

**“Bad taste” narratives, Good Values –*South Park* as an  
example of political communication**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this thesis is to use South Park, a satirical TV programme as an example of popular culture, to explore the extents to which it uses “bad taste” narratives as a way of carnivalesque presentation to present “good values”, as a result of conveying political knowledge. The idea of “political knowledge” established by van Zoonen (2005) and the relevant literature of satire will be discussed on the ground of the connection between politics and popular culture. Despite South Park using vulgarity, grotesque images, taboo-breaking discourse as satirical manners to frame its “bad taste” narratives, this thesis will use Bakhtin’s ideas of “carnivalesque” and textual analysis to find out whether South Park presents “good values” via selected episodes.

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## Introduction

This research project is designed to find out how the use of ‘bad taste’, humour narratives conveys messages critical of politics. My focus is on an animated satirical TV show, *South Park*, one of the most popular cartoon TV programmes in the US. According to IMDb (Internet Movie Database), *South Park* received an overall rating 8.8 out of 10 in 2016<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, there were “three million new subscribers to *South Park* in the first half of 1998 alone” (Gournelos, 2009:12). More importantly, according to Comedy Central (2013), a television channel on which *South Park* is one of the highest rated shows - up to 4.43 million of viewers watched *South Park* via different media in 2013. According to Simmons Market Research (2005), to the “surprise of many media critics”, *South Park* is the most popular show among gay viewers, which suggests that it appeals to a diverse audience.

The show’s popularity means that it may have the potential to convey political messages to the viewers, enabling them to look at politics and social issues more critically (van Zoonen, 2005). This dissertation will argue that despite the ‘bad taste’ humour that is used in *South Park*’s narratives, the narratives convey ‘good values’. *South Park* is used here as an example of popular culture to discuss the extent to which the programme suggests an alternative way to look at politics by focusing on the ‘good values’ of the narratives of *South Park*. In this thesis, I will argue that these ‘good values’ are a result of the political knowledge embedded in *South Park*’s narratives. This political knowledge involves the critical messages *South Park* tries to convey. Those can be an

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0121955/>, Access date: 12/07/2016

illustration of what happens in political reality, a set of critiques of particular political behaviour or the suggestion of looking at particular political matters differently.

South Park has a “vision of the world: what it should look like, how people should behave and treat one another, and how we can all function together harmoniously” (Solomon, 2012:3). This research project will argue that *South Park* as an example of popular culture, provides “political knowledge” (van Zoonen & Wring, 2012:2). The idea of political knowledge is defined as below:

Political knowledge can be political ideas derived from the narratives/texts from popular cultural productions. These popular cultural productions can be framed as political fictions for the purpose of conveying political messages. These political messages, as political knowledge, can be conceived as political judgements and criticisms. For instance, van Zoonen (2015) claims that where the narratives/texts from the CBS series, *Person of Interest*, offers a range of political messages that involve criticism and political judgements.

The analysis of *Person of Interest* suggests that a government is able to foretell terrorism and crime on the basis of monitoring all forms of digital communication – “You are being watched. The government has a secret system that spies on you every hour every day”. Although the political plots in *Person of Interest* are fictional, van Zoonen (2015) argues that *Person of Interest* successfully illuminates crucial matters in the real political world: surveillance and privacy. The plots in this series, according to van Zoonen (2015), revolve around “a government AI that is capable of predicting

terrorism and crime on the basis of monitoring all forms of digital communication”. In other words, though *Person of Interest* is fictional political and a crime series, it provides a political vision that may offer the viewers enhanced knowledge about surveillance issues.

Although van Zoonen and Wring work on a different form of fiction to find out how the political knowledge is formulated via UK political dramas, it could be the case that a source of political knowledge and understanding can emerge from the narratives of *South Park*. As a satirical cartoon, *South Park* uses irony and ridicule to mock politicians, celebrities, and other public figures, for their failure to tackle conflict effectively. *South Park* sets its political plots in a town called South Park in Colorado, USA. These plots, which can be seen to convey critical political messages, will be assessed and discussed in later chapters. Soloman claims that *South Park* conveys critical political messages that involve a “battle against extremism – not against the beliefs themselves but against the believers who insist that their way of viewing the world is the only right one”. Thus “moderation” and “tolerance mixed with scorn and scepticism for those who try to tell us how to live our lives is just a part of South Park’s regular message” (Soloman, 2012:3). From what Soloman claims, the pedagogical messages from *South Park* usually involve pointing out the flaws in politics and society and, especially address the criticism of those who take their beliefs for granted. Soloman illustrates the potential that *South Park* has to convey a particular set of political views. This thesis will find out what kind of particular political values *South Park* tries to convey as political knowledge.

As a part of popular culture, *South Park* can perform a wide range of functions. For instance, *South Park* represents “an escapist sphere” which “has a vision of utopia, collectivity or even emancipation” (Dimitrakaki and Tsiantis, 2002:209). One of the functions *South Park* performs is to provide a political vision that involves fictional political controversy. As Soloman argues (2012:4):

A controversy is established in each 22-minute episode. The four eight-years-old boys (Eric Cartman, Stan Marsh, Kyle Broflovski and Kenny McCormick) in *South Park* must learn about the issues surrounding this controversy [...]finally, they must summarise what they learned.

This controversy is a reflection of what happens in the real world. It revolves around the issues of ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality and political conflicts in society. In each episode, these four eight-years-old boys engage in one or multiple controversies that are politics-related. By finding out what they eventually and mutually agree in order to end the controversies, they need to experience the causes of conflict and the consequences of the conflict. *South Park* is not “bound by reality when it creates the outrageous problems surrounding any controversy” (ibid:4). *South Park* usually generates fictional controversy surrounding political and social conflicts, or chaos. It presents the cause, the progress and the solution to a specific conflict or state of chaos in every episode. It also tends to use the children to present political issues, conflicts and individual struggles, as well as the controversial, and more importantly, pedagogical messages at the end of each episode. What Soloman may suggest is that *South Park* has the potential to offer viewers political knowledge to look at particular political matters presented in different episodes

The way that *South Park* presents its narratives is to use vulgarity, obscenity and grotesque images, humour, graphic presentation of the characters' death, nudity, ridicule and taboo-breaking discourse. This 'bad taste' is central to the plot in each episode. It is important to look at these 'bad taste' features as they play quite a significant role in *South Park*'s narrative framing. These narratives also address politics by mocking, ridiculing and poking fun at certain political ideologies or individuals. The vulgarity and the deaths of particular characters are not necessarily the only tactics that *South Park* uses in its narratives. It also "tackles contemporary issues by applying lewd and toilet jokes," (Thorogood, 2016:2) to ridicule particular political matters or public figures. *South Park* also contains a series of acts such as "bestiality, cannibalism, genocide and mutilation" (ibid:2) which can be considered as taboo-breaking. What is in 'bad taste' in *South Park* is that its narratives usually involve the features relevant to vulgarity, obscenity and grotesque images as a framing tactic. This kind of framing tactic is most likely linked to the carnivalesque, a concept that will be used to explain the purpose and the function of 'bad taste' narratives. Furthermore, the establishment of 'bad taste' narratives is a part of carnivalesque framing. The ideas of the 'carnavalesque will be further discussed in Chapter Two.

The main question that the thesis raises is how the 'bad taste' narratives of *South Park* have 'good values' as a result of providing political knowledge while satirising political or public figures, individual political conflicts and controversy. In answering the question, this thesis will be organised into three chapters. The first main chapter will be assessing the literature of what is political about popular culture and the relation between politics and popular culture. This can help us to understand how popular

culture can be used to learn about politics. Thus, Chapter One will explore the extent to which popular culture has the potential to serve as a source of political knowledge.

Chapter One will find out the extent to which satire, as an example of popular culture, is political. By doing this, the first chapter will utilise van Zoonen (2005), Torchin (2008) and Jordan's (2010) analysis of selected satirical programmes to find out the extent to which satire uses particular narratives to express political messages. After that, this chapter will explore the extent to which *South Park* has the satirical characteristics detailed in the analysis by van Zoonen, Torchin and Jordan. It will use Binder and Gournelo's work, in addition to Anderson's essay on *South Park*, to further explore the potential of *South Park* for providing a source of political knowledge.

After that, the first chapter will introduce the idea of the 'carnavalesque, a concept established by Mikhail Bakhtin. This theory will help us understand the purpose of *South Park*'s 'bad taste' humour in its narratives. The literature on 'carnavalesque' discusses the function of vulgarity, taboo-breaking discourse and grotesque images used in popular cultural production. This will help us understand whether *South Park* uses the carnivalesque framing in its narratives as a way of presenting critical political messages. Based on the concept of carnivalesque, this chapter will introduce the combined method, called carnivalesque textual analysis, in order to analyse selected episodes of *South Park* in this thesis. This method is an appropriate method for the analysis of selected episodes of *South Park* because it will help us to firstly explore whether *South Park* has carnivalesque content. Secondly, it will help us to find out the political potential of narratives within *South Park* which the features involve the use of ridicule, vulgarity, taboo-breaking discourse and grotesque images. Thirdly, this

method will help us to comprehend what critical messages each of these selected episodes of *South Park* try to convey.

This chapter will examine whether the 'bad taste' narratives of *South Park* that are associated with the idea of the carnivalesque, have good political values. The critiques that draw upon particular political or social issues and the pedagogical discourse that suggests looking at particular political events and struggles from a different angle. It will focus on analysing five selected episodes of *South Park*. This chapter will be divided into three sections. The first section will use one episode, S15E01 (Season 15, Episode 1), "HumancentiPad" (A parody of the film *The Human Centipede*), as an example to investigate the critical messages about the relation between users and the technological giant, Apple Inc. This episode also deals with the subject of everyday consumerism. The second section will seek to explore the surveillance and privacy issues presented in two particular episodes in *South Park*, S17E01, "Let Go, Let Gov" and S16E01, "Reverse Cowgirl". The third section will discuss a different political subject – political correctness (PC), which is presented throughout Season 19. This section will use S19E01, "Stunning and Brave" and S19E02, "Where Has My Country Gone", to find out how *South Park* addresses critiques of PC culture via carnivalesque framing.

Chapter Three draws conclusions for what the previous chapters have analysed. This chapter will critically reflect what the previous chapters have done, providing a summary of the 'bad taste' narratives from *South Park* that, as a result of providing political knowledge, has 'good values'. This chapter will suggest that popular culture affords a capacity for learning about politics, rather than producing political

enlightenment. Although the political potential of *South Park* should not be overlooked, it still does suggest a different way of looking at politics. Therefore, this chapter will finally argue that although *South Park*, as an example of popular culture, uses carnivalesque framing strategy to present its ‘bad taste’ narratives, it does not fail to suggest a different way to look at political matters differently and critically.

