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Humanities

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When Humor Hits Harder: The Power of Satire Over a Straightforward Argument

“Sir, you were just going 100 miles per hour in a school zone,” said the police officer, “so can I have your autograph Mr. Cruise.” Celebrities are regularly treated with more respect than the average person. Despite being just as human as everyone else, they are given unfair privileges by the public. Because the issue is so outrageous, many authors have addressed it in a variety of writing styles, such as writing articles and creating video satires. Amber Hewitt’s article “Society should not give celebrities a pass just because they are famous,” directly argues that celebrity privilege is harmful. The article uses logical reasoning and arguments to convince the reader that celebrities receive unfair treatment. Meanwhile, SNL’s “Science Presentation,” exaggerates how society gives athletes and celebrities unfair advantages by portraying a “famous athlete,” Ray, who is played by John Cena, as a contestant in a science fair. Ray wins the science fair with his project, a banana nailed to a piece of plywood, instead of the other two contestants who made a much more impressive project such as a “particle accelerator” and a “cloud chamber.” Although both the article and the skit address the same social problem, they communicate their points using very different rhetorical strategies. Using satire to communicate a point is vastly more effective than traditional writing as it better creates a lasting memory for the audience and allows the reader to come to their own conclusion rather than feeling forced into accepting an opinion, as evidenced by the short skit “Science Presentation” by SNL which

uses exaggeration, humor, and reductio ad absurdum in comparison to the straightforward article “Society should not give celebrities a pass just because they are famous” by Amber Hewitt.

SNL’s use of satirical devices such as exaggeration, irony, and visual humor creates a more memorable experience than Hewitt’s traditional article, strengthening its rhetorical impact. For example, Ray’s “science project” is literally bananas nailed to plywood. And yet, he receives a perfect score for his work despite competing against very technical and award-worthy projects. When the judges announced the results, they announced, “Nerd, you scored a 20%,” where he responded, “WHAT?” “Heather, 70.2%,” where she responded, “I hate this school.” “And, Ray, I’m happy to say you scored 100%” (SNL 4:11). The authors exaggerate how celebrities get a free pass by giving Ray a perfect score while the other two contestants receive much lower grades. This is highly effective at communicating the issue to the viewer, as the audience’s attention is kept through humor while the message is embedded. When Ray gets a perfect score for having a vastly worse project, it underscores how celebrities get privileges that give them an unfair advantage that is inaccessible by people who are not famous. Additionally, making adults do a science pair project adds humor and absurdity. In turn, this causes the viewer to laugh and better remember the clip, which outlines how the writers’ communicate the hypocrisy in a more effective and memorable way than a factual explanation. The viewers will remember the absurdity from SNL, and therefore the message, far longer than a more serious claim. Meanwhile, Hewitt’s article uses logical appeals and direct explanations. Her tone is serious, critical, and literal. For example, she writes “Society places celebrities above the law by glorifying their behavior and turning it into a joke” (Hewitt). While her writing is clear, it lacks an emotional sense that sticks with the reader. There is nothing particularly visual or surprising that makes the point memorable. The satire from SNL is more effective at making a long-lasting

point because it triggers an emotional response and uses visual performative elements that are remembered much better than a logical argument. Through exaggeration and irony, SNL plants an unforgettable image of celebrity privilege, making its argument far more memorable than Hewitt's direct written criticism.

SNL's satire invites the audience to recognize the problem on their own through implied criticism, rather than Hewitt's traditional argument which tells readers directly what to believe, making the satire feel more persuasive and engaging. SNL implies their argument, rather than being so straightforward and onesided. They never directly say that celebrity privilege is unfair. Instead, viewers infer the message by recognizing the absurd favoritism shown to Ray. Designing the satire to allow the audience to come to their own conclusion respects the audience's intelligence by encouraging personal interpretation. Additionally, the humor lowers the defenses of the viewer, allowing them to be more open to the message. For example, one judge asks Ray, "what's the outside of a banana called?" and Ray replies, "the crust" which is met with praise from the judges (SNL 3:07). SNL uses *reductio ad absurdum* to portray a situation where celebrity privilege gets extreme with clear bias. This is further helped through the imagery in the video, where the judges are clearly wearing merchandise that supports the team that Ray plays for. This absurdity is further reinforced when Ray gets praise from the judges despite knowing much less than the other contestants. This allows the viewer to conclude how ridiculous celebrity privilege is through the comedy presented throughout the video. Meanwhile, Hewitt tells the reader what they should think. She uses direct statements in order to prove her point, like when she says, "Society needs an attitude change. It is essential that celebrities be given the same treatment as any other member of society" (Hewitt). Hewitt appeals to *logos* many times, using reasoning to support her article. While the appeal to *logos* is strong, it

leaves very little room for personal interpretation. Therefore, readers might feel lectured and might be less willing to agree with the argument. When the audience forms the conclusion themselves, it feels much more authentic. Studies into cognitive psychology show that self-generated conclusions are more persuasive and longer-lasting than lectured conclusions (Briñol). The SNL skit's indirect delivery and clever humor allow audiences to come to their own conclusion, creating stronger persuasion than Hewitt's overly instructive approach.

The short skit "Science Presentation" by SNL shows how a satire can be much more effective than a straightforward article such as "Society should not give celebrities a pass just because they are famous" by Amber Hewitt because it creates a lasting memory for the audience and allows the reader to come to their own conclusion rather than feeling forced into accepting an opinion. People need to use satires more often in order to educate people on serious societal issues so that the issue is better remembered and people feel like they have a choice when picking what course of action to follow.

Works Cited

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