

# *Affront or Humor: Social Stigma in Stand-up Comedy*

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**Abstract:** Recently, talk shows have become a popular entertainment activity among young people, and more people have different opinions on the irony of stand-up comedy. As a result, this research is about the social stigma in talk shows, including the examples in the genres, language styles and the audience response of these things in talk shows. The research on this topic would be useful to help the audience understand more about the social stigma in talk shows, not only the humor, but also a kind of way to show the standpoint of the comedians. When the audience hears this kind of humor in the future, they can not only laugh it off but also think about the meaning behind it. This research used the case analysis method to analyze some cases of different comedians to explain the phenomenon. This paper found that in talk shows, social stigma is very common and this stereotype not only be shown in language but also can be felt from the form.

**Keywords:** Stereotype, Social stigma, Talk shows

## 1. Introduction

The term "talk show" refers to a variety of shows, including the act of spontaneous conversation and stand-up comedy, among others. The majority of this article is about stand-up comedy. Stand-up comedy is a type of live comedy in which the performer addresses the audience directly from the stage. Comedians are entertainers. Stand-up comedy has its roots in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century traditions such as minstrel shows, vaudeville shows, burlesques, and British music halls. With the popularity of talk shows, more and more scholars pay attention to the social stigma in talk shows. However, previous studies focus more on the language instead of treating talk shows as a whole. As a result, this paper will explore how talk shows reflect stereotypes from different perspectives. This research would be beneficial for scholars to understand better the topic of social stigma in society and combine talk shows with social stigma more closely and deeply. This article reviewed some excerpts from some famous talk shows. There are three parts in the main body: the genres, the language styles, and the audience response.

## 2. Social Stigma in Talk Shows

In the following sections, this paper will mainly focus on three perspectives of talk shows, which are genres, language style and audience response. These three parts were mentioned in the existing papers, and they are the main parts when scholars do research on talk shows. However, it is an innovation that this paper relates these three parts to social stigma. Table 1 shows what the three perspectives really mean.

Table 1: The three perspectives of doing research on talk shows.

Main Part	Main Contents
Genres	How the specific genre shows the opinions of the comedians
Language style	Different skills used on the stand-up comedy
Audience response	Different kinds of response and the reasons

## 2.1. In the Genres

From the website "45 Types of Humor with Examples", there are few kinds of humors including the social stigma, such as Edgy Humor, Blue Humor, Black Humor, Aggressive Humor, Satirical Humor.

In fact, many forms of comedy include satire. However, these five genres use irony to Reflect social phenomena. Most of the genres use disparaging word. The original meaning is to express discrimination against other races, but in the mouth of the stand-up comedian, it not only makes the audience laugh, but also shows that they don't care about the words.

There is a question that why the victims tell their stories. Just as Beverly Daniel Tatum's definition of racism: One needs power to be able to commit an "-ism. The aggressive talk show format has become a way for the underprivileged to speak out and become more acceptable. They can make jokes about being a woman or being Jew because they are experiencing all of these marginalized identities. They're not just cracking jokes; they're also sharing personal stories.

Because of these genres, the minority groups have a special way to express their opinions. Somebody even think these genres are the art of stand-up comedy because the meanings behind them.

## 2.2. In the Language Style

The language styles of stand-up comedy are quite different because of the comedians' own characteristics. Some typical skills are Apostrophe, Periphrasis, Prolepsis, Hyperbole, Epithet, Synecdoche, Irony, Sarcasm, Innuendo.

Irony is quite famous because the audience may find it ridiculous easily. Irony means making jokes by using language that normally signifies the opposite.

Trevor Noah, a South African comedian and television host, use an ironic phrase "Charming Racism". He said: "The standards of racism have dropped. Now, it's cheap and mass-produced" [1].

Charming, in common language environment, is a commendatory term. In this sentence, Trevor manifested his attitude by irony way, all the racism is similar, even the people being targeted are "accustomed".

Some African comedians even use "nigger" in their text, and that is another skill, Innuendo. Just as Chris Rock said You scream "nigger" and I'll raise interest rates [2]. He used the contemptuous words to make audiences laugh. Also, this utterance reflects how white skin America underestimated black skin America. The truth is many white people have privileges on their skin.

Historically, in apartheid-era South Africa, racism decreed that different races should be kept apart from each other.

In Silverman's stand-up comedy show named A Speck of Dust, she acted into a "normal" stranger, and said: " You petty, smallminded, materialistic twats. You do not get it. With their, like, \$1500 purses. It's only a bag. Get a backpack. You're silly "[3]. From few words, the prejudice to a woman of upper class showed clearly. However, Silverman did not show much attention on what she said, for her, just laugh it off.

Just like Silverman said: "Nothing is taboo if you have an angle on it. That said, critiquing women's human shells isn't my thang. Though there's probably something funny or interesting to be said about those who do it, and what that comes from". Many people have malicious speculation for women whether in work or in life. A 2017 survey by the Pew Research Center, in the United States, found that 42% of women have experienced gender discrimination at work.