# **Chapter 1: Why South Park Matters to the Connection Between Politics and Popular Culture**

## **1.1 Popular culture and politics**

This chapter will first introduce van Zoonen's theory (2005) that popular culture serves as a source of political knowledge. This theory matters because the analysis of *South Park* will partly involve the messages critical of politics it tries to convey. These critical political messages can be a source of political knowledge, which provides the indications of political crisis, critiques of political ideas and explanations of the causes of societal conflict. Moreover, to investigate what 'good values', as a result of political knowledge, *South Park* tries to present in spite of its 'bad taste' narratives needs a theoretical background study of the potential of popular culture and its role played in political communication. This theoretical background study will involve van Zoonen's theory of how popular culture can be a source of political knowledge. Additionally, this chapter will divide into three sections. The first section will open up the discussion of van Zoonen's analysis and summary of the relation between popular culture and politics and the function of popular culture in knowing about politics. van Zoonen analyses two TV programmes, a political drama, *The West Wing*, and a satirical comedy, *Yes, Prime Minister*, to explore the extent to which the plots in these TV programmes can be a source of what she sees as political knowledge.

The second section will begin a discussion based on what van Zoonen discovers from *Yes, Prime Minister* and an analysis of the satirical film *Borat*, analysed by Jordan (2010). By applying these two examples, this section will begin assessing the literature

that emphasises the potential of satirical programmes in regard to conveying political messages. The reason why this section is using those two examples and assessing the literature of satire is because it is important to find out the extent to which satire, as an example of popular culture, is political.

The third section will be based on the findings of the first and second section, along with the previous findings of scholars such as Anderson (2005), Binder (2014) and Gournelos (2009), on the literature of *South Park* as a satirical animated TV programme, to find out the political potential of it. This is to find out what sort of messages critical of politics *South Park* tries to convey.

## **1.2: The Politics of Popular Culture**

van Zoonen's *Entertaining the Citizen – When Politics and Popular Culture Converge* shows that popular culture, such as music and particularly television, is “our prime source for learning about politics, and it provides the instruments for understanding, evaluating and appreciating politics” (2005:21). She argues that television is the primary and unavoidable means of political communication (2005:21). To find out how television is a vehicle of political communication and information, she uses examples of television programmes where political matters are prominent. van Zoonen establishes a set of categories based on the different framings given to political plots in television series – “the quest, soap, bureaucracy, conspiracy” (ibid, 2005:109). Each of these plots has a different function that imagines a different relationship between the individual and the political order. For instance, the narratives of “quest and soap are

about individuals, operating alone or in teams, for the greater good of society, whereas bureaucracy and conspiracy are about the sinister forces that favour private interests and oppress individual choice” (ibid, 2005:120)

Later in her book, van Zoonen reveals how popular culture can serve as a vehicle to accelerate citizens’ possible interests or engagement in politics. For example, after her analysis of how audiences react to the TV series, *The West Wing*, van Zoonen (ibid, 2005:137) concludes that:

Although a large amount of the comments in audiences’ analysis did not address politics at all, there were enough that did to warrant the conclusion that popular culture indeed functions as a source of gaining insight into politics and as a means to perform citizenship by presenting one’s idea in a public setting.

In this sense, although there might be some audience members who do not necessarily discuss politics after watching *The West Wing*, van Zoonen’s conclusion from her audience analysis suggests that *The West Wing* has the potential to facilitate audiences’ political knowledge. In other words, *The West Wing* serves as a potential source of information for audiences by conveying political ideas and perhaps political critiques.

However, there are different views about the relation between politics and popular culture, especially popular culture that serves as a source of political knowledge and critiques. Sceptics such as Mulgan (1991) claim that popular culture leads to “personalised” politics, trivialising democracy as it provides ill-informed judgements of political events and so forth. Despite Mulgan’s scepticism about whether popular

culture provides sources of political critiques and political knowledge, the role played by popular culture in political communication is still significant. Politics needs to be “communicated in order to acquire the interest and involvement of its external referents, the average citizens” (van Zoonen, 2005:7). Thus, whether it may trivialise politics or lead to ill-informed judgements (Mulgan, 1991) popular culture still does play a potential role in informing citizens and providing sources of political knowledge. The relationship between popular culture and politics is closely linked. Politics has become, as Jones argues, “a source of entertainment and drama [...] Politics are increasingly created through and for media spectatorship, and hence the desired separation between media (popular culture in any formats) and politics is no longer possible” (Jones, 2010:14). Popular culture potentially presents political messages as a source of political knowledge, and politics is used for the establishment of popular cultural productions that are framed accordingly to present particular critiques.

Another question about the relationship between popular culture and politics is whether the fictional political plots in productions connect to the real world, as a way of representation. van Zoonen suggests that “fictional politicians are subjected to the same categories of judgments that people use to evaluate real politicians” (2005:130). Whether the politicians in TV series or political stories are fictional or real, according to van Zoonen, does not really matter. They “function in the continuous reconstruction and expression of people’s evaluation schemata, in order to make clear to others what they think are appropriate conducting mode in office” (ibid, 2005:130). van Zoonen (2005:137) then concludes that

the matter of whether the popular text in question is based on true or fictional is not crucial, because fictions like *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*; *Dave*, *The West Wing* or *Yes, Prime Minister* are analysed entirely based on knowledge and the advice of insiders to true politics; because both fiction and nonfiction of politics draw from the same popular codes about character and narratives; and because the viewers accordingly use the same frames in order to make sense of fictional and true politics.

This section has explored the extent to which popular culture serves as a potential source of political knowledge, regardless of the fictionality of political plots. Popular culture, in other words, is claimed as a means of knowing about politics and forming political critiques. Thus, popular culture is playing a significant role in political communication. The next section will examine the extent to which satire, as a part of popular culture, provides the critical political messages as a source of political knowledge. The reason for doing this is to find out how satire uses particular framings to present those political messages.

### **1.3: Satire and politics**

This section will use van Zoonen's analysis of *Yes, Prime Minister* and Torchin and Jordan's analysis of the film *Borat*, to find out if satire, as an example of popular cultural production, can serve as a source of political knowledge and imagination, in spite of the use of irony and ridiculing narrative framing. The purpose of discussing these two examples, *Yes, Prime Minister* and *Borat* is not to go into detail about their

narratives, but to highlight the political potential of satire. The discussion revolving around these two examples is designed to raise the question as to how satire enables discussion of political subjects, playing its pedagogical role in conveying messages critical of politics. The narratives of satire divides society into two: “greedy, corrupt individuals and honourable, ordinary people” (Street, 2011:90). It has its particular narratives framing, which serves different purposes for ridiculing or mockery of those “greedy, corrupt individuals” while urging others to be “honourable and ordinary people”.

van Zoonen uses *Yes, Prime Minister*, a satirical comedy broadcast on British television in the 1980s, as an example to argue that the fictional stories and characters are not necessarily out of touch with “true politics”. Rather, the fictional stories address authentic political matters and make critiques of particular political behaviour. Even Margaret Thatcher, who was the British Prime Minister in that era, seemingly agrees that it is authentic of the series:

“Its closely observed portrayal of what goes on in the corridors of power has given me hours of pure joy” (BBC, 2001)

The satirical comedy, *Yes, Prime Minister*, allows a more pleasurable mode of knowing about politics. It also, either indirectly or directly, criticises political figures for their incompetence and inefficiency. In spite of its fictional status, argues Hall, it acts “to balance the fictional and the real in order to amuse and to educate in more or less equal measure” (2012:222). Satire has a tendency to “make substantial use of irony, of addressing the opposite of what the author and the audience know is (or ought to be)

the case, for drawing attention to an inconsistency or contradiction” (ibid, 2012:222; Rorty, 1989). In this case, satire can serve as a source of political knowledge, by using a framing strategy based on irony. Although satire can be fictional, it is not necessarily out of touch with political reality, as Griffin (1994:1) argues:

It seeks to persuade an audience that something or someone is reprehensible or ridiculous; unlike pure rhetoric, it engages in exaggeration and some sort of fiction. Moreover, satire does not utterly leave the “real world” behind. Its victim comes from that world, and it is this fact (together with the darker or sharper tone) that separates satire from pure comedy. Finally, satire usually proceeds by means of clear reference to some moral standards or purposes.

The example of *Yes, Prime Minister*, as used by van Zoonen, can be seen as an instance where satire can convey political messages. As a part of popular culture, satire provides a more pleasurable experience of knowing about politics. It also conveys messages critical of politics. Satire’s entertaining element consists of “jokes”. These jokes are not merely for laughter or fun. More importantly, these jokes may play a role for the viewers to “have a laugh” at politics. Their function in political communication is that “the joke is not that funny things happen in politics, but that politics is laughable” (Street, 2002:16). In addition, another purpose of jokes in a satirical series like *Yes, Prime Minister* is to ridicule politics, to undermine its power (Keighron, 1998). The role played by satire is to provide “the mockery of politics and politicians. It is perhaps the most obvious way in which political life becomes part of entertainment” (Street, 2010:81). The example of *Yes, Prime Minister*, as analysed by van Zoonen, shows that, despite its fictional status and its features that involve irony, jokes and ridicule, satire

engages in political discussion and conveys political messages. Satire can be a source of entertainment, political knowledge and critiques.

There is another example where satire can be considered as a potential for conveying messages critical of politics as a source of political knowledge, in spite of its fictional status. This is found in Torchin's film analysis of *Borat*, a “mockumentary satire which shares the common ground of documentary, involving numerous interviews with real-life characters and events” (2008:53-54). The form of mockumentary “draws on recognisable documentary conventions to serve story-telling purposes” (ibid, 2008:54). The film *Borat* “mostly depends on irony to achieve its satiric thrust” (Jordan, 2010:41). *Borat* deals with numerous political subjects. These include American nationalism, homosexuality, feminism and the political interview. Particularly, *Borat* has anti-Semitic narratives where Borat performs on the stage and sings “throw the Jew down the well”. There is another plot of this film where he is trying to buy a gun while asking the gun seller: “What is the best gun to defend from a Jew?”

However, the actor and co-creator of *Borat*, Sacha Baron Cohen, is a Jew himself. So this may raise the question as to why Sacha Baron Cohen, as the main character and co-creator, has made such a film that involves being prejudiced against himself? The film, as Jordan argues, is not anti-Semitic at all (2010:42). The anti-Semitism narratives are situated in the film for ironic effect. As Low and Smith (2007) suggest, Sacha Baron is making statements that are absolutely opposite of what he really believes in order to illustrate underlying prejudices towards the Jewish community.

