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“OK BOOMER!”: HOW A PEJORATIVE CAN PROMOTE SOCIETAL CHANGE THROUGH HUMOR, IMPOLITENESS, AND CARNIVALESQUE

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Abstract

The “OK boomer” pejorative has become very popular on social media platforms because of its ability to encode both impoliteness and humor. The encoded impoliteness and humor work together in both ironically polite and mockingly impolite ways by utilizing satire and parody to subvert and ridicule the target of the joke. This encoding creates a unique opportunity that allows those from younger generations to deride people from older generations because the two groups adhere to differing ideologies. The pejorative is also valuable for younger generations because when it is employed against older generations or even one’s own peer group, it promotes carnivalesque degradation and renewal in order to bring societal change. Although “OK boomer” may seem like a simple insult, the phrase actually follows the pragmatic rules of impoliteness and humor, prompting change through carnivalesque decay and renewal in the users it is directed at on Twitter.

In the interconnected sphere of social media platforms, differing ideologies abound within a rigid social hierarchy. There are many levels to this hierarchy; the lowest levels encompass young adults and teenagers who have little inherent power over their communities, and the higher levels contain older adults and seniors who tend to hold more sway over how their societies are shaped. When debating contrasting ideologies with people from different levels of the social hierarchy in person, one needs to attempt to find common ground while moderating one’s rhetoric in order to have a polite dialogue. When arguing on social media platforms with those who have different ideological views, however, users tend to neglect these polite formalities.

Instead of using a genuine sense of politeness, users attempt to appear civil in their online discussions by incorporating polite-sounding speech into their arguments in order to be heard by those on different levels of the hierarchy. Stephen Pihlaja and Andreas Musolff (2017) posit that the arguments between users of

differing hierarchical standings exist as a means to develop ideological communities among like-minded users and to ridicule those who do not hold these same values. Instead of upholding politeness, users on social media platforms act in certain ways and use distinct language to signal their ideologies while also mocking those who believe differently. Social media platforms such as Twitter (2021) have created guidelines to prevent users from employing hateful language like that of racism, sexism, or ageism. They enforce these policies with “permanent account suspension” to help manufacture a polite environment among people with dissimilar ideologies and social standings (para. 23). Despite these guidelines, users continue to develop new impolite words and phrases as a way to find community with some and to ridicule others in a subversive and humorous way.

One such phrase, “OK boomer,” has been used on various social media platforms such as Twitter to mock people from older generations, especially those from the baby boomer age group. Tweets using this pejorative display the versatility of the phrase and how it disrupts a sense of politeness between older and younger people on the social media platform by mocking anything from Thanksgiving guests’ opinions (Champion, 2019) to then-presidential nominee Joe Biden’s campaign bus (Holland, 2019). The pejorative is immensely popular with younger generations because it offers the chance to subtly deride others in a way that seems polite at first but actually conceals an impolite connotation within itself. “OK boomer” is also attractive because of the humor that is encoded in its underlying meaning. The phrase employs satire and parody in order to degrade the target of the joke in a subversive and humorous manner, giving rise to its continued popularity because of its power to make the teller of the joke seem clever in a subtle way.

The “OK boomer” phenomenon, which sparked substantial discussion in the press, has been mostly ignored by academics. Scholars have not yet begun researching or writing about why the “OK boomer” pejorative has developed into such a significant insult in online forums. Some researchers have attempted to understand the pragmatics of impoliteness, with linguists such as Geoffrey Leech (2014) and Jonathan Culpeper and Dániel Kádár (2010) exploring the various forms that impoliteness can assume in a conversation and the historical and cultural forms of impoliteness, respectively. Several scholars, such as Helen Davies and Sarah Illott (2018), as well as Susan Stein (2000), have conducted research on humor and its relationship to Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1965/1984) theory of carnivalesque. These scholars write about the nature of parody and satire, with Davies and Illott putting a particular emphasis on the satire found in modern popular culture. Although

researchers have focused on the pragmatics of impoliteness, the nature of parody and satire, and the theory of carnivalesque, a gap exists in the study of how these elements have converged to develop phrases such as “OK boomer.”

