideologically congruent. Repeated use of “you know,” instead of “I know,” continually draws the audience into collusion with the joke’s premise, reinforcing and increasing the likelihood of positive responses. Use of plural pronouns establishing a “we” help to do that work; more importantly they delineate *us and them*.

Self-Deprecation Tactics

The use of self-deprecating humor or negative self-presentation functions as a way to level the power between audience and performer and suggests that if comics can make fun of themselves, then viewers should be willing to do the same. Self-deprecation usually draws from deficiencies in the following areas: cultural ignorance, intellectual failings, and social faux pas. These shortcomings communicate that the comic is neither smart nor culturally savvy enough to be politically correct. This can play out in a variety of ways, but commonly comics will employ self-deprecation as a platform from which to engage in negative other-presentation. White stand-up comic Chris D’Elia has made a career of employing this rhetorical strategy, ostensibly making fun of himself in order to make fun of Others without engendering animosity.

I want to be black. I think that would be cool, just because then I’d get to wear whatever the fuck I wanted to. You know what I mean? black people—like I get clowned for what I wear—these shoes—[*assumes disapproving voice*] “Nice fucking dumb shoes, bro.” [*Resumes normal voice*] I want to be black, man. black people could wear anything. If I was walking down the street, and I saw a black dude in full camouflage

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gear sucking on a pacifier, with like, fake wings on his shoulders, [laughter and clapping] wearing—wearing a safari hat with a dildo sticking out of it. [laughter] Well, I would not look at that dude and be like: “What the fuck is wrong with that asshole?” I would just be like: “Oh, I guess he knows some shit I don’t know. Fuck it.” [laughter and cheering]. black dudes. They’re the only race in the whole world that can wear cartoons on their shirt. Not only is that cool, that’s some hardcore gangster shit [laughter]. Right? A black dude will roll up on you and be like: [assumes voice of black gangster] “Hey, what up, motherfucker? Owee, partner. Fuck y’all player. Haha, fuck y’all motherfucker. Y’all better recognize that’s Dora the Explorer, motherfucker [laughter]! Yo, act like that shit ain’t Charlie Brown right quick [laughter]! Say that shit. Buh-buh-buh-Blue’s Clues, motherfucker [laughter]! Say that shit, J-Bro! Watch where it get you, motherfucker! That shit lay you six feet deep, player” [makes cawing noise, three times; laughter and clapping]!

Coding whiteness as awkward and bland, D’Elia appears to compliment black men as natural repositories of cool but his impression resuscitates beliefs about black men as brutes or savages. The price of insulting a black man’s fashion choices could be a verbal altercation or even physical violence laying “you six feet deep.” This rhetorical strategy appeals to comics who occupy dominant categories of identity because it acknowledges privileged identity categories but recasts that privilege with the illusion of inferiority. Employing self-deprecation from a dominant position seldom has the impact of impugning an entire race or sexuality. A white comic is not automatically assumed to be a spokesperson for her race; nor are the actions and beliefs of a heterosexual comic considered generalizable to all heterosexuals. Comics from marginalized communities may also employ self-deprecation. The added danger is that doing so doubles as mockery of them *and their communities*. Thus, self-deprecation may be interpreted differently coming from bodies marked/self-identified as Other.

When belonging to the category of Other, establishing membership is one way of obtaining audience approval for insulting jokes; self-deprecatory humor, even more so. After all, the comic is targeting her own community. For those belonging to a minority group, a simple reference to her belonging is sufficient foundation for joking about themselves and the groups to which they belong. Sierra Katow uses her mixed-ethnic background to lob arrows at herself, simultaneously demeaning her ethnic heritage and cashing in on stereotypes about Asian-Americans more generally.