The use of this kind of irony in satire should be “understood not as an engendering of racial hatred, but as a condemnation of these prejudices” (ibid, 2010:42). Borat lets people “lower their guard and expose their own prejudice, whether it is anti-Semitism or an acceptance of anti-Semitism” (2007:20). *Borat* allows for the discussion of racial prejudice. It provides a pleasurable way to experience politics with laughter. It also uses oppositional narratives and irony to ridicule individuals, the public and political figures.

In addition, based on van Zoonen’s arguments that fictional political rhetoric connects to “political reality”, satire draws on observations of reality to illustrate the humour extent in everyday life (Rill and Cardiel, 2013). It is also capable of making comments upon political or social issues, by articulating a sense of the absurdity of, and hilariousness at, the individuals who cause them. Leboeuf (2007) also points out that satire can shield its creator from being condemned for expressing criticism. It becomes a powerful tool for dissenters in difficult or oppressive political and social periods.

In short, there are three essential points that van Zoonen contributes to the literature that links popular culture and politics. Firstly, van Zoonen’s work on films and television programmes provide ideas that can serve as a source of political knowledge. Secondly, van Zoonen stresses that the fictional characters or stories are not necessarily out of touch with politics. Rather, they provide the political knowledge that connects to the real world. And finally, van Zoonen utilises a satirical programme, *Yes, Prime Minister*, as an example of her analysis of how popular culture or entertainment provides a pleasurable way to know about politics. Thus, satire, as a part of popular culture, is a source of entertainment, and of political knowledge and understanding the messages critical of politics.

So far in this chapter, I have explored van Zoonen's and other scholars' work on the link between popular culture (i.e.: television programmes and films, especially satire) and politics, revealing that popular culture conveys political knowledge. It has also highlighted the role of satire in political communications. The next section will ask whether *South Park* shares the political purpose and narrative features of the satirical programmes mentioned above.

#### **1.4: South Park and politics**

As briefly stated in the section 1.3, satire expresses political ideas, critiques and especially ridicules and mocks individuals and political figures. Satire has its particular narrative features, involving “critique, irony and implicitness” (Leboeuf, 2007:3). These features altogether are the core framing of satire. The narratives of *South Park* have these satirical features as it uses absurd language to poke fun at individuals including average citizens, public figures, politicians and celebrities in almost every episode. They also use an exaggerated form of illustration of characters' behaviour in every episode. There are numerous scholars such as Binder (2014) and Kincheloe (1999) who show that *South Park* has the potential to convey political messages, as a source of political knowledge via these satirical features. These authors agree that *South Park* provides critical views of political matters. Binder (2014) points out that *South Park* applies humour as a tactic to address sensitive political issues such as racial politics. She uses the episode, “With Apologies to Jesse Jackson”, to explore the racial tension and the critical political narrative embedded in the fictional characters in *South Park*. This episode mainly focuses on the racial tension between “the white” and “the black”

as races. The representation from this episode embodies “a social critique of the state of race relations in the United States and a portrayal of white anxiety as hindering open discourse on the topic” (2014:41). Moreover, in this episode, white anxieties “are portrayed in such a way as to critique the current dysfunctional state of race relations in the United States, suggesting viewers to critically consider issues of race rather than to inhibit such discourse” (ibid, 2014:41)

This particular episode not only raises issues of racial tensions but also enables more critical ways of viewing politics. Kincheloe argues that the episode suggests “a critical pedagogy of whiteness must balance a serious critique of whiteness and white power with a narrative that refuses to demonise white people” (1999:85). There is a different view to be taken about this episode. Groening does not agree that *South Park* conveys critical messages of particular political matters because the “cynical and noncommittal attitude” from *South Park*’s narratives “discourage viewers from seeking to remedy societal problems” (2008:125). Nonetheless, Groening’s claim seems limited. *South Park* does not necessarily promote the narratives of the “dominant white Anglo-Saxon culture” as he states. This particular episode provides a narrative “clearly critical of bigoted thinking” (Binder, 2014:62). Binder rejects the claim that the humour in *South Park* works to “disrupt the improvement of race relations in the United States by pitting the dominant culture against a minority target” (2014:62). Despite the taboo-breaking narratives and humour associated with grotesque images, especially when Randy Marsh, one of the main characters, Stan Marsh’s father, kisses Jesse Jackson’s bottom in this episode, the political purposes of such narratives should be viewed as a critical message of race, as Binder (2014-62-63) argues:

In this episode, all positions – from white guilt and white anger to Jesse Jackson’s controversial politics – are satirically undermined [...] In all its absurdity and humour, this episode works to show that feeling of white guilt and white anger are convoluting and dysfunctional factors in today's’ racial discourse.

Binder’s work on the racial politics of *South Park* via the episode, “With Apologies to Jesse Jackson”, articulates that this episode offers a capacity to look at politics more critically. *South Park* has the potential to deal with the subject that matters to politics. Moreover, Gournelos also finds that *South Park* can be a source of political knowledge. The episode of South Park, S06E14, “The Death Camp of Tolerance”, discusses gender politics. This episode uses Mr. or Ms Garrison (who is the character that he later becomes in his/her role. He/she is also the teacher in South Park Elementary School). He/she could be seen as object framed for the discussion of gender politics in this particular episode, as he/she is “considered as a deviant in South Park in many different ways”. (Gournelo, 2009:116).

Gournelos argues that this episode should not be “reductively considered as issues of homosexuality or difference”. Rather, Gournelos argues that “the responsive approach to political activism taken by *South Park* in “The Death Camp of Tolerance” thus manages to assert the simultaneous importance and impossibility of stabilising identity” (2009:111). Even in later episodes of South Park, when Ms Garrison assumes a transgendered identity, this performance is usually associated with “shocking, humorous, offensive, reactionary, or progressive statement, appropriating all these

modes and then responding in a sharply focused ‘denouement’” (ibid, 2009:111-112). The combination of these modes, in this case, perhaps has a more profound pedagogical function. Mr. or Ms Garrison “embodies a set of specifically targeted transgressions and narrative shifts that interact with contemporary popular culture, taboos, and political climate to facilitate the creation of a sort of crisis atmosphere” (ibid, 2009:121). This can suggest that *South Park* has the potential to interpret matters politically, thus providing the political knowledge that suggests a different angle on looking at political subjects.

Both Binder and Gournelos unearth the narratives from *South Park* that purposely discuss or present different political issues and messages, providing a critical angle for looking at these matters. *South Park* has a tendency to ridicule characters’ absurdity, individual matters or their causes of social conflicts. The ultimate aim of *South Park* is to provide messages critical of politics, as Binder (2014) seeks to find out the critical messages about modern racial relations, whereas Gournelos (2009) seeks to discuss the transgressive side of politics and gender politics. Despite the taboo-breaking and grotesque discourse, *South Park* has the potential to promote political criticality and perhaps progressive view of politics.

In contrast to the progressive view of politics in *South Park* that is emphasised by Gournelos, there is a different view of what political stance *South Park* tries to take. This view can be found within Anderson’s book, *South Park Conservatives*. The narratives of *South Park*, as Anderson argues, are “anti-PC”, as in “anti-liberalism” (2005:75-76). Inspired by Matt Stone’s statement, “I hate conservatives, but I really fucking hate liberals” (2001), Anderson identifies the conservatism in *South Park*.

Throughout his book, Anderson uses particular episodes of *South Park* as examples of “Conservatives’ fight back”. In other words, Anderson endeavours to explore how *South Park* pokes fun at liberalism and political correctness culture. He does not see *South Park* promoting “transgressive” or “progressive” viewpoints, as Gournelos does.

According to Anderson’s book, current liberalism is not very “liberal” (2005). He points out that those who identify as liberals usually apply labels such as “racist, homophobic, mean-spirited, insensitive”, as “left-liberal political argument to dismiss conservative ideas because they do not deserve a hearing” (2005:17). Also, the reason why he claims that the liberalism is “illiberal” is because liberalism “undermines two principles crucial to liberal democracy and central to its superiority to other forms of government”:

1. “Democracy requires a willingness to engage the argument of those you disagree with, recognising their equality as citizens.
2. The ingredient of liberal democracy that elite-media nourished illiberalism denies is a belief in the superiority of argument over force” (ibid, 2005:17).

The core of liberalism is “legal and political equality” (Chau, 2009:3). However, Anderson claims that there is an illiberal element to liberalism – liberals nowadays are monopolising the sphere of speech by undermining the core of democracy via the “old media regime” (ibid, 2005:17). In addition, his criticism of liberals is that they contradict themselves by promoting their set of policies and viewpoints by silencing individuals who hold opposite views and labelling.

Anderson presents *South Park* as an example of conservatism's fight back. He shows how *South Park* expresses the notion of "anti-liberalism". He also suggests that *South Park* "sharpens the iconoclastic, anti-PC edge of earlier cartoon shows like *The Simpsons* and *Kings of the Hill*, and spares no sensitivity" (ibid, 2005:76). Although *South Park* may have an element of the "conservative fight back", the conservative critics "have attacked *South Park* for its exuberant vulgarity, calling it 'twisted', 'vile trash', and a 'threat to our youth'" (ibid, 2005:75). However, Anderson suggests that "conservative critics ought to take a closer look at what *South Park* so irreverently jeers and mocks" (ibid, 2005:75). In Anderson's work, he focuses on how *South Park* pokes fun at liberals. For instance, he uses the episode, "Rainforest Shmainforest", as an example of how *South Park* takes on an environmental activist choir group who want to raise the awareness about "our vanishing rainforest" (ibid, 2005:76), by ridiculing them as "Getting gay with kids". The elementary school in *South Park* sends their children on a field trip to Costa Rica. During the trip, Eric Cartman, one of the four children who are main characters in *South Park*, makes a comment about how horrendous the capital of Costa Rica, San Jose, is:

**Eric Cartman:** Oh my God, it smells like ass out here

**Choir Teacher:** Alright, that does it! Eric Cartman, you respect other cultures this instant.

**Eric Cartman:** I wasn't saying anything about their culture. I was just saying their city smells like ass.

Also, there is another exchange where the remarks of other children and Eric Cartman on San Jose are condemned by the Choir Teacher:

**Kelly:** Wow, seeing a place like this really makes you appreciate living in America, huh?

**Kenny:** (Pick his nose)

**Choir Teacher:** You may think that making fun of Third-World countries is funny, but let me...

**Eric Cartman:** I don't think it's funny! This place is overcrowded, smelly, and poor! That is not funny, that sucks.

**Choir Teacher:** Eric, will you please, please, just keep your mouth shut while we present ourselves to the Costa Rican President.