Throughout this thesis, I endeavor to illustrate how the “OK boomer” pejorative is more than a simple online insult or a passing phase. “OK boomer” is linguistically fascinating because of its compliance with the pragmatics of impoliteness and its use of subversively satirical and parodic humor in this impoliteness, as well as its proficiency at bringing change through carnivalesque humor when it is targeted at others on social media platforms. Although the “OK boomer” pejorative may seem like a simple insult, the phrase actually follows the pragmatic rules of impoliteness and humor, prompting change through carnivalesque decay and renewal in the users it is directed at on Twitter.

Impoliteness Theory

Ironic Politeness and Mock Impoliteness

Geoffrey Leech (2014), linguist and author of *The Pragmatics of Politeness*, posits that several kinds of impoliteness exist, but he reveals two in particular that delve into the humor surrounding impoliteness. One of these forms of impoliteness allows a speaker to say something seemingly polite on the surface but have it actually mean something entirely impolite if one looks at it more closely (p. 233). Leech explains that this form of ironic politeness is meant to be an unstable form of a polite utterance that can be interpreted only as a direct attack against the listener (pp. 233–234). He uses the example phrase “A fine friend *you* are!” to show that this ironically polite sentence can only be taken as a verbal attack toward the person it is aimed at because of the emphasis on specific words—“you,” in this case (p. 234). This phenomenon of listeners understanding the implicit meanings of ironically polite sayings is referred to as pragmaticalization (p. 234).

The other form of humorous impoliteness is mock impoliteness, which occurs when a speaker says something inherently rude to a peer and means for that peer to interpret it as something polite (Leech, 2014, p. 238). For example, a tweet made by Denz™ (2021) mockingly references a post he made several years ago about his desire to be nice to women at the seeming expense of his dignity. Ridgeway (2021) replied to this tweet with “Was? LOL,” displaying a sense of impoliteness at first by questioning Denz’s assertion that he has changed and then following it with the acronym for “laughing out loud” to show that she was only teasing. Mock impoliteness can be used by speakers to create a sense of belonging

and camaraderie among those who are close to them “in terms of both vertical and horizontal distance” (Leech, 2014, p. 239). The distance that Leech refers to is the gauge with which people determine their relationship standing with others and how close they are to these people. If one feels as though one is close to someone both vertically and horizontally, one feels as though one is on the same level of the social hierarchy and within the same peer groups as the other person, allowing for a sense of camaraderie between the two people. This form of humorous impoliteness is very effective in situations where everyone gathered feels comfortable mocking each other and trading friendly banter; a sense of familiarity with those present is required to achieve this humor (p. 240). According to Leech, this type of impoliteness cannot be used by strangers, as the inherent politeness would be lost on the listener, given the lack of camaraderie (p. 239).

Sarcasm and Parody

Delving further into how these two forms of humorous impoliteness operate, two different forms of humor emerge to work in tandem with these two impolite forms of speech. Ironic politeness employs satire in an effort to attack the object of the joke in a way that will make the speaker and other listeners laugh. Susan Stein (2000) explains that the goal of satire is to show that the speaker is better than the person being satirized in both morality and intellect, while also showing that satire is “more serious than playful” in its humor when compared to parody’s unique jollity (para. 6). This sense of inherent superiority is evident in ironic politeness when a speaker means to ridicule the target of a joke subtly while showing that the speaker is being moralistic in their apparent politeness. It also allows the speaker to reveal their higher intelligence if the person who was ridiculed did not understand that they were being satirized. Because of this fact, satire cannot be separated from ironic politeness during its utilization. Moreover, to be taken as a nicety by the other person, it requires a sense of seriousness in its delivery.

Just as ironic politeness makes use of satire in its humor, mock impoliteness utilizes parody to create laughter and camaraderie. Stein (2000) discusses the idea that parody is more concerned with imitating objects and people in humorous ways, as well as with being more playful in its usage, than is satire. As mock impoliteness is used to create a feeling of equality among peers, parody works well in achieving this feeling because it makes light of seemingly important issues such as politics or societal norms by imitating them in a funny way. Parody creates a space within peer groups that allows members to exchange playful banter and to liken each other to things or people that would be considered humorous in that space.

