Stand-Up Comedy and Self-deprecating Humor

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Introduction
Self-deprecating humor is a form of humor where the comedian pokes fun at his or herself, and it has recently become more incredibly popular in today's society. Stand-up comedians like Louis C.K. have risen to newfound popularity by using self-deprecating humor almost completely in their sets. I am investigating the question of why audiences respond so positively to stand-up comedians who use self-deprecating humor. I have found that there are several reasons for this, including how self-deprecating humor is trending in other aspects of society and how self-deprecating humor rises and falls in popularity but always remain present in American humor. However, the audience also feels more comfortable laughing directly at the comedian than at a certain demographic or minority, and although it is the comedian's performance, by using self-deprecating humor, the comedian relinquishes some of his/her authority and power on stage to the audience because the audience has the power to decide whether to participate by laughing.

Historically
Jesters in medieval courts would make fun of themselves to amuse kings and queens.
- Fast forward a few centuries to 1955 and Phyllis Diller is popularizing what we know today as self-deprecating humor through her stand-up comedy on being a woman.
- Comedians like Louis C.K. now come immediately to mind nowadays when mentioning self-deprecating humor (hence the background picture of this poster).
- There are other comedians, less famous than Louis C.K., like Mike Birbiglia, Conan O’Brien, etc. who also use self-deprecating humor extensively.

Trending
Self-deprecating humor can be found in several other fields, including...
- Ads
- Movies
- TV Shows
- Comics
- Everyday Conversation

Psychologically
Self-deprecating humor has been found to have several psychological effects on the audience:
- The audience feels more comfortable with self-deprecating humor than say a racist or some other offensive joke.
- The audience may feel less threatened by the self-deprecating humor because it is solely directed at the comedian.
- The comedian creates an emotional/psychological connection with the audience members who have had similar situations as the comedian.
- The comedian's use of ethos, pathos, logos, and kairos to retain the audience's attention and participation.
- The audience may feel less threatened by the self-deprecating humor because it is solely directed at the comedian.
- The audience is conditioned by pop culture to like self-deprecating humor and thus find it comfortable to have a comedian use the same technique.

So What?
Why does all of this matter? Well...
- Self-deprecating humor may be funny but it degrades the fact that these stereotypes the comedians are making fun of still exist. These stereotypes are not challenged by the humor, they are secretly perpetuated through the humor. Although the humor is not as upfront as racist and offensive jokes, in reality, the self-deprecating humor is just making it easier for the audience just to accept the stereotype as fact.
- This rise in popularity of self-deprecation may reflect a serious psychological shift inside our minds. Seeing self-deprecating humor in ads, movies, TV shows, and comics has conditioned us mentally, we need to be aware of these trends and how it affects us psychologically.

To be clear: I am not saying we cannot enjoy self-deprecating humor or any humor for that matter, I am just saying we need to become aware of the effects of these jokes being made.

List of References:

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