In this exchange, not only is the city represented as unpleasant, but the rainforest itself as obnoxious. The children and the environment activist choir group experience death threats on numerous occasions in the rainforest. However, they must endure “the choir teacher’s New-Age gushing: ‘Shhh! Children! Let’s try to listen to what the rainforest tells us, and if we use our ears, she can tell us so many things’” (Anderson, 2005: 76). The children have to abide the nonsensical acts by the environmental activist choir group, who suggests that they listen to what the rainforest tells them to do, though they experience death threats (Anderson, 2005). As a result, the children are desperate for civilisation and leave the rainforest. In the end, instead of the environmental activist choir group trying to raise awareness of the need to protect the environment at the beginning of the episode, this episode ends with them singing:

“There is a place called the rainforest that truly sucks ass.

Let’s knock it all down and get rid of fast.

You only fight these causes' cause caring sells.

All you activists can go fuck yourselves”.

In contrast to Binder who explores the critical political messages regarding racial politics in a selected episode of *South Park*, and unlike Gournelo's analysis of S06E14, “Death Camp of Tolerance”, which identifies the progressive viewpoints on the narratives, Anderson's analysis of “Rainforest Shmainforest” questions environmental activism. The worker receives an instruction from the environmental activists to annihilate the “whole fucking thing”. The choir group – - whose name is satirised as “getting gay with kids” – eventually show no concern for the environment. These narratives serve the purpose of poking fun at and ridiculing environmental activist groups, for their unrealistic activism that, instead of raising awareness about “our vanishing rain forest”, causes death as a consequence of their nonsensical acts. On the one hand, the first message, which emerges from the conversation between Eric Cartman and the Choir teacher, is that making a comment about how smelly the city is, is not necessarily a negative remark about a particular culture. On the other hand, it reveals that the choir teacher is being unduly susceptible to Eric Carman's speech about how the city smells, by accusing him of being insensitive and failing to respect other cultures. The purpose of it is to ridicule the environment activists for their absurdity and perhaps their self-righteous acts, forcing others to comply with their ideas of protecting the environment.

Another instance where the liberals are ridiculed, according to Anderson, is the episode, S04E05, “Cartman Joins NAMBLA”. He points out that “one of the contemporary Left's most extreme (and, to conservatives, objectionable) strategies is to draw the

mantle of civil liberties over behaviour once deemed criminal, pathological or immoral in the satirical context in South Park” (2005:77-78). NAMBLA is an abbreviation of a controversial group called “North American Man-Boy Love Association” (BBC, 2002). According to BBC report on April 2002, there is a supporter of NAMBLA raping and sodomising children. NAMBLA is therefore parodied as “the ultra-radical activist group advocating gay sex with minors” (Anderson, 2005) in this episode. The leader of NAMBLA constantly tries to justify their action to the children of South Park by stressing:

**NAMBLA:** Rights? Does anybody know their rights? You see, I have learned something today. Our forefathers came to this country because they believed in an idea. An idea called “freedom”. They wanted to live in a place where a group couldn’t be prosecuted for their beliefs. Where a person can live the way he chooses to live. You see us as being perverted because we are different from you. People are afraid of us, because they don’t understand. And sometimes it is easier to prosecute than to understand.

**Kyle Broflovski:** Dude, you have sex with children.

The dialogue illustrates the doctrine of “freedom”, but only from NAMBLA’s point of view. The idea of their “freedom” is that they want to do whatever they want, without being condemned. Such a claim from NAMBLA, that “people are afraid of us, because they don’t understand” gives a hint that they want people to understand their desire for having sex with children rather than to get them prosecuted. This could also be a hint that such activists like NAMBLA are only serving their own interests. NAMBLA

expects people to accept their ‘difference’ and understand their ‘difference’. The subsequent dialogue continues like this:

**The leader of NAMBLA:** We are human. Most of us didn’t even choose to be attracted to young boys. We were born that way. We can’t help the way we are, and if you all can’t understand, well, then, I guess you’ll just have to put us away.

**Kyle Broflovski:** Dude, you have sex with children.

**Stan Marsh:** Yeah, you know, we believe in equality for everybody, and tolerance, and all that gay stuff, but dude, fuck you.

These two exchanges reveal how NAMBLA tries to justify their wrong-doing. There are three messages which this episode tries to convey. The first message is to emphasise that NAMBLA holds the view that their act is justifiable and “natural”. The second message from Kyle is to re-emphasise that having sex with children is never justifiable. It also points out NAMBLA’s ridiculous justification, expecting others to understand or be “tolerant” with their criminal act. The third message from Stan is that equality and tolerance for everybody are necessary. However, it also points out that what NAMBLA has done is criminal and unacceptable.

Anderson uses these two episodes to reveal how *South Park* ridicules liberals. These episodes are also used as an example of the “conservative fight back” via media (Anderson, 2005). The reason why Anderson uses *South Park* as an example of the “conservative fight back” is to argue that *South Park* provides a critique of liberal

activism and to prove that *South Park* is not, as other conservatives claim, “vile trash”. Anderson uses “Rainforest Shmainforest” as an example to criticise environmental activism. He uses “Cartman Joins NAMBLA” as an example to criticise liberals’ self-serving activism. The aim of Anderson’s selected episodes for his analysis, in contrast with Binder and Gournelo’s analysis, is to emphasise that *South Park* criticises liberals’ policy and political behaviour. It ridicules liberals with irony. More importantly, he suggests that *South Park* should be looked at differently, as it contains “anti-liberal” discourse despite other conservatives’ condemnation for its use of vulgarity.

However, though Anderson’s selected examples to show liberals’ hypocritical and self-righteous behaviour in *South Park*, there is a limitation to his selected examples. His book is described as “the revolt against liberal media bias” (ibid, 2005). Can these two particular episodes used by Anderson as examples of “conservative fight back” justify that they fully have “conservative” contexts against liberals? In order to answer this question, I would like to take a further look at these two episodes.

Although the texts of both of these episodes tend to mock and satirise the extreme liberals or radicals, ridiculing their beliefs and behaviour, there are some dialogues or narratives that do not necessarily convey the messages that can be considered part of a fight back by “the conservative”. S04E05, “Cartman Joins NAMBLA”, is not necessarily “anti-liberal”, though Anderson suggests so. For instance, Stan Marsh, one of the main characters in *South Park*, claims that he believes in “equality for everybody, tolerance and gay stuff”, but he also knows that NAMBLA is an organisation that supports paedophiles, trying to make having sex with children justifiable and legitimate.

This statement also suggests equality and tolerance, which is not necessarily “anti-liberal.”

Although Anderson suggests looking at *South Park* differently, in contrast to the conservatives’ condemnation of it as being vulgar, his analysis implies that he is solely finding what is “anti-liberal” about *South Park*. There are some exchanges where *South Park* is not necessarily to be seen as “anti-liberal”. In “Rainforest Shmainforest” there are some speeches from the president of Costa Rica, who angrily makes a statement to the environmental activist group and the children. He emphasises that “You white Americans make me sick! [emphasises his disgust with thumps on the table] You waste food, oil, and everything else because you’re so rich, and then you tell the rest of the world to save the rainforest because you like its pretty flowers.”. This statement is an example that this episode is not solely “anti-liberal” since it takes on both the environmental activist group, as Anderson (2005) claims, and those who already have exploited the land of Costa Rica. This episode then turns into an attack on “rich Americans” who “have gathered to feel good about themselves and act like they are not responsible for the rainforest’s destruction”. More importantly, this episode suggests that the activists only “fight these causes “cause caring sells”. It is also “a critique of a form of contemporary U.S environmental activism in the developing world (versus domestic green politics, for instance)” (Gournelos, 2009:174). In addition, Eric Cartman’s “intolerance reflects an honest anger and disgust at the conditions in which he finds the third-world country, and contrasts sharply with the ‘activism’ of the choir teacher” (ibid, 2009:174). Despite Anderson suggesting looking at *South Park* differently, he seems to solely explore the “anti-liberal” discourse in *South Park*, failing

to find out what other critical political messages that “Rainforest Shmainforest” tries to convey.

The arguments above suggest that *South Park* does not necessarily position itself on a political stance. It tends to engage in different political subjects by ridicules, poking fun and mockery. *South Park* perhaps tends to raise more than just one political or social subject and issue. It may not seem obvious that *South Park* tends to draw critiques on more than just one political or social matter. Anderson is eager to reveal the anti-liberal content in *South Park* as part of a “conservative fight back”. However, when Anderson (2005) quotes Matt Stone’s statement about his loathing of both liberals and conservative, he seems to ignore that there are other possible “anti-conservative” points of view presented in *South Park*’s narratives. Nonetheless, from Binder, Gournelos and Anderson’s analysis of *South Park*, the common ground they all share is that *South Park* conveys messages politically, regardless of their views on what political position or attitudes that *South Park* tries to express.

As stated above, *South Park* tends to address current political issues and offers narratives critical of politics. From Binder, Gournelos and Anderson’s analysis of *South Park* altogether, it could be argued that Matt Stone, along with the co-creator of *South Park*, Trey Parker, are “equal opportunity offenders” who “cast their net of derision wide enough to encompass the entirety of the traditional political spectrum” (Thorogood, 2016:2). This is not suggesting that both creators take *South Park* as an opportunity to offend everyone. Rather, *South Park* tends to free itself from an assumption that they support any particular political ideas or parties. Hence, I would

like to suggest that the narratives should be assessed more critically and multi-dimensionally.

Binder finds out the taboo-breaking discourses in *South Park*, Gournelos concludes that *South Park* uses ridicule to present individual and social absurdity, and Anderson suggests that the vulgarity used in *South Park*'s narratives ought to be taken a further look. These authors suggest that in *South Park*, there are narrative features, which involve vulgarity, ridicule and irony. These features could be considered as 'bad taste' features of *South Park*'s narratives. Thus, the next section will firstly explore the extent to which the narratives of *South Park* are considered as 'bad taste'. By doing this, the next section will introduce and discuss Bakhtin's concepts of the carnivalesque and argue that *South Park* uses carnivalesque framing to establish its 'bad taste' narratives. The reason why it is important to introduce the notions of the carnivalesque is because they will help explain the purposes of the use of 'bad taste' narratives that potentially present 'good values' as a result of political knowledge.

### **1.5: The Carnavalesque**

This chapter will first discuss *South Park*'s narrative features and the concepts of the carnivalesque. It is important to discuss these concepts to find out whether *South Park* potentially uses carnivalesque framing to establish its 'bad taste' narratives. After that, this section will introduce the combined method used for analysing selected episodes in this thesis, to find out whether *South Park* uses 'bad taste' narratives to present 'good values' as a result of political knowledge.