Leech (2014, pp. 239–240) explains mock impoliteness, and specifically playful banter, by using an example of a man who went to an unfamiliar bar and attempted to get a drink. This man tried being polite with the bartender but managed to get a drink only when one of the regular patrons stood up for him by calling the bartender a “dozy bastard” in a friendly and endearing way in order to get the bartender’s attention. In this instance, the bartender was most likely not acting as a “dozy bastard” and the regular patron called him this name only because he knew the bartender well enough that such a comparison would be funny and in no way insulting to the bartender. Mock impoliteness and parody are used together to develop a relaxed, fun relationship between friends.

Although a strict dichotomy may be struck between ironic politeness and mock impoliteness, the jokes within each category can be incredibly diverse. Deborah Tannen (2005) writes about this idea after recording her family’s sense of humor at a Thanksgiving meal (p. 164). She finds varying levels of seriousness in joking, with some of her relatives using explicit emphasis in their humor in order to make the joke obvious and others favoring a more deadpan, serious tone in their jests (p. 175). Jokes in either the ironic politeness or mock impoliteness category can take on a more serious or more playful tone depending on the speaker’s form of humor.

Within Leech’s (2014) discussion on ironic politeness, he uses a few examples of humor that employ different tones. These can vary from emphatic, obvious humor to biting rebukes masked in polite tones. He provides one example of a woman who was late to work being greeted by her boss with a very emphatic “*Good afternoon, Sue,*” as well as an example of a biting “*Sorry I asked!*” apology (p. 235). Speakers use a vast range of tones within the two separate categories of impolite humor, allowing for incredibly diverse joking within these spheres of ironic politeness and mock impoliteness.

Impoliteness Theory and “OK Boomer”

With this context in mind, applying Leech’s (2014) theory to the “OK boomer” pejorative reveals several key nuances. This paper examines posts pulled from significant dates on Twitter, namely when the phrase “OK boomer” began to appear regularly on the platform (January 1–February 1, 2019), when the phrase peaked in popularity (November 1–December 1, 2019), and as its usage declined (January 1–February 1, 2020). All of these tweets were pulled from threads that featured the phrase “OK boomer,” although they represent only a small selection of a vast number of tweets using this pejorative.

Approximately three-quarters of the “OK boomer” tweets pulled can be labeled ironically polite, and the remaining tweets can be considered mockingly impolite. A few tweets did not fit clearly into either category and were left out of my analysis. In addition to these outliers, the tweets found within the two categories can employ a wide range of tones, from good-natured fun to rather scathing. I have endeavored to place each pulled tweet into the category that best describes its implicit meaning, but this designation is inherently subjective and must be taken into consideration while reading this essay.

Ironically Polite Tweets

Examples abound from the ironically polite category that detail how the “OK boomer” pejorative can be deftly used satirically to ridicule the object of the attack. A Twitter user by the name of Ny (2019) used the pejorative to mock another user who claimed that “Google should not be your only check” when fact-checking journalists (Bund, 2019). The implied meaning in this instance is that this other user was out of touch with the way that people use Google to find out whether a news outlet is spreading factual evidence and that the user should stop attempting to reprimand others for being innovative in how they get their news information. Another example of this use was displayed when the musician Jacob Sartorius (2019) tweeted some general ideas that he typically heard from adults. He tweeted, “I LOVE SCHOOL EDUCATION IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU WONT [sic] BE ANYTHING WITHOUT SCHOOL,” and replied to his own comment with the phrase “OK boomer” to summarize that these general sentiments about education are old-fashioned and not relevant to modern youth.

Both of these examples fit well into the ironically polite category because of their inherent satirical tone in using “OK boomer” to deride their targets on Twitter. These tweets using the pejorative are meant to sound either neutral or even agreeable on the surface, but their position as ironically polite utterances leaves no room for them to be understood as anything other than biting humor at the expense of their targets. As an added bonus for those who use this pejorative on Twitter, it “boosts the face of the ironist while attacking the face of the target” because the one who uses the phrase lampoons the target while showing their own cleverness in the situation (Leech, 2014, p. 235).

