The object I will be focusing on for my paper is The Good Place. I want to focus on the episodes and scenes that deal with the moral implications of our existence and of everyday life that come about by operating in our culture/system. This show focuses on a group strangers who all end up in the “good place” but that place actually ends up being their own personal hell. In this place they learn lessons about becoming better people as well as realizing that their actions are not their own but that everything they do is being controlled. They also realize that their earth actions had major consequences. My research questions are as follows: how does the good place use comedy and their positionality to discuss what is the perfect good consumer and how is this tied back to our overall culture? And how does the good place use comedy to situate and make light of how good is tied to consumerism as well as how things that happen in our culture are due to power structures? And how does the good place use comedy as a form of social change?

The target audience for this project is viewers of the TV show. Another target audience would be those who want to have an understanding of the implications comedy has when it comes to social change. The show focuses on using comedy for making fun of the social issues people are dealing with. This comedy is one way that the show likes to draw attention to it and make it a show more people want to view. If the show was a serious show that only focused on serious topics, it would not have such a wide fan base like it has for being a comedy. The show interpellates the audience into being to have them realize their own place in life. The use of comedy allows the audience to laugh at the characters issues while thinking about the fact that this is something they are dealing with. There are specific scenes from the show that express the fact that human existence as we know it now has too many social implications no matter what.
Even if one tries to be a good person there is always things that happen based on the capitalist system that we as humans do not have any control over. The show is one way to discuss media and how the audience members of the show will each get a different definition of the show and of the points they are trying to make. The show uses comedy to talk about larger social issues and allow the audience to have a better understanding by making fun of the issues that people are actually dealing with today. In our social world today everything is controlled by the system we live in. Everything in life is based on class and race, these issues are brought to light and are explained how they are socialized into our everyday society.

The show tries to interpellates audiences into recognizing themselves as subjects of the system that we live in. It shows them how everything in life is laid out for them and there are consequences to every action that people have on earth that will therefore affect where they end up in the afterlife. This media object is currently really popular, it has even been called one of the best sitcoms out there today. It focuses on societal ideas that are prevalent in our society today that affect the way people live. It highlights societal norms and ideals that are created by the capitalistic society we live in. The use of comedy allows for people to make sense of the philosophical questions and issues by putting themselves into the shoes of the characters in the show. The Good Place show directly located within the core are of media studies and comedy, it is in this because it is a tv show that is widely known that is a comedy that most people enjoy when they watch the show.

By analyzing the scenes that focus on these big philosophical questions as well as scenes where the characters are realizing their positions on both earth and the good place and earth I will be able to make connections to the larger society that we are a part of. The show has very
specific scenes where the people in the good place realize everything that is happening to them is due to their actions on earth. The scene I will focus on the most is the scene where the main character Michael realizes that no one has gotten into the real good place for over 500 years. The characters figure out that everyone's actions on earth even if they are good have negative consequences tied to them. Michael realizes that being a consumer in society makes it impossible to be a good ethical person because no matter what there might be something negative attached to these things.

Those who have talked about this show discuss how it is a show that teaches the audience life lessons and allows them to learn more about themselves. They even discuss how this show is needed in our society to teach people the lessons that they might not want to become aware of. This is important and should be studied. Comedy being used as social change is one of the ways tv shows are now becoming popular. This show uses comedy and philosophy to teach crucial life lessons to people by having someone else deal with them and making it funny. The audience connects with the issues being presented in the tv show and feel like they are being given a way out of their own issues.

2) Literature Review.

Previous literature has focused on how comedy is used to talk about serious topics and how the comic frame can be used to discuss these topics and shed light on social issues. Scholars such as Renegar, talks about how comedy can be used to discuss books and how these books shed light on underlying topics presented in these stories. Other authors such as Young talk about how comedy can be connected to tv shows and can show how late night shows use this frame to talk about politics in a satirical way that more people can connect with. The theories most
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pertinent to my work are going to be comedy and how comedy has a larger effect on people as well as how comedy can be used to talk about issues. The show I will be focusing on is a comedy that sheds light on the things happening in the world and they do this in a funny way. I will also focus on how the TV show uses religion and talks about it. As well as audience reactions to tv shows and to comedy in tv shows. Literature for this project can be split into three categories: Religion, Comedy, and audience reaction.