And when it comes to dating ... the Chinese part of me is like: “Oh, Sierra, find a nice Chinese boy to date.” And then the Japanese part of me is like: “No, no, no, find a nice Japanese boy to date.” Right, and then the American part of me is like: “I don’t know, they’re all yellow to me” [laughter]. Just pick one. There’s like a bajillion of you guys. You do the math cause you’re typically better at that, so [loud laughter]. Thank you, thank you.... I also don’t speak either language. I only speak English. So, it’s pretty weird. I’ll go to like a Chinese restaurant and they’re always coming at me

speaking in their tongues [laughter]. And I'm just like: "Sorry, no hablo Ching-glais! [laughter]. [Continues miming confusion] Ahhhh, what?" Yeah, but you know they judge me cause they think that I'm a little less Asian cause I don't speak Asian. Yeah, and it hurts, feels a little awkward so I figured if that ever happens again I'm just gonna leave. And then drive away and crash into seventeen cars and be like: "Who's the Asian now, bitch? [laughter]. It's me!"

There is no mistaking this millennial's disdain for preserving, let alone observing, Chinese and Japanese cultural traditions, respecting ethnic values related to outmarriage, or knowledge of customs and languages. Further, the joke reinforces stereotypes about Asians—good at math, bad at driving—without a hint of irony. Katow's solution to being a bad Asian resides in fulfilling widely held stereotypes. And, as so often happens in the treatment of ethnic groups that are simultaneously racialized for the convenience of categorization (e.g., you are no longer Filipino, Vietnamese, Thai, or Indonesian; rather, you are raced as Asian), she collapses any cultural distinctions among Asians by calling them "yellow" and stating that she doesn't "speak Asian" (Tuan). While the focus is on the ways in which she fails in her performance of Asian-ness, the real target becomes Asian Americans, and occupying in-group membership forecloses audience dissent.

Complimenting the Other

Praising an Other proves a valuable decoy for practicing negative Other-presentation or reinforcing harmful and narrow perceptions of marginalized communities. Ralphie May, a white stand-up comic who gained a massive following before his untimely death in 2017 at the age of forty-five, boasted his ability to not be politically correct, but just "correct." He often impersonated racial minorities, making humor out of their cultural differences and just as frequently positioned himself as anti-racist and minorities as communities to be admired. This rhetorical footwork granted him permission to mock Others, as he does in the following bit about Mexicans.

I don't think the people who have made this law [referring to anti-immigration legislation] up have really thought it all out, you know? Think about it, folks. If we get rid of all the Mexicans, not for nothing, how are we gonna move? Everyone I know uses Mexicans. white people, black people, Mexicans use Mexicans, ok? I'm not talking about well-nourished American Mexicans with good bone structure and proper nutrition. I'm talking about the little *mojados* [slur referring to Mexican undocumented immigrants], the ones who sneak over the border that you get at the Home Depot, three for \$50, or for \$100 twelve of them will show up with three old ladies, an *abuela*, and two *tías*, ok. And it takes 'em seventeen minutes, seventeen minutes and they move all your stuff out of the house on one pickup truck. One! An upside-down pyramid, they stack it. It's incredible! Amazing engineering, amazing! No rope.

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No rope! They just throw the littlest Mexican up on top and he holds down two mattresses and a coffee table. It's incredible [*laughter and applause*]! ... And these old ladies they're cleaning everything. And you're standing in the former shell of your house going: "Why are we moving? This is amazing! [*laughter*]! It was our crap that was messing this house up!" [*laughter*]. Man, Mexicans are amazingly clean. It's funny, when I did that joke, I was telling this joke and, you know I tell people that's where the term "spick and span" comes from [*audience signals shock: "ohhhhh"*]. Look it up! Look it up! Cause Mexicans are so clean, see? See first you think it's gonna be a racial slur then it turns out to be a racial compliment. Now who's prejudiced? [*points to the audience*] Not me. I love Mexicans. I was doing this joke in Orange County California about a month and a half ago, and when I did it a white lady stood up and said [*dons a high pitched voice*]: "We have to get rid of all those Mexicans, they're ruining our country!" And I was just amazed at her racism, you know?