Mockingly Impolite Tweets

Along with the examples of tweets in the ironically polite category, some tweets showcase mockingly impolite parodic humor. Many of these tweets use the pejorative self-deprecatingly. One such example was written by Eliza Ronalds-Hannon (2019), who shared a story about her mom “referring to herself affectionately—and in [third-person]—as ‘Boomer.’ ” Ronalds-Hannon’s tweet explains that her mom realized that she might be doing things in a slightly old-fashioned way and was lightheartedly mocking herself by calling herself a boomer. Another example employing the “OK boomer” pejorative in an even more parodic way is a tweet by Juiblex (2019) that makes a series of observations, such as “Me pointing at an old person: ok boomer” and “Me pointing at a flower: ok bloomer.” This user was making a mockery out of the pejorative itself by using it to refer to an older individual and then rhyming it with other words such as “bloomer” and “groomer” to make it lose its satirical power.

These two examples fit well into the mockingly impolite category in that they use parody implicitly to connect with others and make them laugh. The mother who calls herself a boomer most likely knows that the word has taken on a pejorative meaning and so is making this word inclusive and a parody of its new usage by lightheartedly calling herself a boomer (Ronalds-Hannon, 2019). In the same manner, Juiblex (2019) used “OK boomer” in a parodic way by rhyming the term “boomer” with rhyming words, causing the term to lose the power it retains by infusing it with lighthearted humor. Both of these users were having a good-natured laugh with other Twitter users by mocking themselves and the “OK boomer” pejorative to connect with their peers who also enjoyed this type of humor.

As previously mentioned, on Twitter, the usage of “OK boomer” in an ironically polite way is significantly higher than its usage as a mockingly impolite form of humor. Although the pejorative can be used to create camaraderie between peers through parody and lighthearted fun, its main purpose is to satirize a particular target in a covert way. The pejorative is versatile, but most of the posts that feature the phrase are focused on getting a quick laugh at the expense of the target.

The Ideology Behind “OK Boomer”

The Encoded Meaning of “OK Boomer”

From these two categories, a distinct topic trend is emerging in the usage of the “OK boomer” pejorative. Within the mockingly impolite category, the topics

stayed fairly similar throughout the research period. These topics include popular culture, parody, self-deprecation, and friendly banter. In the ironically polite category, the topics shifted a bit more. At the beginning and middle periods of the pejorative's lifespan, the topics dealt with politics, technology, and provoking an anger response in other people. The current usages of the pejorative still include the ones previously mentioned but also deal with popular culture and daily life. The distinct topics of the "OK boomer" pejorative found in the ironically polite and mockingly impolite categories are starting to meld together into a focus on the "boomer" as a person who is out of touch with both popular culture and the daily life experienced by younger generations. This is different from the pejorative's initial usage as referring only to someone who talks about politics or does not understand technology. As these two categories begin to share a definition of a boomer as someone who is out of touch with current trends in areas that are important to younger generations, both the ironically polite and mockingly impolite usages of "OK boomer" highlight how much the younger and older generations have diverged.

Differing Ideologies

Just like a time capsule, the "OK boomer" pejorative displays the frustrations that people from younger generations have experienced for many years in interactions with people of older generations. The amount of scorn directed at older people for their believed indifference toward the issues that younger people are fighting against is funneled into this pejorative phrase, which is then hurled satirically at anyone who does not agree with the common views of younger generations. Taylor Lorenz, a journalist at *The New York Times*, discusses this idea in a 2019 article that brings up the pejorative from the perspective of those who were born into Generation Z, a generation that currently includes both young adults and teenagers. Lorenz writes that many people from Generation Z believe that older people are unconcerned with climate change and were brought up on old-fashioned ideas with which younger generations today disagree. This divergence of beliefs and opinions about the world has led to the creation of a pejorative that can dismiss the ideas of older people humorously by simply reminding them that they are older and therefore out of touch with the reality of the world that younger generations are inheriting.

