Stereotypes in Satirical Sitcoms: Is This Really a “Post-Racial” Society?
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Introduction
In the 21st century, society considers America to have gone beyond race and racism and allege that we are presently living in a post-racial era. Post-racial relates to a society in which racial prejudice and discrimination no longer exist. Some individuals would disagree because subtle forms of racism are still prevalent today. Studies have shown that the repeated exposure to selective portrayals of particular groups (men and women minorities) can lead to viewers adopting distorted beliefs about those groups. Another study indicates how strategic use of humor allows the constraints on current racial discourse to be broken. Therefore, there is the suggestion that a new phase of colorblind racism may be underway. The study shows how racism is also being used in order to be humorous and not offensive in comedy. How would you like your image, race, ethnicity, and children to be viewed? What are the features in this “post-racial” era that distinguish post-racial from the “racial” era?

Research Question
How do stereotypes in satirical sitcoms lead to racism in a “post-racial” society?

Background
The use of racial stereotypes in comedy has been practiced since the nineteenth century. One of the oldest accounts is the blackface minstrelsy of the 1870s. White men starred in shows in which they would portray black men and play on racial stereotypes. This practice downplayed the severity of slavery and racism. The use of stereotypes in comedy continue on present-day television. The appearance of people of color is often a rarity on 21st-century television. When these characters of color do appear, they are mere caricatures of their race. Presently, our society has come to be considered as evolved and “post-racial.” However, these stereotypes still play a major part in what we watch. The question remains: What role do these racist stereotypes play in our so-called post-racial society?

Materials & Methods
In order to complete our project we used different methods of research. First, group members searched for scholarly articles which were related to our topic. Second, we used the YouTube website to compile clips that demonstrated the use of racial stereotypes in satirical cartoons.

Findings
Then, these clips were used to conduct interviews with a number of people consisting of various ages, ethnic backgrounds, and gender. We specifically targeted young adults and adults over the age of 21. Finally, the participants were asked to complete a survey, providing us with the demographics and findings for our research. Later, the combination of clips, interviews, and findings were combined as a final project / documentary filmed and created by group members.

Conclusions
Through conducted research, the group administered an unbiased, anonymous survey consisting of demographic and opinionated questions. Within the findings of our research, group members found that, generally, people of different ethnicities found stereotypes targeting minorities more offensive and less humorous. Along with surveys, our group administered several interviews and filmed test subjects’ responses as they watched the videos and answered a variety of questions. Through this we found that test subjects found stereotypes targeting their own race or races close to them more offensive and less funny. Subjects found blatant racism more offensive than subtle racism when they knew they were being recorded. In contrast, a large majority of subjects did not find scenes targeting European or American stereotypes offensive although they presented racist stereotypes. In relation to our research question, our findings show us that racial inequalities are still present in our “post-racial society”; however, our research shows that a shift has been made from the days of blatant racism to subtle, unconscious stereotypes that appear in humorous sitcoms that air to millions every day.

References