As stated in Chapter One, Leboeuf outlines that satire has three features – critique, irony and implicitness. The way that she categorises satire is not explicit enough to demonstrate how *South Park* presents political plot via ‘bad taste’ narratives. As illustrated in Chapter One, section 1.3, *South Park* tends to use taboo-breaking discourses, vulgarity, excrement jokes and grotesque presentation to frame its plots and tackle political subjects. Thus, this thesis will address whether *South Park* uses these three features as parts of carnivalesque framing to establish its ‘bad taste’ narratives. The first one is the use of ridicule. The second one is the use of vulgarity and taboo-breaking discourse. The third one is the use of grotesque images as a way to mock individuals and particular political matters.

1. Ridicule: Does *South Park* usually poke fun at certain political or public figures’ and citizens’ irrationality or ignorance?
2. Vulgarity and taboo-breaking discourse: Does *South Park*’s burlesque involve the application of abusive language, profanity and discussion of taboo subjects?
3. Grotesque presentation: Along with the use of vulgarity and taboo-breaking discourses, does *South Park* also use exaggeratedly grotesque images as a way to “degrade” (Bahktin, 1984) individuals?

These features can link to Bahktin’s theory. In his theory, as briefly stated in the introduction section, Bahktin demonstrates that vulgarity, taboo, profanity and grotesque images can be used to mock individuals and political matters. These satirical narrative features listed above are mostly a part of carnivalesque framing. Carnival is “the people’s second life, organised on the basis of laughter. It is festive life” (ibid: 8). During the carnival, all people “were considered equal” (ibid: 10). In other words, the

carnival provides an alternative space, “characterised by freedom, equality and abundance, which have liberating means” (Robinson, 2011:1). In this kind of cCarnival, the speech patterns involve “profanity, abusive language and grotesque exaggeration” (Bahktin, 1984 16 – 18). Vulgarity and taboos are the contributing elements to the carnival. Profanities and oaths are “in many ways similar to abusive language” (1984:17). Such elements can be considered as the ‘carnavalesque framing. Moreover, one of the categories in carnivalesque framing, the use of profanity, has the following function, as Bahktin (1984: 17) argues:

Profanities and oaths were not initially related to laughter, but they were excluded from the sphere of official speech because they broke its norms; they were therefore transferred to the familiar sphere of the market place. Here in the carnival sphere they acquired the nature of laughter and become ambivalent.

The use of profanities, ridicule and grotesque images can be a way of degrading individuals Degradation, in Bakhtin’s term, is “the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity” (ibid: 19 – 20). It means “coming down to earth, the contact with the earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time”. To degrade is “to bury, to sow, and to kill simultaneously, in order to bring forth something more and better” (ibid: 21). In this sense, degradation is a notion of “destruction for resurrection” (ibid: 21)

To degrade is to mock individuals and other matters associated politics. Such uses of profanity feature in taboo-breaking narrative. Degradation is one of the core elements of the carnivalesque (Bakhtin, 1984). These carnivalesque framing elements do not necessarily support or promote the taboo-breaking and vulgarity, but deconstruct and juxtapose what is considered as correct and incorrect, to reshape them as a set of messages critical of political subjects. For instance, according to Weinstock's *Taking South Park Seriously*, where the taboo issues are addressed, *South Park* "does not support or attack one racial or ethnic identity in particular but is rather inclusive via mockery" (2008:13). *South Park* does not aim to promote any taboo-breaking discourse. What it does is, according to Binder, to "encourage viewers to think critically about race" (ibid: 13). This may suggest that with a use of the carnivalesque framing, *South Park* offers an alternative space for "festive laughter" (Bakhtin, 1984), potentially allowing viewers to think critically about certain political matters.

#### **1.6: Carnivalesque narratives: Bad taste humour, good values?**

Here is a question - does *South Park* uses carnivalesque framing to establish its 'bad taste narratives? This kind of "bad taste" narrative can be extended to linguistic use in *South Park*. *South Park* is notorious for its use of language because of its constant use of "potty-mouth humour" (Cueva, 2010:1) and perhaps the application of language that is not considered as 'good taste'.

As Anderson has noted, *South Park* has been criticised by conservatives for its linguistic use, regarding it as "vile trash". It also attracts public criticism for its inappropriateness and excessive use of vulgarity and taboo-breaking discourse. For

instance, there is a particular episode, S10E11, “Hell on Earth”, where Steve Irwin, an Australian television personality and wildlife expert, was mocked and parodied as an individual with a bloodstained T-shirt and with a stingray still attached to his chest. What is more, the episode was aired not long after Steve Irwin’s death. John Meyer (2006), from UK Television watchdog, Mediawatch, said that:

This is such bad taste and the markers of *South Park* should review their decision to show it. Steve’s family are still grieving. To lampoon somebody’s death like that is unacceptable and so soon after the event is grossly insensitive.

Similarly, it has been argued that the ‘bad taste’ aspects of *South Park* might be considered as harmful rhetoric. As Allemang (2015:1) indicates:

Satire, more than many genres in literature and devices in politics, thrives on its lack of boring and reasonable moderation [...] Satire is often nasty, harmful and grotesquely abusive, an acquired taste that is not for one and all [...] It also involves grotesque exaggeration of a caricature.

In this case, the ‘bad taste’ narratives in *South Park* make extensive use of vulgarity and taboo-breaking discourses, inappropriateness and unacceptable application of humour or mockery. *South Park* is ‘bad taste’ because it shows no sensitivity when it parodies a public figure’s death through a grotesque form of presentation. The narratives of *South Park* are usually nasty and grotesquely abusive. Although there are

negative comments on the way that *South Park* frames its narratives, the purpose of its narrative framing should not be reduced to the representation of blatant vulgarity, being an insensitive, nasty or abusive representation. As a source of political knowledge, *South Park* may enable viewers to learn or construct criticism as a skill necessary for political judgement. Scholars, such as Janssen, conclude that the ultimate aim of satire, whatever its format, is more or less the same – its purpose is to “urge humankind to better itself” (2003:28). The narratives of *South Park* are ‘bad taste’, but it does not necessarily have no ‘good values’.

For the analysis of selected episodes of *South Park* in the next Chapter, this thesis will use the carnivalesque textual analysis as a combined method to explore the critical political content. This combined method is useful because it can determine whether *South Park* has the elements of the “carnival”, allowing a detailed understanding of the purpose of ‘bad taste’ humour narratives in *South Park*. It also helps to explore whether the use of these ‘bad taste’ narratives in *South Park* has the potential to present ‘good values’ - through messages critical of politics as parts of political knowledge.

## **Chapter 2: Carnavalesque textual analysis of *South Park***

### **2.1: The analysis of S15E01, “HumacentiPad”**

The use of ridicule, vulgarity, taboo-breaking discourse and the use of grotesque images, altogether play a significant role in carnivalesque framing. This chapter will question whether *South Park* uses such carnivalesque framing techniques to present messages critical of political subjects as a way to convey ‘good values’, while mocking individuals and specific political or social matters, such as privacy concerns and surveillance programmes. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section will analyse the episode, S15E01, “HumacentiPad”, and not only answer the questions raised above but also find out what critical messages this episode tries to convey. The second section will use two episodes, S17E01, “Let Go, Let Gov”, and S16E01, “Reverse Cowgirl”, to explore the extent to which *South Park* conveys critical political knowledge about the intensive use of surveillance established by the NSA, as well as the privacy concerns of citizens, providing the critiques of both issues. The third section will use the episode, S19E01, “Stunning and Brave”, to find out how *South Park* discusses the ideas of ‘Political Correctness’ while providing an angle critical to these ideas. The reason for choosing these selected episodes for analysis is because it will help answer the questions of whether *South Park* uses carnivalesque framing as a manner to establish ‘bad taste’ narratives, which potentially provide political knowledge of particular political subjects as ‘good values’.

The “HumacentiPad” discusses the ownership of an iPad, which links to everyday consumerism. There is another political subject this episode discusses, which links to the privacy concerns. This episode uses Eric Cartman as a character to discuss and poke fun at everyday consumerism, and the idea that owning Apple products is popular.

Particularly, this episode also uses Kyle Broflovski to mock the technological giant, Apple Inc. Apple uses terms and conditions that do not necessarily serve the convenience of the customers. *South Park* ridicules the individuals who fail to read them and suggests they deserve the consequences. The carnivalesque framing strategy can be found in this episode, where ridicule, grotesque images, vulgarity and taboo-breaking discourses are heavily used.

The narratives in this episode seem fragmented. This episode starts with Eric Cartman pretending that he owns an iPad, while the rest of the kids in the South Park Elementary School own iPads. When Kyle and Craig point out that Eric Cartman is lying, Eric Cartman, who claims that his “iPad” battery is dead, gets infuriated and insists that he is going to bring in a charged iPad and make the rest of kids look stupid. Eric Cartman later arrives at home and rants at his mother, Liane:

**Eric Cartman:** You said I had to wait til my birthday to get an iPad! So the one I rubbed in everyone’s faces today is not real and tomorrow everyone is going to call me a liar. Would you mind loaning me some of your lipstick, Mom? Because I want to at least look pretty the next time you decide to FUCK me!

Eric Cartman’s ranting in this context unveils a message, which is that having an iPad is ‘significant’. Nonetheless, after the ranting, this episode jumps into a plot where Kyle Broflovski fails to read the terms and conditions before updating iTunes, a music software program designed by Apple Inc. Because Kyle has agreed to the terms and conditions, the staffers from Apple are able to get into his house to take his blood. They claim that Kyle Broflovski “agreed” to the terms and conditions, which included a right

to blood sucking. The satirical use of blood-sucking is to mock Apple Inc., for its greed to predate what its users “agree to give away”.

In the following scene, Kyle desperately asks his father, Gerald, who is a lawyer, for legal advice about the terms and conditions. In response to Kyle’s request, Gerald says “it is always the agreeing party’s responsibility to know what they are signing”. Regardless, the staff from Apple raid Gerald’s office, claiming that his son, Kyle, has agreed the terms and conditions that allows them to taser him. Kyle later is taken to a prison cell, with two other persons who have “agreed” to the terms and conditions. They have also not read the terms and conditions, which state that they are going to be volunteers for being a “HumancentiPad”. The “HumancentiPad” is a parody of the horror film *The Human Centipede*, where three individuals are used as parts of centipede. In *South Park*’s version, the HumancentiPad connects together (See at P1 below). Kyle’s mouth is mounted in the man’s bottom, and his anus is installed in the lady’s mouth.