The ideological divergence that has occurred between older and younger people highlights a hierarchical structure in which the older generations hold much of the power over societal conduct. To illustrate this ideological divergence, Lorenz

(2019) writes about several younger people's opinions about how older people disparage the beliefs of Generation Z. One of the people whom Lorenz interviewed shared her viewpoint that older people are out of touch with the issues that younger people deal with and that "[e]verybody in Gen Z is affected by the choices of the boomers, that they made and are still making. ... Those choices are hurting us and our future. Everyone in my generation can relate to that experience and we're all really frustrated by it" (para. 8). From the perspective of younger people, the hierarchical order is such that older generations are able to shape the future of the next generations, and one of the only ways that younger people can have a say in their future is by using the "OK boomer" pejorative to call out the mindsets and behaviors of older people.

The Theory of Carnavalesque and "OK Boomer"

Carnavalesque Equality

The hierarchical structure that favors older generations over younger ones reflects the hierarchy that was in place during the days of medieval carnivals. According to literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1965/1984), the medieval carnival allowed a sort of "temporary liberation ... from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" (p. 10). In the medieval carnival, all people were considered equal, in direct opposition to traditional feasts, which exemplified hierarchical inequality (p. 10). During the carnival, people from different levels of the social hierarchy could interact with each other in ways that were normally not permitted, allowing them to temporarily do away with polite societal practices and to exchange the normal practices for good-natured humor among equals (p. 10). The carnival was therefore a place that produced openness and equality for all.

Degradation and Renewal

The ideas and common practices of the medieval carnival are developed and distilled into a theory that Bakhtin (1965/1984) terms "carnavalesque" (p. 15). This theory posits that two important stages need to occur in order for someone to not only experience equality with others but also bring about change in a society (p. 10). The first stage is degradation, which occurs when a speaker parodies or satirizes their target to the extent that what was once sacred and untouchable is now vulgar and material (pp. 20–21). Degradation causes everyone to be situated on the lowest level of the hierarchy together. The second stage happens after a target has

been thrown “down to the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and new birth take[s] place” (p. 21). The target is thus degraded to the point where a rebirth through humility is possible. This stage allows renewal to begin in the target and “bring[s] forth something more and better” in the target’s life (p. 21). Degradation and renewal work in tandem to radically improve societies and those living in them.

The two stages of carnivalesque humor create a space for social correction in a less threatening way by masking the reprimand in a joke made at the target’s expense. Degradation can be used by anyone on any level of the social hierarchy to subvert and mock those above them, and the renewal that follows can develop a sense of humility in the target. Bakhtin (1965/1984) posits that these two stages also affect the creators of the jokes, as well as the audience members who simply listen in on the joking (p. 12). The equality and interconnectedness that everyone experiences when taking part in this degrading and renewing humor work to bring reformation to the societal practices of as well as the people who live in these communities. The humor of carnivalesque points societies toward utopian living by asking them to embrace humility and their own humanity (p. 12).

The stages of degradation and renewal are inextricably linked with humor, relying on laughter to bring about change in a society. As mentioned previously, ironic politeness employs satire to ridicule a target covertly, whereas mocking impoliteness uses parody to evoke laughter. In the case of societal change through degradation and renewal, ironic politeness requires a very biting piece of satire that inspires humility in a target who is higher in the social hierarchy, whereas mocking impoliteness requires that both the speaker and target be from the same peer group and share a jovial camaraderie in order to create change. Both satire and parody can be used to change a society, but they require vastly different tones and intensities to create the change sought by the speaker.

