Assignment 3, PSYC 304

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Michael Richards, famously known as Kramer on “Seinfeld”, went on a belligerent and extremely racially insensitive tirade at one of his comedy sets in 2006. There is a video of Michael Richards spewing racist and hateful words at a Black audience member. Upon viewing this video, I was absolutely appalled as I did not expect someone so famous to say the things that he did. Richards’ eventually came out and said that he went on this tirade solely out of anger and not because he was inherently racist. I, however, think that this tirade was absolutely done with malicious intent and was a by-product of a deep-seeded hatred for the heckling individuals’ race. I say this for a few reasons; Richards’ tirade was obviously intended to harm the individual solely due to his race and Richard’s never took a minute to realize that not only the heckling audience member, but all audience members were extremely uncomfortable with these racist jokes.

This tirade by Michael Richards was obviously intended to harm the individual and was done solely because this individual was Black. To respond to this heckler, Richards’ does not make a joke about the audience members’ clothes or how rude his remarks were, but he focuses on his race and what negative things he could say solely regarding this audience members’ race. I could understand saying such horrid things out of anger if someone actually threatened your well-being, but this audience member was simply heckling, which is a normal thing to do as an audience member during a comedy set. Richards’ said, “Fifty years ago we would have had you hanging upside down with a fork up your…”([Staff, 2006](#_ENREF_1)). I want to highlight the fact that he said “we” because that means that he is inferring he would identify with a group that would commit this act. I do not think him saying this means he actually would commit a horrid act like this, but he obviously doesn’t think an act like this is unjust. Only someone who utterly disrespects Black history and the obstacles that they have had to face would say such a thing. It is obvious that Michael Richards attacked this man because he felt threat to his group’s image, a group whose members are known for being perceived as superior. The text book says that advantaged groups will show the strongest prejudice toward outgroups when the advantaged group is experiencing a threat to their group’s image or interests, which is exactly what has happened here (Baron, Branscombe, 2016).

Another reason why I believe that Michael Richards went on this tirade due to a deep-seeded anger for Black individuals is that he never took a moment to realize that what he said was absolutely atrocious. When the entire crowd is visibly uncomfortable and stops laughing all together, does Richards stop to realize that maybe he has gone too far? No. He doubles down and continues to scream racial slurs at a black man while also demanding that he be kicked out because of his race. If this were a tasteless joke that was made out of anger, then I truly think that Richards would have realized in that moment that he had gone too far. An individual who is “not racist” would not belligerently attack another individuals’ race and racial history. I understand that some of this tirade was due to anger that came from frustration of being embarrassed by the heckler, however that does not excuse the fact that this tirade is rooted in hatred of Black Americans.

It is quite obvious that this tirade reveals Richards’ deep-seeded hatred for Black Americans. Some may argue that this tirade was simply just the product of a very angry man who was trying to hurt another man in any way that he could. I, however, completely disagree. There are many people in this world that are able to deal with conflict without attacking another individual for things that they cannot control. If Richards’ was simply trying to cause as much pain as possible to this man, why would he not go after other characteristics besides his race? Michael Richards also called the audience member a racial slur repeatedly, which leads me to believe that this tirade is rooted in hate for Black Americans.

Michael Richards, in his apology, expressed regret over the tirade. He said that it was a result of extreme anger and he expressed that he was sorry for offending the Black community. Some may look at this and think that he was just a very angry man who was having a bad day. While that may be the case, I believe this tirade was made mostly due to a deep hatred for the black community. Richards had never gone on a tirade with such anger before. The failing actor was in a bad place in life, as he was not making any appearances in television except for Seinfeld. It does make sense that such anger and frustration would build up inside this man, however that does not mean that he had to attack another man in the way that he did. A racially charged attack is not a common result of built up anger, it is a common result of racist beliefs and tendencies.

There are thousands of stand-up comedians in this country and the majority of them must face heckling at some point. Most comedians, when faced with a heckler, choose to lighten the mood by making fun of the hecklers’ voice or clothes. In Michael Richards’ case, however, he chose to make fun of the audience members’ racial history and called him atrocious racial slurs repeatedly. When normal people are faced with conflict, like being told they are not funny, they tend to pick a characteristic of the other person that is comparable to attack. People with racist tendencies, on the other hand, will hone in on the other persons’ race or social status as opposed to a comparable characteristic. Michael Richards is a perpetrator of the latter, which is why I believe that he was not simply trying to inflict as much pain as possible onto the audience member, but he was simply trying to attack the audience members’ racial background.

If this comedian was just simply trying to cause this heckler to feel pain, then why would he not make fun of his other characteristics? It is a normal thing for comedians to make fun of hecklers, as we just discussed, so if Richards was just trying to harm this person why did he not attack several different characteristics? He could have made fun of the hecklers’ voice, his hair, the way he sits, the way his girlfriend or boyfriend looks, or really anything else about him. Michael Richards, however, chose to only make fun of this audience member because of the color of his skin. Richards obviously went on this disgusting tirade because of an inner hatred for the Black community, not just because he was simply trying to hurt the heckler’s feelings.

Finally, Michael Richards called this audience member an atrocious, racist slur repeatedly until the audience member began to leave. This is literally the definition of being a racist; being racist can be defined as being prejudiced or antagonistic actions towards people based on their membership in a racial group because one believes that some races are superior to others ([Unknown, 2020](#_ENREF_2)). The repeated use of this well-known offensive slur is proof that Michael Richards’ tirade was nothing more than a big reveal of who he truly is. I hope that this experience allowed Richards’ to reflect on his personal problems and gave him motivation to change himself for the better.

In conclusion, this tirade was despicable and disgusting to witness. This just goes to show that the people you see on TV or listen to for entertainment are not necessarily who you think they are. They could seem like wacky, lovable characters when they are truly filled with immense hatred and anger. This situation does beg a question: Is it possible for racial slurs to exist without a racist intent/prejudice? In my opinion, no they cannot. Racist slurs exist solely because white people intended to offend and belittle other races with their words instead of with physical action. These words have only been created in order to keep other races feeling inferior to the white race. Because this was the original intent behind these words, I personally do not think they will ever be okay to use and will always be something that is tied to racial prejudice.

References

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