### **P.1 HumancentiPad (*The Human Centipede*)**

The ‘HumancentiPad’ is announced by a parodied Steve Jobs, CEO of Apple Inc., who claims it is going to be a new product that will once again revolutionise the way we use

our phones and tablet devices. He also emphasises that the individuals, as part of the 'HumacentiPad', have agreed to the terms and conditions that they are going to be the 'HumacentiPad' experiment. However, Kyle is reluctant to be a part of the 'HumacentiPad'. Therefore, Steve Jobs provides him with paperwork and asks Kyle to sign it. Kyle once again does not read the terms and condition and signs it straight away.

While Steve Jobs gets frustrated about Kyle not reading the terms and conditions, one of the parodied Apple technicians suggests that the 'HumacentiPas' is low on power. As a result of the "low battery", the person from the left, Junichi, whose bottom is mounted on Kyle's mouth, is fed with beans and cheese burrito. Although Junichi tries to resist, he stresses that he cannot resist the temptation of the burrito. He then consumes the food and defecates, passing the excrement into Kyle's mouth. After that, Kyle passes the excrement into the woman's mouth.

There is carnivalesque framing in this plot as it uses excrement and grotesque images to present its story. The carnivalesque framing used in this plot is to point out the characters' absurdity, and their incompetence, in neglecting to read the terms and conditions. Meanwhile, the bigger picture of the carnivalesque framing of this plot is that it involves a set of critical messages. As Isler (2011:1) argues:

The ridiculousness of User Agreements and those who do not read them is a point well-made, and we should all be a wee bit more cognizant of exactly what we agree to (although the courts can always judge the enforceability of unreasonable terms in EULAs). However, the bigger

issue here is one of putting your faith in a corporate giant that may not have your best interest in mind.

On the one hand, this episode uses carnivalesque framing to ridicule individuals who fail to read the terms and condition and to suggest that corporate giants such as Apple do not serve their users' interests. On the other hand, it frequently refers to one of the main character's (Eric Cartman) eagerness to get an iPad. In the superstore, Eric Cartman's mother, Liane, states that she cannot afford to buy the iPad that he wants. Thus, Liane decides to find a cheaper Toshiba tablet, which is half the price of an iPad. However, Eric Cartman behaves like a spoilt child as he is not able to show off in front of his classmates that he has an iPad. As a result, he gets infuriated and starts getting verbally abusive:



## P.2: Eric Cartman tells his mother to penetrate his bottom

**Eric Cartman:** Mum, do not screw me over again! If I take that thing to school, everyone is going to think I am a poverty-stricken asshole!

**Liane Cartman:** Eric, stop acting like a spoiled brat! You can either have the Toshiba Handibook or you can have nothing at all!

**Eric Cartman:** Oh, I have got a better idea! Why don't you go across the street and buy some condoms?! Because we should at least be safe if you are going to fuck me, mum!

**Liane Cartman:** Eric!

**Eric Cartman:** You might as well go buy some cigarette too, because I like to have a smoke after I get food and fucked! Do you want to fuck me, mum?! (Everyone in the store is looking at Eric and Liane) Go ahead! Here (Eric Cartman pulls down his pants and shows his bottom towards his mother). Huh?! Go ahead, Mum! Fuck me! Fuck me right here in the Best Buy! You want to fuck your son so bad?! Go on mum! Fuck me! Fuck me!

The dialogue between Liane Cartman and Eric Cartman makes use of vulgarity and taboo-breaking discourse as a part of the carnivalesque framing – the constant use of “fuck me” and the implication that Liane Cartman is a child molester. The use of the carnivalesque framing is mostly for the purpose of a mockery of modern consumerism, as Eric Cartman wants to buy an iPad to “show off” instead of having an affordable Toshiba tablet.

As Eric Cartman does not get an iPad, he later attends the talk show, *Dr.Phil. Dr. Phil* is a show that covers and discusses numerous issues covering family, friendship and personal difficulties. Ultimately, this talk show will find out what solution or “materials” they can give to those participants who are considered as “victims” or “being treated badly”. Nonetheless, the parody version of *Dr.Phil* in this episode starts like this:

“Today, on *Dr. Phil*, the tragic story of a little boy whose mother constantly tries to fuck him”.

Although Eric Cartman expects an iPad from the show, what he gets is the brand-new Apple product, the HumancentiPad, which he approves of because of its functionality and particularly because of it “shitting in Kyle’s mouth”. However, at the end of the episode, as the terms and conditions issued by Apple Inc. become invalid, the HumancentiPad has to be separated. Thus, Eric Cartman cannot have his brand-new Apple product. As a result, Eric Cartman gets infuriated once again:

**Cartman:** Hey! Hey, what is this? Some sort of sick prank? I get the greatest thing ever just to have it taken away?! Why did you do this to me, God? Next time you are going to get my hopes up, could you please take me to a grease monkey? Cause I like to get lubed before I get fucked! Huh? Some lube would be nice! Or at least a courtesy lick, God! How about a little courtesy lick next time you decide to fuck me! (A bolt of lightning strikes Eric Cartman while the power gets cut. Eric Cartman is later sent to the hospital. He is laying in the bed and crying of his agony).

This episode uses vulgarity, grotesque discourse, scatological jokes and blasphemous expression, which are all parts of the carnivalesque framing. The purpose of such a narrative framing is to, firstly, use the HUMANCENTiPAD as an object to ridicule users who fail to read the terms and conditions. This episode also mocks the technological giant, Apple, and the terms and conditions that require extensive effort to read through. It also criticises the applications of Apple that require updating within a

short period, causing constant inconvenience. This episode uses Eric Cartman, who is acting like a spoilt child, as a way of discussing iPad ownership as an issue that reflects everyday consumerism. For instance, early in the episode, he makes fun of those fellow pupils who do not own iPads, while he pretends to have an iPad himself. Meanwhile, the ownership of iPads in the South Park's elementary school seems ubiquitous. While this episode tries to present everyday life, it tends to give a critique of everyday consumerism. This critique, as a 'good value', emerged from the narratives in this episode, which points out that the ownership of an iPad is popular, however, it should not be a luxurious, trendy good as shown in this episode. Eric Cartman desperately wants an iPad so it can look "cool" than have it as a necessity. Also, the use of such vulgarity and taboo-breaking discourse is not only for the carnivalesque humour, but also to serve as the potential to encourage critical thinking of everyday consumerism - that ownership of a particular good should be put in consideration of whether it is a necessity or to follow the trend.

In short, we can see what Bakhtin regards as the carnivalesque from this episode in *South Park* – the frequent uses of vulgarity, taboo-breaking discourses and grotesque images as a strategy to ridicule particular political or social issues, and individuals' absurdity. While the carnivalesque framing is used, it perhaps allows the viewers to enjoy the 'bad taste' humour framed in its narratives, while presenting 'good values' - the critique of everyday consumerism as a social matter.

## **2.2: The analysis of S16E01, “Reverse Cowgirl” and S17E01, “Let Go, Let Gov”**

**“That just so you know, the government is watching everything you do!”**

**“I am telling you guys. The government thinks they can do whatever they want, and we don’t have any privacy anymore!”**

**“Yeah, because the government won’t respect my privacy.” – Eric Cartman.**

**“Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four. If that is granted, all else follows.” – George Orwell, 1984.**

This section will continue analysing the extent to which *South Park* presents its narratives via ‘bad taste’ humour that also conveys political knowledge. As discussed in the previous section, the carnivalesque framing is used as a strategy for the establishment of narratives in South Park. This section will once again explore whether there are ‘carnivalesque’ elements in the narratives of two episodes, as well as find out what ‘good values’ these two episodes, S16E01, “Reverse Cowgirl” and S17E01, “Let Go, Let Gov”, try to present.

In these two episodes, the focus is on privacy and surveillance matters. This section argues that the narrative from these episodes not only satirises and mocks the establishment of surveillance by the government, which involves authority’s overuse of its power, violating citizens’ privacy via different surveillance programmes. It also suggests that citizens should be cautious of their privacy. The analysis of these two

episodes will firstly involve the examination of theoretical aspects of surveillance and privacy. It will also explore the tension between surveillance and privacy because the practice of them creates a “dilemma” (Gilbert, 2007:12). This dilemma can be embodied in two ways. On the one hand, when surveillance is practised, it may violate individuals’ privacy. On the other hand, the practice of protecting individuals’ privacy may obstruct the practice of surveillance. The messages from these two episodes perhaps discuss the matters of privacy and surveillance which are assessed by a number of scholars such as Fuchs (2013:62), Gilbert (2007), and Allmer et al. (2011). These scholars’ literature matter to the analysis of those episodes because their literature discusses the contemporary surveillance and privacy matters in the U.S linking to the fictional plots presented in these episodes, particularly S17E01, “Let Go, Let Gov”. Particularly, these two episodes parody the NSA (National Security Agency) and the TSA (Transportation Security Administration) in order to present their extensive use of surveillance, while addressing the individuals’ privacy concerns.

Thus, prior to the analysis, the next two sub-sections (2.2.1 and 2.2.2) will explore how the dilemma is established by providing an overview of surveillance and privacy. After that, this section will carry on the analysis of these two episodes based on the idea of the dilemma - how *South Park* discusses privacy and surveillance matters by presenting narratives via ‘bad taste’ humour to convey messages critical of both sides of the dilemma, based on the carnivalesque framing. These messages could be considered as political knowledge that is embedded in these two episodes.

### **2.2.1 The aspects of surveillance**

There are numerous definitions of the term “surveillance”. Surveillance is “a specific kind of information gathering, storage, processing, assessment, and use that involves potential or actual harm, coercion, violence, asymmetric power relations, control, manipulation, domination, disciplinary power” (Fuchs, 2013:62). Fuchs argues that “surveillance has two faces, serving as a fundamental aspect of all society and a necessity for organisation”. Surveillance is “any kind of systematic information gathering” (2013:62). For instance, the installation of CCTVs (surveillance cameras) serves as a “deterrent of crimes such as burglary, assault, car theft and anti-social behaviour” (Isnard, 2001:2). Hence, the “two faces” of surveillance are both constraining human behaviour and enabling social order. Surveillance is not only limited to where the CCTVs operate, but also extends to many other media. These could be the Internet, telecommunications and other gadgets that transmit data.

More importantly, Allmer et.al argue that “surveillance is based on a logic of competition” and is “instrumental and a means for trying to derive and accumulate benefits for certain groups or individuals at the expense of other groups or individuals” (2014:54). The negative aspect of surveillance is that it also “affects us in myriad ways. It infringes on our personal freedoms, submits us to state control, and prevents us from progressing as a society” (York, 2014:29). Thus, the practice of surveillance can be a major factor of violation of privacy, though it serves for the public security. This kind of practice will be explored and analysed in both episodes (S16E01, S17E01) – the parody of the NSA’s establishment of the surveillance programme and Transportation Security Administration’s (TSA) intensive security check upon individuals, which will be discussed in section 3.2.3.