Ironic Politeness and Carnavalesque in “OK Boomer” Tweets

The “OK boomer” pejorative functions on Twitter as an attempt to bring about societal change humorously. Some users on Twitter employ the pejorative in ironically polite tweets with the hope that people will try to think and behave in a fashion similar to that of younger generations. One user tweeted that they were seated near an older gentleman who let his phone ring while in a movie theater, prompting the user to ask the man to turn off his phone (Ho Toy Noodle, 2019). The man told the user, “[I] don’t even know how to work it,” to which the user replied that the man should have left the phone behind if he did not know how to

silence it. The user then followed this remark with “OK BOOMER?” to signify confusion about the fact that the older man did not know how to operate his phone, as well as to imply that the man needed to learn more about current technology. Another user tweeted that she spent a substantial amount of time painting a piece of intricate artwork but her mom noticed only the background colors of the painting (King Max⁷👑, 2020). This user followed her mother’s comment by saying, “ok boomer,” suggesting that she thought her mom did not understand her modern artwork and needed to develop a sense of what is considered tasteful in art today. Both of these users employed ironically polite usages of the “OK boomer” pejorative to satirize their targets and to try to change their targets’ behavior or thinking on issues important to them.

These two tweets follow the stages of degradation and renewal found in carnivalesque humor. The first tweet, from a user who sat next to an older gentleman, uses satire against the older man—on a higher level of the social hierarchy—in order to degrade him by making him seem incredibly incompetent at operating a phone. Because this gentleman is implied to be older than the user, the implication is that he has more power and a higher position in the hierarchy, which causes the user to strive for equality with him by degrading him to the level that the user resides on. The tweet also involves renewal, in that the older gentleman is humbled on Twitter and given a chance to increase his technological skills. In the second tweet offered as an example, the artist’s mother is also both degraded and renewed on Twitter. The mother experiences degradation by having her comment ridiculed in the tweet, but she also finds renewal when her opinion about art is humbled and she is implicitly asked to develop a more modern sense of artistic taste. The degradation and renewal represent an attempt by the daughter to humble her mother in order to have a better connection with her mother, who is in a higher position on the social hierarchy.

Mock Impoliteness and Carnavalesque in “OK Boomer” Tweets

Twitter users have similarly utilized “OK boomer” in a mockingly impolite fashion to bring about change through friendly humor. A user named Nauticalist (2019) employs the pejorative in a reply to a user who typed the wrong word when referring to a collection of emoticons on their phone (Joe, 2019). The pejorative is used in a humorous way for the purpose of lightly correcting the other user on word choice in a nonthreatening manner. The reasoning for using the pejorative here is that the second user should have known the correct word because it is related to a frequently used form of technology. Moreover, Nauticalist is simply trying to make

sure that this user types the right word in future so that the user does not sound like they have just learned about this technology.

Another Twitter thread features the “OK boomer” pejorative in a conversation between a couple of friends. One user tweets that he does not “play games on [F]ridays,” to which his friend Goldy responds with the “OK boomer” pejorative (Goldy, 2020; TUCKER, 2020). This dialogue seems harsh at first, but Goldy is just lightly criticizing a friend for not playing on a Friday. The usage of “OK boomer” implies that Goldy’s friend is acting like an older person in not wanting to play games on a Friday in the way people their age normally do, and Goldy is trying to get the friend to change by pointing out this detail.

These tweets exemplify both degradation and renewal in their usage of the “OK boomer” pejorative. When Nauticalist (2019) lightly corrects their friend, this degrades the friend by humorously pointing out the incorrect usage of the word “reel” and showing that this incorrect usage makes the user seem like they are acting above their social position in the hierarchy. The errant user experiences renewal when replying to Nauticalist by saying that they “like to switch things up now and again,” implying through humor that they know they have made a mistake in word usage and are going to try to not make the mistake again, in order to remain relevant and relatable to their friend (Joe, 2019). When Goldy (2020) mocks his friend for not playing games with him on a Friday, he is degrading his friend by showing that his friend is acting outside of the friend’s position within the social hierarchy by not accepting Goldy’s invitation to play games. Renewal for the friend occurs because the friend has to consider changing their usual Friday activities to include playing games with Goldy in an effort to maintain their position in this peer group.