Comedy:

Comedy has been used in television for a very long time now. Tv shows focus on using comedy when they are talking about bigger social issues. An important comedy act used as comedy for social change has been Nanette by Hannah Gadsby. Nanette is used as comedy for social change, she discusses serious issues about her life through the use of comedy. This is a kind of trauma tourism that uses comedy as a way to make light of bigger issues (Fury 2019). This kind of comedy is used to make an impact on the way people think. Though it is funny and used as a way to get people to laugh, there are serious topics being discussed and in Nanette this is incredibly important to get the point of how she was treated when she came out. Comedians use this comedy to make fun of serious social issues. But so do late night tv shows. Late night Tv shows like Stephen colbert as well as shows like The Daily Show with Trevor Noah both make fun of politics through the use of comedy. The shows focus on cliches like the citizens fool as well as making fun of political leaders and their current plans or ideas by making jokes and cracks at them (Meier 2016, Young 2006). This has been something that has been happening for years on television. Especially recently Stephen Colbert has gained much popularity among the younger crowd and makes fun of republicans and politicians with his citizens fool (Meier 2016).
From these tv shows we understand how comedy is connected to american culture. Television comedy can be used to showcase american culture and it sheds light on current political and social ideologies (Meier 2016, Marc 1992, Young 2006).

Talking about social change and about the fear or the future is something done in book and tv shows. Comedy can be used as a way of accepting the lives that we have or thinking about the lives that we are headed towards (Renegar 2011, Renegar 2016, Christiansen and Hanson 1996). Comedy gets us as an audience to start thinking about our own life and to make realizations about where we are or are heading. What is done is that comedy is used to make fun of big social issues and to get people to correct their behavior and think really hard about the issues we are facing today (Christiansen and Hanson 1996). While we are presented with our current situations and our current state of living we are made to think about our actions and about the moral world that we are living in. Renegar argues that Kenneth Burke's comic frame can serve as a vehicle for critical self-reflection and social critique (Renegar 2011). This is what Tv shows who use comedy are trying to achieve, they want people to self reflect as well as see the social critique that they are making about life.

Tv shows now in America have also focused on this issue of social change through comedy. British Tv shows focus on issues of social class and they tend to do this trough comedy (Lockyer 2010). They make fun of certain social classes with comedy to make people more aware of the class differences people experiences as well as self reflecting on the viewers own social class. Humor has such an intense amount of power when it comes to self reflections of one's own life. It is also important to understand the power that humor holds in getting people to
realize the larger social structures that are at play in society (Lockyer 2010, Friedman and Kuipers 2013)

Religion:

The good place relies heavily on talk about religion, the show focuses on heaven and hell as well as what happens when you die and go to the after life. There is a kind of god up there but really the way people are picked to go to heaven or hell is through a point system. Religion is used in many different tv shows and many different avenues. Two other shows that discuss religion are The Big Bang Theory and The Simpsons. Both shows use comedy to discuss religion and they are heavily centered around religion even if they are not explicitly outward with how they feel about religion (Lewis and Malloy 2015, Lewis 2009). Both tv shows saterize American ideals about religion. Both shows make people laugh but they also make people aware of the impact that religion has on our society (Lewis 2009). Religion and comedy work together on TV. It is even taken as far as using comedy and religion together with politics on Tv to interpolate the audience into being and seeing the greater aspects of life (Gray 2009, Howley 2001). Using comedy with religion and with some big social issue like politics shows how ingrained religion is in our system and and what a huge impact religion has on the culture that we live in (Lewis 2009, Gray 2009, Howley 2001). It is important to understand as well that a late night tv host Stephen Colbert talks about religion and he became a voice of religion for his fan base (Schofield Clark 2011). Comedy and religion go together and get people to start thinking about the things they may not always be thinking about.

Religion is mostly used on reality tv shows. The way religion is taught on reality tv shows is the hegemonic norms of society and how normalized religion seems to be in people's
lives (Engstrom and Semic 2003, Birman and Lehmann 1999). Religion is so ingrained in to who we are as people and it comes with such a specific type of person that is a religious follower. This kind of religion has an ideology behind it that people have a connection with based on how they were brought up in our society. The problem here is that when only certain religions are shown on television or only one kind of religious person is shown it creates an issue among those who are not religious (Norenzayan et al 2009). The Good place uses traditional religious ideals with the idea of heaven and hell, everyone who was good and bad went to the good place or the bad place and there was not any other options for people. The show focuses on the cultures ideals of what heaven and hell are like and who goes to these two different places.