### **2.2.2 The aspects of privacy**

The notions of privacy can be various. Nonetheless, Gilbert argues that privacy can generally be defined as “confidentiality, anonymity, self-determination, being ‘left-alone’ and control of personal data” (2007:11)

In the legal context, privacy is protected by Law. On 10<sup>th</sup> of December, 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 42:

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

Similarly, the European Convention on Human Right, Article 8, states that:

Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence. There shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right except such as is in accordance with law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic well-being of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedom of others.

Moreover, Article 8 also suggests that the current legal and regulatory system is not providing adequate protection for personal information.

In the United States, privacy is a fundamental right. The Fourth Amendment of the Constitution guarantees the “right to be free from unreasonable searches and seizures, and is often argued as protecting our right to privacy”.

Although there is the law of protection of privacy, similar to surveillance, privacy has “two faces” also. Allmer et al. argue that privacy does not necessarily serve “the common good”. Privacy can “shield the planning and carrying out of illegal or antisocial activities and can be deceptive by concealing information in order to mislead others or misrepresent the character of individuals” (2011: 51). It is also “bound up with the idea of private property and can shield the wealthy and powerful from public accountability and wealth and power structures from transparency” (2011:51). Tannsjo, a Swedish socialist, suggests a utopian approach in which “the power structure should be made transparent and not be able to hide itself and operate secretly protected by privacy rights”. He also argues that “it is needless to keep power structures secret in democratic socialist society” (2010:191 – 198).

The negative aspects of privacy are that the practice of protecting it may indirectly allow illegal acts. However, all the negative aspects do not mean that all kinds of privacy should be eradicated. Allmer et al. argue that “there are some forms of behaviour for which humans tend to be left alone”, such as defecation – “many humans would both in a capitalist and a socialist society feel embarrassed having to defecate next to others, for instance by using toilets that are arranged next to each other without

separating walls” (2014:52). This suggests that privacy is a necessary part of human lives. Despite the negative aspects of privacy that only serve for particular individuals’ group or communities by disregarding the common good.

In short, both surveillance and privacy share the “two faces” – both of them have positive and negative aspects. It has been argued that there are “dilemmas in both privacy and surveillance” (Gilbert, 2007:11). There is no ultimate good or bad about the protection of privacy and the use of surveillance, but society cannot operate without the surveillance and the protection of privacy. The interests that they both serve can be varied and in conflict with each other. What is more, in S16E01 and S17E01 of *South Park*, both episodes open up the discussion of the “two faces” characteristics of surveillance and the dilemmas between privacy and surveillance. The politics of surveillance and privacy are neither simply black nor white.

The previous discussion has raised general matters about surveillance and privacy, especially the “two faces” characteristic of them and the “dilemma” between them. It can help us comprehend the surveillance and privacy matters discussed in these two specific episodes of *South Park*. Thus, the next task in this section is to give a carnivalesque textual analysis of the two episodes, S16E01 and S17E01 in order to find out the extent to which *South Park* discusses the matters of the use of surveillance powers and individuals’ privacy concerns, through the narratives via ‘bad taste’ humour. Ultimately, the analysis will suggest that the narratives provide the political knowledge, which viewers can apply to comprehend the abuse of surveillance power by the NSA, the TSA, and privacy concerns.

### **2.3: Mass surveillance disclosure**

The episode, S17E01, “Let Go, Let Gov”, was aired in September 2013. This episode is about mass surveillance disclosures. It parodies Edward Snowden, a former CIA employee, who is also a whistleblower, as he has disclosed the detail of massive surveillance programmes established by the NSA. Snowden revealed how surveillance infiltrated citizens’ privacy, regardless of what they were doing, as Hayes stresses below (2014:1):

If anyone told us anything about the state of power in 2013, it was Edward Snowden, who revealed that the surveillance capabilities of some of the democratic governments of the West are such that they can access almost anything their citizens do online or over a fixed or mobile telephone in the absence of meaningful democratic and judicial controls.

The setup of this particular episode is based on the kids (Eric Cartman, Kyle Broflovski, Butters and others) and also the other characters (Joe, the chief of NSA and a parodied celebrity, Alec Baldwin) as characters to establish the plots that link to the political matters of surveillance and privacy. This episode, similar to the episode, “HumacentiPad”, which is analysed in the previous section, uses the carnivalesque framing strategy, which involves ridicule, irony, vulgarity, taboo-breaking discourses and grotesque images to present the plots. It also presents the plots as the “opposite of what people believe” as a way of satirical presentation, purposely uncovering and attacking “pretence and stupidity” (Brigeman, 1965:85). The plots in this episode are presented in a rather fragmented manner. Each plot uses different characters to establish

the ridicule, irony and mockery of different subjects such as surveillance and privacy in this episode. Also, each plot tackles various political or social issues and provides sources of political knowledge, and the formulation of messages critical of politics. The narratives in “Let Go, Let Gov” are based on surveillance issues in the United States. It reflects and reveals how the NSA monitors citizens’ behaviour via the Internet. The narratives show Eric Cartman infiltrating the NSA and attempting to discover how the surveillance programme is operating and managed, in order to find out the “truth” of how the NSA, as the operator of national security, monitors every citizen. Therefore, the main task here is to analyse the narratives based on the aspects of privacy and surveillance issues discussed in “Let Go, Let Gov”. This episode will link the narratives to what has happened to the real world in which mass surveillance was revealed by Edward Snowden in 2013, to find out what critical messages, as political knowledge, this particular episode tries to present.

The analysis of another episode, S16E01, “Reverse Cowgirl”, will also discuss the carnivalesque strategy applied by *South Park* to poke fun at the surveillance agency called the TSA (Transportation Security Agency). Due to a mother’s death caused by her inappropriate use of the toilet, the TSA establishes a massive surveillance programme that monitors everyone’s usage of the toilet.



### **P.3: Eric Cartman: “The Whistleblower”.**

This episode, “Let Go, Let Gov”, starts with Eric Cartman deliberately turning his phone onto speaker mode while having a phone call and constantly keeping physically close to Kyle Broflovski, whereas Kyle, by contrast, shows no interest in his conversation and asks him to turn off the speaker mode. However, Eric blames Kyle for violating his privacy.

**Eric Cartman:** Yeah, it is that kid Kyle again. He is a total boner, always listening in on my calls.

**Kyle Brofloski:** How do we have a choice?

**Eric Cartman:** Stop listening to my conversation, Kyle! What are you, the NSA?! Lawrence, remember how I was telling you the NSA listens to everyone’s phone calls and reads all our e-mails.

In the following scene, Eric Cartman fails to leave Kyle Broflovski alone, as he continues to talk on his phone and leaves the speaker mode on while constantly staying physically close to Kyle Broflovski.

**Kyle Broflovski:** Will you please take your rally conversation somewhere else?

**Eric Cartman:** Oh Hell no! You didn't just invade my privacy again!

In this dialogue, the narrative between Eric and Kyle suggests that citizens provide their information endlessly to sites which everybody would know of. These sites can be any form of media for communications. Having speaker mode on constantly is an ironic statement. It points out that privacy issues in which citizens should be aware that once the personal information is provided to the medium, such as the Internet, their privacy might be in danger. Likewise, there is a study conducted by the World Economic Forum suggesting that in high Internet penetration countries, a majority of respondents (60.7%) agreed that “people who go online put their privacy at risk” (Dutton et al., 2013).

In this dialogue, the fact that Eric deliberately stays close to Kyle is an ironic statement. This is an ironic presentation - it does not necessarily illustrate that Eric Cartman wants to get everyone to listen to his conversation through his phone while his phone's speaker mode is on. If Eric Cartman does not want Kyle to listen to his conversation, why does Eric Cartman always follow Kyle and leave his phone's speaker mode activated? Hence, these narratives could be seen as “ironic satirical presentation” (Jordan, 2010:42) of the surveillance by the NSA. The plot does not show that Kyle really wants to be left alone or Eric to have his conversation on the phone somewhere else. The physical proximity is more of an indication that the NSA never leaves citizens

alone for any form of telecommunication. The proximity of Eric Cartman and Kyle Broflovski, together with the use of speaker mode, could be seen as an ironic emphasis, revealing that the NSA does not only show disregard for the citizens' privacy, but also constantly records citizens' telecommunication through any kind of medium. This also emphasises that once the personal information is put on the Internet, there is no guarantee of whether privacy is protected. The dialogue between Kyle and Eric is an ironic attack on both uses of surveillance of power and the lack of privacy protection. It points out that the NSA monitors citizens' conversations. It also conveys a message that citizens should be careful while providing their own information.

After the dialogue between Eric Cartman and Kyle Broflovski, this episode fragments into three different plots. The first plot parodies Alec Baldwin, a successful theatre, film and television actor<sup>2</sup> to discuss the sharing of private information on social media. Alec Baldwin also is portrayed as a "homophobe", since, according to Fox News, he was accused of being anti-homosexual, because of failing to control himself posting homophobic content<sup>3</sup>. In this episode, due to his failure to control his "hot-headed" behaviour, he has to chop his thumbs off. This is because he believes that he does not think that way but types that way.

Nonetheless, he advertises 'Shitter' (a parody of Twitter, where his followers can see whatever he posts) in this episode. He claims that the use of 'Shitter' can save lots of time as it is grafted harmlessly into the skull, as any thoughts that he has go directly from the brain to the 'Shitter' followers and the Internet without typing ('Shitter' is also

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<sup>2</sup> Access date: 08/09/2015, <http://www.biography.com/people/alec-baldwin-9542174>

<sup>3</sup> Access date: 08/09/2015, <http://www.foxnews.com/entertainment/2014/04/11/alec-baldwin-accused-homophobia-after-twitter-fight-with-romney-aide.html>

grafted into Eric Cartman's skull in this episode). However, through "Shitter", he still posts whatever he thinks, making homophobic remarks (faggots), sexual innuendos (pussy sandwiches) and potentially offensive speeches. He also stresses that people who carry their cats on board should be shot, while an old lady is sitting next to him holding a cat carrier. Since he emphasises that "he does not think that way, but types that way", this is once again the irony. It does not mock Alec Baldwin for being a homophobe, but uses him as an example to establish a view that the individuals' privacy has to be their concern once they provide their information to the Internet.

The exchanges are ironic statements that reflect information sharing online. Alec Baldwin still does not control his speech, regardless of the installation of 'Shitter' into his brain and no longer posting content via his thumbs on the medium. This is to suggest that he "does think that way" rather than "types that way", even if there is no manual effort required. The exchanges here suggest that information once shared online is hardly protected, as another dialogue between Kyle and Eric sates:

**Kyle Broflowski:** You are okay with everything you think going up the Internet?

**Eric Cartman:** Yeah, because the government won't respect my privacy.

These two lines of dialogue stress the privacy concerns and surveillance issues. On the one hand, it stresses that the privacy concerns should not be neglected or ignored when using any form of media that has access to the Internet. On the other hand, it once again emphasises that the NSA or perhaps some other surveillance agency operated by the government will invade citizens' privacy.