In the aspect of racism, Silverman also had some aggressive humor: "People are always introducing me as Sarah Silverman, Jewish comedienne. I hate that! I wish people would see me for who I really am – I'm white" [4].

There are other comedians use their special language to add Social Stigma in their show. Joan had a typical saying that If you can't laugh at yourself, you don't have any right to make fun of others. As a result, there are many social stigma of gender in her comedies. One of her most famous jokes is: Don't tell your kids you had an easy birth or they won't respect you. For years I used to wake up my daughter and say, "Melissa, you ripped me to shreds. Now go back to sleep" [5].

The society knows the difficulties of women, especially the fertility. However, the society also required women to put all her energy into her family as soon as she has the baby. They ignored the pain of fertility because they do not have that experience.

From the quote of Joan, the typical impression is broken. The mother is not gentle and considerate, she has her own grievance.

On May 25, 2020, George Floyd, a 46-year-old black man, was murdered in the U.S. city of Minneapolis by Derek Chauvin, a 44-year-old white police officer [6]. This matter aroused public anger. David Khari Webber Chappelle, an African American stand-up comedian, for this matter, created 8:46, a video of newly recorded stand-up comedy. It's different from regular stand-up comedy. There are no humor, and more serious speech. However, for the comedy and the social commentary, the critical consensus are positive.

"What are you signifying that you can kneel on a man's neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds and feel like you wouldn't get the wrath of God" [7]. In his words, he showed his opinions in a special way. His speech was full of irony, on the contrary, nobody would laugh for his fine statement.

As we know, this social stigma is widespread, so, the talk show use a humorous way to satirize present situation. Every audience laugh and they remember the full of aggression show. Not all style of stand-up comedy are full of aggression, some comedians speak slowly and gently, however, the social stigma in their text still shows the meaning behind it.

### 2.3. Audience Response

For most audience, most of time, they laughed at the words. On the other hand, some audience may feel insulted when hearing this kind of comedies. The important question is how to distinguish between insult and humor.

Charlie Hebdo is a satirical weekly newspaper in France that publishes cartoons, reports, polemics, and jokes. The irreverent and stridently nonconformist tone of the publication is strongly secularist, antireligious, and left-wing, publishing articles that mock Catholicism, Judaism, Islam, and a variety of other groups as local and global news unfolds [8]. The newspaper's office was firebombed and its website was hacked because of its "humor".

Though this matter is not about the stand-up comedy, the satire is similar in comedy and cartoon. The audiences would feel that they are being represented by the wrong people. They are not as mean and stupid as the stand-up comedian's text portrays them to be.

From an article on April 12, 2004, Cheung said, "Most people tell themselves to not believe stereotypes. But they do because they always see it, it's in the back of their minds" [9]. The comedian just said something about Social Stigma, and the meaning is different in different

audience's heart. Some of the audiences may think they do not have the stereotypes on the marginalized population, but after they heard of these jokes, they reflect on themselves. Although the other part of audience may do nothing about it, it is a remarkable improvement.

The ability of a performer to "work" an audience is critical to the success of live comedy. According to ethnographic studies, this involves the coordinated use of subtle social signals like body orientation, gesture, and gaze by both performers and audience members. As a result, the Social Stigma can easily engage the audience's empathy.

### 3. Discussion

According to findings, the social stigma is widely used in talk shows. According to Davies (in Lowe, 1986), ethnic jokes "delineate the social, geographic and moral boundaries of a nation or ethnic group" [10].

Actually, most of the comedians are from a developed country, such as the United States. There are different people in America, so there are different discrimination. The social stigma in stand-up comedy is also a manifestation of the inclusiveness of the society. The government allowed such talk to circulate among the people, however, many comedians have been accused for their comments. Some of them even go to the court because the people said them against the law.

With more focus on social stigma, it can be well understood that stereotypes are everywhere in society and people use various forms to express these ideas. Currently, social stigma is mainly regarded as a negative phenomenon, especially in the research field of LGBTQ (lesbians, bisexuals, transgender and queer). From this perspective, this research could pave a way for people better to understand the relationship between talk shows and social stigma. However, from another perspective, this research also can be used to change people's conventional thinking to realize that the talk show is also a way for people to express their ideas.

### 4. Conclusion

This article brought some examples to show the social stigma in talk shows, and these examples provide some new explanations of the social stigma.

Though more audiences show the incomprehension of these comedies, the social stigma is still a widely used element in comedies. Nowadays, more and more people fight for equal rights for themselves, and they tried to use comedies. It is a useful tool and help the common people know the situation they are in.

For future studies, scholars could pay more attention to the relationship between talk shows and social stigma, as this relationship is not well-paid attention to in previous studies. And in reality, not only the actors but also the designers can use the form of talk shows to better reflect society and express novel ideas.

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