

Hate is Not Inherently Funny: A Tale of Two Nights

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For the vast majority of people, jokes are funny only when you are 'in' on the joke. If you go on stage and just start saying racist, sexist, and/or homophobic things, good luck getting people to laugh! This has not always been the case and we still have a long way to go, but most people in modern society recognize that hating and discriminating against people based on their racioethnic, sexual, or gender identity is wrong. Allow me to tell a story of two nights just a few days apart where I tried (practically) the same joke during my first year of doing stand up at open mics. I hate to say the 'c word,' but this demonstrates the importance of '**context.**'

Let's start with the negative, Night 2, a HARD bomb. Some context. It's a Monday, and it's the next time I'm doing comedy after I fucking crushed the week before. I'm confident. I'm clearly white, and no one knows me. Not one comic in the room knows shit about me. I mean, they don't even know my real name. Also, there are no black people in the room. Oh yeah, and Trump is president and saying crazy ass shit on the daily.

Night 2:

'I don't like when people use the n-word, like even when black people call their friends the n-word, it's like they don't understand the historical context, do you have any idea how hard *my* people worked...to make that word sting.' (fucking nothing! no laughs at all!) It doesn't matter what the rest of the set was, I bombed fucking hard. I imagine people are thinking, what the fuck is up with this racist piece of shit? I thought it was obvious that I was saying an absurd thing, but, given the context, it was not obvious. I'm not up there exuding likeability, and literally not one person in the room knows anything about me. So, it just seemed that I was starting a set off being racist, so nothing else worked. It fucking sucked!

Okay, now let's back it up to Wednesday from the week before, Night 1, I crushed. Some context. There is a group of people being loud all night, and the comics were struggling to get their laughs over the noise. At this table, there is an absolutely JACKED white, bald guy being obnoxious and interrupting people's sets (let's call him the Bad Heckler). Also at this table, there is a black guy who has made multiple funny quips and retorts in response to comics addressing him during their sets (let's call him the Good Heckler). I'm in the corner, feverishly writing mediocre jokes that play off of what is going on in the room, and I wanted to go after the Bad Heckler so bad! During the set right before I go up, the whole table leaves, and I was so disappointed. Then, one of the hosts gets on the mic and refers to the Good Heckler as 'the gentleman with the mustache.' This is Albuquerque. There are not many black people in the city, and the Good Heckler was likely the only black person in the room, and the host referred to him as 'the gentleman with the mustache.'

Night 1:

So, I get up there, and I do an opening joke about how when the table left, I saw that someone left their jacket, and I asked a woman if they noticed who it was. She gave me a weird look, and I had to ask again. Then, she said, 'it was the...(paused)...' and she whispered 'black guy.' So, then, I said in a whisper, why are you whispering? I'm pretty sure that he knows he's black. It's not racist to call a black person black. It's REALLY racist to whisper it. (bam, the punch!) That may be more racist than the n-word. (laughter continues) And if I'm honest, it's a little racist to call him the 'gentleman with the mustache.' (bam, in-the-moment bigger punch!!!). I mean (pointing to crowd), did any of you notice that he had a mustache? (At this point, I'm getting the best laughs I've ever had). Then, I transition to this joke...'I don't like when people use the n-word, like even when black people call their friends the n-word, it's like they don't understand the historical context, do you have any idea how hard my people worked...(I'm clearly white....I get my favorite reaction, straight up laughter followed by ahh's and more laughs, and I didn't even finish the joke! People were laughing out of anticipation of where the joke was going.). So, I've demonstrated likeability during this set. I'm talking about race, but I'm not thought of as racist.

Ultimately, I learned a lot from these two nights. Now, if someone could find a clip where I did the "N word" joke on Night 2, they could make me out to be a terrible person. "How could he say that?" Well, like I said, it's only funny if you're 'in' on the joke. If you know that I don't mean it, and I know that you know that I don't mean it, then it *can* be funny (P.S. If you don't find it funny, that's fine, and that's not really the point.). In day-to-day conversation, we are incredibly skillful at detecting sarcasm, and would be unlikely to go after and attack our friends for their 'problematic' positions or statements on things. So, please ask yourself, why would we do so for comics?