Audience reaction:

One critical thing that the show has to focus on is the audience reaction to the things they are showing them. The audience is all going to get something different from each show that they watch and from each episode there can be multiple different reactions. Everyone will have a unique perspective when it comes to comedy, everyone has a different lense that they see the world trough that allows for multiple interpretations of the same thing (Martin et al 2008). People are more likely to respond to self deprecating humor that shows others suffering and nonsense humor that does not make any sense (Chang and Grunner 1981, Zillman and Bryant 2013). This kind of humor is what attracts people and get people to watch. The Good place uses self deprecating humor where the characters realize just how bad their lives are. It also sometimes uses nonsense humor where the audience has no idea what is going on but they are laughing along with it and making fun of the characters and maybe even themselves. All viewers of the show have a different reaction to the comedy being shown in the show.
Popular media:

The Good Place and the work it has been doing to discuss topics many may not want to discuss, I also want to consult all sorts of literature that has to do with comedy and how wildly popular comedy has become to talk about politics or other issues. Popular media has gotten a hold of the good place and have nothing but good things to say about the show. Some critics online say “The fact remains. “The Good Place” — the story of a group of recently deceased earthlings navigating the afterlife — is the best sitcom on TV” (The New York Times Magazine 2018). There is a lot of people who think that this show is funny and they have a connection to it making it one of the best shows in their minds. Within the show “ethics is not some kind of moralistic byproduct; it’s baked into the very premise. The show is entirely life lessons.” (The New York Times Magazine 2018). The show focuses heavily on teaching people something about themselves as well as getting them to start thinking about their own positionality on earth.

Critics of the show talk about the lessons and the ideas behind shows that are using comedy to tell their stories. Most critics tend to agree that The Good Place is “exploring more ethical avenues for us to travel down, in which our badness is openly acknowledged, right before we are gently nudged back onto the road of rehabilitation, via snappy but casually earnest dialogue” (Buzzfeed News 2019). Another huge lesson from the show is that “The human race, may actually have some redeeming qualities; that our moral fiber might not yet have gone fully rancid” (Buzzfeed News 2019). The Good Place tries to teach these life lessons to their audience...
by showing the characters dealing with their own moral and social dilemmas and trying to balance this with their social lives. By making the characters more relatable to the audience, critics agree that the show makes people want to come back and continue watching the show as well as actually get something from the show. The show uses it platform as well as comedy to show people these life lessons and get them to think a little about the things that they do.

3) Methodology.

To analyze my research object I will watch the show and study certain episodes that discuss philosophical issues that the characters in the show are dealing with that transfer to real life people. I will discuss how this show uses comedy in order to talk about topics that people may find as taboo or controversial and they use it in order to get the audience to make a connection with the show. The show uses comedy throughout while also including some serious scenes that deal with serious topics. The comedy and the seriousness are used throughout the show and bits and pieces of it are present in the episodes to capture the audience's attention. I am going to analyze the scenes from the show and carefully look for times when they use comedy for social change and whether they want people to laugh with the show or laugh about the show. The scenes I will be using will be scenes that are tied to what it means to be good consumer and good person on earth and how this has an affect on where people will end up in the after life. The scenes focus on how the shows critiques the overall culture that we currently live in. The scenes discuss class, and race when it comes to being good and bad consumers.

I will focus on scenes that focus on how our actions on earth have consequences based on the current system that we live in and how this has many effects. I will focus on scenes where they talk about the point score system that the show has for getting into heaven or hell and how
these points are tallied in the end. The show uses this point system to decide who gets into heaven and who gets into hell. The point system is incredibly flawed and was man made, so this is an important scene to discuss. I am going to compare this show to other shows out there as well as other comedy sketches that use comedy for social change. Multiple shows that I will be comparing to The Good Place talk about human existence and about human moral dilemmas that people deal with every single day that make them “bad” or “good” people. This is imprinted on us from when we are kids and this has an affect on the way we live our everyday lives. I will also like to focus on how the TV show interpellates the audience into seeing how they fit into the grand scheme of life as well as having them realize this is something people deal with everyday.

By viewing the tv show and analyzing the scenes of the show I will be able to look at the philosophical issues being talked about in the show through a critical lense. The scenes in The Good Place that I have chosen show philosophical questions and the ways in which humans navigate earth. The actions taken on earth have consequences when getting into heaven and hell and this is shown throughout the show as the four main characters navigate their actions taken on earth. The show both brings the audience into realizing that they are the ones currently dealing with these issues and it explains the bigger social implications within the show.
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