One wonders why May was surprised by the woman's racism. He had just performed a bit that reinforced her existing beliefs about Mexicans as non-natives exploiting U.S. resources. May's joke functions as complimentary of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans while also invoking anti-racist sentiments to reassure audience members that the joke is all in good fun. He distances himself from racism, turning the charge of racism onto his audience when they respond unfavorably to his use of a term used to disparage Mexicans. May imagines that linking an oft-used pejorative to cleanliness undermines the power of the racial epithet and transforms it into a compliment. Invoking compliments, criticizing the audience members vocalizing opposition, establishing himself as anti-racist, and diverting to an example of actual racism (someone else's response after telling that joke)—the confluence of all these strategies lets him off the hook and ensures warm reception of this joke.

Distancing Mechanisms

Most jokes invoke multiple strategies to ensure positive audience reception. The rhetorical strategies considered to fall under the category of distancing mechanisms are commonly used in tandem with one another. There are three key rhetorical strategies that function to distance joke-tellers from bearing responsibility for the bigotry extolled in their jokes: (1) Third-person strategies that position comics as merely repeating what they heard rather than bearing those world views. (2) Modern-day minstrelsy or donning the affect of an Other for comedic purposes. (3) And, comics billing themselves as equal-opportunity offenders so no one can suggest that comics are targeting any group in particular. Comics invoking this strategy may also be referred to as shock comics. In the case of the first strategy, if someone else said it, the progenitor of the joke is not held accountable for any bigoted sentiment conveyed in the joke. Comics attribute such bigotry to family mem-

bers, friends, and conversations overheard in a public setting, carefully positioning themselves as observers rather than producers of racism, sexism, or homophobia. Comics commonly cite their parents as purveyors of bigotry, as when Bill Dawes positioned his father as a racist Republican against interracial dating. This distancing mechanism negates criticism by emphasizing that jokes spring from the observable world; similarly, modern-day minstrelsy supposes that the comic is merely imitating real people.

Modern-day minstrelsy repackages stock characters within comedic discourse a la impersonation, as with Chris D'Elia's impersonation of a black gangster. In this example audience fear of this Other is mitigated by clothing incongruent (e.g., a t-shirt featuring Charlie Brown) with performances of hegemonic masculinity. Without donning visual signifiers used in 19th and 20th century blackface minstrelsy, like burnt cork or mock Chinese queues (a single braid extending from the back of the head), modern-day minstrelsy makes Others the target of humor by using accents, dialectical shifts, and body language. From Jewish folks to LGBTQ persons to black people to women, no marginalized group has escaped being impersonated for the sake of entertainment. I use the generic term minstrelsy, but this can be identified more specifically as: blackface, yellowface, brownface, Jewface, Arabface, or queerface (and more). Deploying modern-day minstrelsy functions to distance the jokester by imagining the impersonation as creative theatricality. Pérez observed that comedy coaches praised minstrelsy for invoking qualities of a savvy "dialectician" ("Learning" 493). Several of the jokes examined thus far included minstrelsy in concert with other rhetorical strategies: Malik imitating his gay brother, Dawes imitating a black and then Asian Eve, D'Elia imitating a black gangster. It is a crowd-pleaser but must be carefully contextualized and framed so as not to appear malicious or rooted in actual beliefs about Others' inferiority.

When it comes to the final distancing mechanism, fans easily let equal opportunity offenders off the hook for bigoted jokes because such a strategy invites the audience to laugh at everyone, not any group in particular. If comics target enough minorities, they need not apologize; rather, they can fall back on the comedic style of shock comedy as their *modus operandi*. Many comics position themselves as equal-opportunity offenders while negating any accusations of verisimilitude between their comic and off-stage personae.

This joking seems innocuous enough, especially when set in a context of playfulness, yet there are consequences to consuming comedy that denigrates Others. Donald Saucier, Conor O'Dea, and Megan Strain argue that humor disparaging Others results in the "devaluation of outgroups, often loosening norms that discourage expression of prejudice, and possibly producing negative attitude change toward the targeted social group" (77).

