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## South Park Critical Response Paper

Comedy Central's South Park is an animated comedy sitcom that utilizes surreal humor to lampoon a wide range of topics, many of which are controversial in society.

Schulzke's (2012) "Contentious Language: South Park and the Transformation of Meaning" article examines South Park's "The F Word" episode and its attempt to challenge linguistic conventions. "The F Word" episode revolves around the derogatory term fag and the connotation and denotation behind the word. In the episode, a gang of excessively obnoxious and egotistical bikers constantly interrupt events in town as they are desperately seeking attention. The shows four main characters along with other young students explicitly harass the bikers by labeling them as fags. When the young students paint "fags get out" on a billboard, conflict arises as homosexuals take it as an attack against them. The rest of the episode focuses on the deliberation of how a word's meaning is determined. Many disputes have emerged over this episode. While some activist groups such as the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) believe that South Park's "The F-word" episode is more of a detriment to LGBTQ because it popularizes the word, others including Schulzke believe that episodes like "The F-word" can serve to change the meaning of fag. Schulzke attempts to convey that satirical shows like South park with large audiences can promote a linguistic shift to transform the meaning of certain derogatory words. I agree with Schulzke's argument because South Park's explicit satire and dark humor can bring controversial social and linguistic issues into a large spotlight to be analyzed and potentially changed.

Schulzke begins his argument by insisting that South Park has set up itself as a platform to bring awareness to large audience about certain social groups and norms through a unique approach of satire and surreal humor. I agree with his argument and believe that South park's ability to use a more unique comedy appeal to satire societal issues rather than a publishing a didactic article or documentary is what allows them to acquire large audiences. In fact, Schulzke's article mentions that around 2.8 million people watched "The F-Word" Episode. Organizations like GLAAD believe that the intentioned effort to dissociate the word fag from the gay community was futile and popularized the word, which "remains a hateful slur that is often part of harassment."

South Park takes harsh criticism from social groups like GLAAD and other organizations, but I believe that explicit language receives a lot of attention on different media platforms, allowing the social groups to get a spotlight and inform the community about struggling issues. In fact, many issues are analyzed for their effects and debated among many platforms which can lead to potential reforms.

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Furthermore, I also agree with Schulzke's belief that "South Park consistently promotes eliminating categories that can be used as a basis for discrimination while still opposing the elimination of difference". Viewers who have watched more than the "The F Word" episode will understand that the writers of South Park take more of a liberal approach and never specifically attack or ridicule groups prone to discrimination, but rather support them and expose central groups. Despite how uncomfortable certain episodes may be due to the dark humor and opposition of censorship such as the "The F Word", the goal is to highlight issues revolving around social norms or groups to have larger groups deliberate, analyze and come up with a collective change. By using explicit words, South Park pushes the limits of what can be said on television, which helps bring up issues that others may not feel comfortable to initiate in a group setting.

Not only does South Park attempt to bring attention to certain societal issues or controversies by using explicit language and dark humor, but South Park's satirical plot is steered in a clear direction to help highlight and enlighten the audience with ideas and information that they previously may not have had. "The F-Word" episode for example, puts a lot of attention to the fact that the word fag has already undergone a shift in meaning. The show depicts a scene where bikers go to the library to consult dictionary and find out that the word fag has had many definitions over time. It is evident that if a word can change its denotation over time more than once, society has the ability to bring about another change in the meaning of the word. Another key moment in "The F-word" episode is when the students are asked "what one should call a homosexual biker, and the children respond that the appropriate name is a "gay fag". This scene portrayed the generational gap and how meanings vary based on age and how they have the potential to transform into different meanings based on a speaker's intent and listener's perception.

South Park focuses on dictionary detonation and the generation gap to help bring a different perspective and provide information to the audience. Schulzke's essential argument is that South Park has built an effective and unique platform that has the potential to provide key information and awareness to large audiences about certain societal issues. GLAAD may disagree and insist that South Park popularized a hateful derogatory term that is used to discriminate, but it is actually allowing a larger audience to analyze a situation that can be debated and changed for the better. In addition, South Park's satirical plot is steered in a clear direction to assist in educating the audience with ideas and information that they previously may not have had. These ideas presented by Schulzke show why surreal humor programs like South Park can provide a positive change. I agree with Schulzke and believe that there are more potential benefits than costs of putting controversial issues into the spotlight.

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