Carnavalesque and the Modern Satire of “OK Boomer”

Although the “OK boomer” pejorative employs satire in an ironically polite fashion in order to degrade and renew others on Twitter, Bakhtin’s (1965/1984) views on modern satire must also be addressed. Bakhtin writes that carnivalesque is an inclusive laughter that draws all people together into both degradation and renewal (pp. 11–12). The modern satirist fails to draw others together by trying to position themselves as above the target of their joking while also failing to include everyone in their humorous appeal (p. 12). The nature of online formats such as Twitter necessitates that all tweets, including those involving the “OK boomer” pejorative, are public, and tweets are posted in a way that allows everyone to see both the pejorative tweet and the thread on which it has been posted. This ability to

look at tweets using the “OK boomer” phrase makes the satire in these tweets open for all to laugh at so all can join in the degradation and renewal of carnivalesque humor. A case may be made that the satire of these tweets can still prop the writer up as wittier and above the target of the joke but can also be just as effective at pointing out hierarchical injustice. Helen Davies and Sarah Illott (2018) posit that satire is capable of “offer[ing] a critique of entrenched values about ... social power inequalities” (p. 11). Even though a satirist can use the “OK boomer” pejorative to place themselves above the target of their joking, they can also use the pejorative to subvert the power of social hierarchies by illustrating this inequality humorously. Bakhtin may not have believed that modern satire could bring carnivalesque degradation and renewal, but I want to suggest that the “OK boomer” pejorative uses satire in order to subvert social hierarchies and prompt carnivalesque change in others.

Conclusion

The “OK boomer” pejorative is incredibly good at employing the pragmatics of impoliteness, humor, and carnivalesque to establish change in those who are on higher levels of the social hierarchy and in those who reside on the same level in online social media platforms. Because this pejorative is still new, more research needs to be conducted in an effort to understand if another pejorative like this one will find its way into popular online forums; if it does, researchers will need to discover whether it becomes popular for the same generational reasons. Some of this research could include understanding how younger generations became so divided from older generations that they feel the need to create a pejorative in an effort to subvert and change the behavior of other people. Another aspect of this research could focus on the humor that Bakhtin (1965/1984) addresses in his book and could apply that humor to areas online that display subversive tendencies, such as Internet memes. All of these questions could be raised in order to better understand how humor, impoliteness, and carnivalesque come together to create the “OK boomer” pejorative.

The many intricacies of “OK boomer” show the malleability and adaptiveness of language. Jokes that at one time needed inflection and tone of voice in order to be comprehensible can now be understood simply through implied meaning in the particular choice of words that one utilizes. The “OK boomer” pejorative is understood by younger generations as either an ironically polite remark toward people who disagree with their viewpoints or a mockingly impolite way to build camaraderie with their peers. Younger generations also implicitly

know that this pejorative is meant to bring change through degradation and renewal. It would seem that younger generations have developed a means to detect, comprehend, and find humorous the implicit messages encoded in text written on social media platforms. The greatest question that remains from this research is whether older generations will adapt to comprehend the encoded messages found in phrases such as “OK boomer” and their viewpoints change based on their understanding of these messages.

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Appendix A

This appendix provides the research that I have compiled regarding the “OK boomer” pejorative on Twitter. The hyperlinks listed have all been pulled from Twitter, using Twitter’s search feature to look for the phrase “OK boomer” at specific points in the lifespan of the pejorative. I separated these tweets into both ironically polite and mockingly impolite categories and divided them further into the specific date ranges from which they were searched.

As there are far more tweets to choose from than is possible with simple searching and the timeframe available to me for this work, more research could be done in this area to discover the most accurate percentage of ironically polite and mockingly impolite tweets. This research can be a good start to a more in-depth assessment of how the “OK boomer” pejorative is utilized on Twitter.

Ironically Polite Tweets

January 1–February 1, 2019

- <https://twitter.com/boomerwache/status/1089841989569236992?s=20>
- <https://twitter.com/TyranTheRed/status/1088683682729209861?s=20>
- <https://twitter.com/VegetasLeftNut/status/1085905553962950656?s=20>
- https://twitter.com/Zhir_Vengerskye/status/1085430553665429505?s=20
- https://twitter.com/Dalmas_i_vinden/status/1087229805844676608?s=20
- <https://twitter.com/MrsFifn/status/1083400402232578053?s=20>
- <https://twitter.com/yudovico/status/1082579592748118016?s=20>
- <https://twitter.com/slmyers11/status/1082137206578241536?s=20>
- <https://twitter.com/katejellybean/status/1081650921019338752?s=20>
- https://twitter.com/Lea_Avi/status/1080880271367593984?s=20