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Another study concluded that participants observing someone else being ridiculed by a stand-up comic were more likely to exhibit higher rates of conformity and an increased fear of failure (Janes and Olson 2000). It is not surprising that the more someone fears failure the more likely he is to exercise caution when it comes to taking risks that might set them apart from their peers. In a comedy club this might mean audience members are performing their role as patron in ways that do not attract unwanted attention from the audience or comic. Another way of summarizing this data would be that they pull listeners into collusion with the values and ideologies being disseminated and reduces the likelihood of overtly challenging what appear to be shared bigoted beliefs. The greater concern is that beliefs about inferiority and an unwillingness to speak up when confronted with prejudice will transfer into the daily lives and activities of people consuming bigoted comedy.

Conclusion: Flipping the Script

Rhetorical strategies socialize audiences to laugh at the ensuing punchline. They help to situate the comic as having good intentions, offer context for sensitive topics, establish community consensus, and remind audiences that this is all in good fun. While I have attended exclusively to jokes that demean minorities, these strategies are recognizable enough that they can be used to set up socially just, charged jokes or to discuss issues around identity in conscientious and complex ways that dispel stereotypes and challenge ideologies that shore up bigotry. Comedy is as surprising as it is formulaic. Psychologist David Huron studies how the arts, music in particular, can generate positive emotions by appealing to anticipation. We move through the world with untold expectations: the sun will set, the car will start in the morning, students will skip class, and humor will entertain. Many expectations are primed through repetition because we are socialized to anticipate the pleasure or pain of an experience. Repetition is a key aspect of comedy—repetition of words, standard set-ups, and recycled punchlines; even comedy club interiors are designed to look alike, a comic stands in front of brick wall with a single microphone and possibly a wooden stool. Comics and laypeople alike learn what makes us laugh: wordplay, puns, silly incongruities, taboo content, self-deprecation, and so forth, and then rely on the comic frame and audience expectations to achieve comedic success. Huron points out that we reap additional psychological rewards when our expectations are accurate; in other words, “[w]hen the stimulus is expected, the emotional response is positively valenced” (13). Indeed, the reward for correctly anticipating something is strong enough that we often experience a pleasure response for accurate predictions despite an unpleasant outcome. As consumers of stand-up comedy,

we expect to be entertained, and when recognizable strategies for delivering humor invoke a stereotype or convey a premise that flies in the face of our individual values, it is likely that we will still laugh.

Humor about marginalized identities does not have to harm. We only expect that it does so because it is woven into the fabric of what we think humor must entail. But, humor can reinvest value and meaning where that has been stripped—it can mend, soothe, challenge, and empower. Saucier et al. write that racial humor may be used “to cope with adversity and stigma,” “allow minority groups to safely discuss their experience of prejudice,” as well as “provide an educational or corrective function through which social lessons for appropriate social behavior, including how to respond to being discriminated against, may be taught” (79). In *All Joking Aside: American Humor and Its Discontents*, I write at length about the history and economy of charged humor, a type of humor that intentionally seeks to identify social injustices, foment cultural citizenship for marginalized communities, and offer solutions to redress the balance. Charged stand-up comics are intentional in crafting their humor, and they work hard to provide appropriate context so that listeners absorb their intended meanings. Fabiola Scarpetta and Anna Spagnolli identify this conscientious crafting and performance of jokes as building “interactional context” or the labor that shapes the “recognizability and acceptability” of the jokes performed (211). Utilizing staid coding mechanisms with appropriate context offers a way of framing jokes to achieve maximum audience enjoyment without disparaging marginalized communities. Director of London’s 99 Club James Woroniecki argues that performing politically correct, smart comedy does not a dull comic make; rather, “A good comedian can track how an audience is feeling about a subject and make their jokes as clear and effective as possible” (quoted in Brown). Doing so helps mitigate ambiguity and controls interpretation of the joke. While beyond the scope of this project, one could chart the ways charged comics utilize the rhetorical strategies discussed throughout in ways that avoid disparaging or reductionist beliefs about Others. Skilled charged comics such as Hari Kondabolu, Aparna Nancherla, Maria Bamford, Patton Oswalt, Margaret Cho, W. Kamau Bell, and Chris Rock make a point to talk about identities in ways that confront bigotry and its consequences for marginalized communities. Rhetorical strategies for generating laughs are unlikely to change; however, we can demand that comics make ethical use of them.

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