November 1–December 1, 2019

- <https://twitter.com/YerboutiSheik/status/1200926969015283712?s=20>
- <https://twitter.com/nathanhartswick/status/1200910283776176128?s=20>

- <https://twitter.com/hollandcourtney/status/1200901626346655745?s=20>
- <https://twitter.com/JoeBiden/status/1200882191875465216?s=20>
- <https://twitter.com/JoeBiden/status/1200882191875465216?s=20>
- <https://twitter.com/mattgaetz/status/1200911984750944256?s=20>
- https://twitter.com/unseen1_unseen/status/1200916541753180161?s=20
- <https://twitter.com/neontaster/status/1200896014938497030?s=20>
- <https://twitter.com/neontaster/status/1200896014938497030?s=20>
- https://twitter.com/white_probably/status/1200793326997426176?s=20
- <https://twitter.com/neontaster/status/1200896014938497030?s=20>
- <https://twitter.com/yeseniamurillo/status/1200893545210511360?s=20>
- <https://twitter.com/mostlybree/status/1200889352764698624?s=20>
- <https://twitter.com/JanaKhanafer/status/1200884559245651972?s=20>
- <https://twitter.com/YehoodiMike/status/1200853189496578048?s=20>
- <https://twitter.com/jacobsartorius/status/1200853086744522753?s=20>
- https://twitter.com/natalie_allison/status/1200819160940470273?s=20
- <https://twitter.com/TerrelDreamer/status/1200819145937424385?s=20>
- <https://twitter.com/hotoynoodle/status/1200782785037905924?s=20>
- <https://twitter.com/LibbyCSutcliffe/status/1200721384391020544?s=20>
- <https://twitter.com/CaliforniaMaqui/status/1200695118686113792?s=20>

January 1–February 1, 2020

- <https://twitter.com/fcarucci/status/1223390849528000512?s=20>
- <https://twitter.com/DJStinky/status/1223333974686171136?s=20>
- <https://twitter.com/Alykkat/status/1223329325698535424?s=20>
- https://twitter.com/_ChemaMendiola/status/1223384361992622080?s=20
- <https://twitter.com/YeetProduction/status/1223442863842906112?s=20>
- <https://twitter.com/carleebullock7/status/1223356733076066305?s=20>

- <https://twitter.com/adammanross/status/1223352591528054784?s=20>
- <https://twitter.com/peachiijeon/status/1223349173094944771?s=20>
- <https://twitter.com/lucyleid/status/1223325713027272705?s=20>
- <https://twitter.com/fourlokoemo/status/1223316069152104461?s=20>
- <https://twitter.com/glenn22x/status/1223301613810438144?s=20>
- <https://twitter.com/messuwanted/status/1223258023503781888?s=20>
- <https://twitter.com/maengdaddy420/status/1223233568274550785?s=20>

Mockingly Impolite Tweets

January 1–February 1, 2019

- <https://twitter.com/LoGravityTweets/status/1082848257141690368?s=20>

November 1–December 1, 2019

- <https://twitter.com/monteiro/status/1200915302315225088?s=20>
- <https://twitter.com/ikoneedy/status/1200924687318028289?s=20>
- https://twitter.com/Rx_Pixel/status/1200910397185748992?s=20
- <https://twitter.com/TroyDreyfus/status/1200871062285770754?s=20>
- <https://twitter.com/LordJuiblex/status/1200847411893227520?s=20>
- <https://twitter.com/weareyourfek/status/1200832235210866688?s=20>
- <https://twitter.com/ElizaHannon/status/1200794168878125056?s=20>
- https://twitter.com/Rachel_Sennott/status/1200781833467772932?s=20

January 1–February 1, 2020

- <https://twitter.com/GoldGloveTV/status/1223318255420370944?s=20>
- <https://twitter.com/jasonkersey/status/1223296235261644800?s=20>