**P.4: Butters, the worshipper; Butters worships the government (parodied as God) before going to bed and thanks it for watching over him and doing everything it does.**

In the second plot of this episode, Butters is portrayed as a “worshipper of government”. The narratives of Butters as a worshipper and the use of DMV (Department of Motor Vehicles) as an object are to satirise and poke fun at the government. These narratives ridicule government (as well as the NSA) as a “church”, where wrongdoers can confess their sins and what they have done wrong.



### **P.5: The worshippers of Jehovah's Witnesses**

When two worshippers of Jehovah's Witnesses come to Butters's house, they convince Butters to become a worshipper of Jehovah's Witnesses. However, Butters successfully converts them to worshippers of government, suggesting that they go to the DMV to confess their guilt. This expression is to satirise the power of surveillance enforced by the state, ridiculing the worshippers as being invasive or like a cult. One of the creators of *South Park*, Trey Parker, in an interview, states (Boyett, 2011):

The story of Jesus makes no sense to me. God sent his only son. Why could God only have one son and why would he have to die? It is just bad writing, really. And it is terrible in about the second act<sup>4</sup>.

Even though Trey Parker indicates that the story of religion (Christianity) is nonsense, he also suggests viewing religion critically, by stating that "at the end of day, if the

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<sup>4</sup> Access date: 10/09/2015, <http://abcnews.go.com/Nightline/Entertainment/story?id=2479197&page=1>

mass delusion of a religion makes you happy, makes your family work better, is that bad or good”? (Boyett, 2011)

Although it is somewhat ambiguous as to why the creators of *South Park* portray the government as a religion, the narratives may link the notion of the “government is watching you” to the Jehovah’s Witnesses. The Jehovah’s Witness religion is “best known for door-to-door evangelism and persistent attempts to engage householders in conversation about God” (Sherwood, *The Guardian*, 2015). The narratives here hint that the government will never leave its citizens alone. Nonetheless, the Jehovah’s Witnesses organisation is believed to be a “global cult” (ibid: 2015). As an organisation, it receives public criticism for knocking at residents’ doors, harassing passers-by who want to be left alone, and even its members “commit alleged sexual, emotional and psychological abuse, domestic violence, the loss of autonomy, the denial of education and people driven to suicide or to attempt suicide” (ibid, 2015). The “Jehovah Witnesses” worshippers are used in this episode to satirise the government’s application of surveillance power by mostly being “harassing”.

Butters, along with the two new worshippers (ex-Jehovah’s Witnesses) of the government, walk around as they did to persuade the residents to believe in Jehovah’s version of the Holy Bible. They tell Craig that:

“Yes, sir. See, I used to be like you. I go around sending them nasty e-mails and nasty texts, putting nasty picture on my nasty Facebook. But then I realised, all these things, they live forever, because the government keeps a file on us. So all that live forever up in what they call the Clou’ [Cloud]. It is a government term. If they could put a file in

the Clou’, then I want to make sure I come clean about the bad ones and maybe get those things off my record off the Clou’. Because we all live forever in the Clou”.

The dialogue here suggests that the surveillance exercised by the government is invasive. It also suggests that once Internet users submit their information and profiles online, the privacy of their details more or less are in danger under governmental surveillance.

The third plot concerns Eric Cartman infiltrating the NSA, accompanying the Chief of the NSA, Joe, in carrying out a massive surveillance programme. There is an interesting narrative about how NSA operates:

**Chief Joe:** “There’s a lot of people working here at the NSA. Good people, people who just want to keep America safe. Only problem is, checking all those e-mails, Twitter accounts, and surveilling all those phone call can take a lot of manpower”.

Likewise, the detectives from the NSA that appear in the scene are constantly monitoring the online content posted by the users, no matter how trivial or unimportant they are. However, the NSA successfully tracks down a person, a hippie who posts that he hates America and wants to blow up the Lincoln Memorial in this plot:

**Hippie:** Well, well, the NSA, I should have known.

**Joe:** We want to talk to you about some tweets you have been tweeting.

**Hippie:** Hey man. I was just blowing smoke. Say, what right does the government have reading my private e-mail anyway? Haven’t you heard of the Constitution?

**Joe:** Yeah, we have heard of that. We have also heard of the Declaration of Independence. See there's a lot of people out there who think like you, people who think their government doesn't have the right to go around poking their noses in the e-mails of its citizens. That is, until a plane flies into a couple of towers and a little girl loses her life. You want to live in the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave, but the brave can't be free if the land isn't home, and that land won't be home so long as folks out there want to take that American flag and shove it so far up your anus that you crap stars and stripes for week, and as you are sitting there on the toilet with the Star Spangled Montezuma's Revenge there's one thing I can guarantee you.

This dialogue suggests that the NSA is deploying its surveillance power for monitoring the potential "threats", no matter if citizens are "blowing smoke" and perhaps playing a prank. Although the plots presented in this episode are fictional, they are still able to show the current political and social matters that are occurring in the real world. The narratives convey the message that there is mass surveillance in the US, and that the surveillance programme carried out by the NSA has been invasive and disregarded citizens' privacy after 9/11. Regarding the surveillance and violation of citizens' privacy, there are numerous reports and scholarly articles that have described increasing mass surveillance in the US. According to the *New York Times*, in December 2005, President Bush authorised the NSA to eavesdrop on domestic phone calls and collect privacy emails without court-approved warrants. Moreover, the *New York Times* possessed documentation of the NSA programme for months before running the article, but it was forced to hold off under pressure from the Bush Administration<sup>5</sup>. Nonetheless,

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<sup>5</sup> Article available at [http://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/16/politics/bush-lets-us-spy-on-callers-without-courts.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/16/politics/bush-lets-us-spy-on-callers-without-courts.html?_r=0) Access date: 12/09/2015

the *New York Times* revealed that the NSA programme was an illegal act, violating citizens' privacy. As of 2010, the NSA had been continuously "collecting and storing upwards of two billion emails, phone calls and other communication every day" (Priest and Arkin, 2010:3). The narratives presented in the exchanges between Chief Joe and Hippie, despite being fictional, articulate the NSA's intensive surveillance upon the citizens' telecommunications.



**P.6: Eric Cartman "The Whistleblower."**

Moreover, Edward Snowden has revealed that the NSA claims to serve the common good while violating citizens' privacy and infiltrating their telecommunication, via different mediums such as mobile phones and the Internet:

Even if you are not doing anything wrong, you are being watched and recorded. And the storage capability of these systems increases every year consistently by orders of magnitude to where it is getting to the point where you do not have to have done

anything wrong. You simply have to eventually fall under suspicion from somebody even by a wrong call. And then they can use this system to be back in time and scrutinise every decision you have ever made, every friend you have ever discussed something with. And attack you on that basis to sort of derive suspicion from an innocent life and paint anyone in the context of a wrongdoer (Interview source is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5yB3n9fu-rM>)



**P.7: Santa Claus get suspended and strangled in the central cell of the NSA**

As the “whistleblower” in this episode, Eric Cartman discovers the NSA’s massive surveillance programme. He later discovers the most secret surveillance programme operated by the NSA. The operation of a secret surveillance programme (See at P.7) involves the strangling of Santa Claus and a large cable attaching to his anus at the fictional NSA central cell. This carnivalesque framing is to ridicule the NSA’s surveillance programme. The texts where Santa Claus is suspended and having his privates violated is not only an “image in tremendously exaggerated forms” and

“celebration of the lower bodily stratum” (ibid, 2010:41) for the purpose of ‘bad taste’ humour, but one that pokes fun at the NSA, while satirising it as “a violator of the privacy”. The purpose of the narratives is to reflect upon the documents leaked by Snowden, who discloses how the NSA monitors citizens’ telecommunications and online data, including personal profiles, e-mails and submitted content on social networking sites. It suggests that the NSA “will obtain intelligence wherever it can by any means possible” (Snowden, 2013).

In this episode, at the NSA, Eric Cartman blows the whistle out loud while saying:

**Eric Cartman:** Your secret is out, NSA! And now that everyone knows what you are doing to Santa, you can kiss your programme goodbye! You should have taken me out when you had the chance. Now everyone knows the truth! And everyone is going to think I am “superkewl”!

The episode then jumps into the scene where Eric Cartman is crying in front of the computer in his room, while his mother wonders why he is crying:

**Liane:** Eric, honey, what is the matter?

**Eric Cartman:** (In tears) It didn’t work, mum! I infiltrated the NSA, and I was a whistleblower and I thought everyone would be super-pissed off at what I exposed about the government, but nobody cared! Nobody cares if the government is listening in on everything! Nobody cares if Santa Claus is hooked up to a big horrible machine!

**Liane:** I know that the NSA is torturing Santa, sweetie. But they are keeping us safe.

**Eric Cartman:** Well now you just sound like everybody else.

**Liane:** Honey, it is okay.

**Eric Cartman:** It is not going to be okay because now I am a whistleblower, and against my conscience I am going to have to hide out in Russia.

This dialogue is indirectly reflecting what happened to Snowden, who had to flee the US and look for political asylum after his massive surveillance disclosure. In this episode, although Eric Cartman unveils the surveillance programme operated by the NSA, nobody seems to care. This dialogue, on the one hand, is to convey a particular political knowledge. This particular political knowledge suggests that despite Snowden's disclosure of massive surveillance, it does not necessarily prevent the NSA from operating its surveillance programme. Although citizens might be aware of the surveillance agencies violating their privacy in the name of "keeping us safe", the surveillance is undoubtedly invasive.

On the other hand, the dialogue between Eric Cartman and Liane Cartman conveys a different piece of political knowledge - the dilemma of privacy and surveillance. The operation of surveillance may violate individuals' privacy for the sake of public security. The absolute practice of privacy will limit the operation of surveillance. The dialogue also implies that Edward Snowden's leaking of the NSA documents does not necessarily make him a "hero". Despite his possible "heroic" action in disclosing NSA's massive surveillance programmes that most likely monitor all citizens, it does not necessarily cease the surveillance programmes operated by the NSA. Instead, his action puts himself in danger.

Later in this episode, Butters persuade Eric Cartman to join his group for worshipping the government, which is satirised as God in this episode. They attend the worshipping ceremony at the DMV ridiculed as the “church”. Eric Cartman then confesses his wrongdoing:

**Butters:** Your government doesn’t listen in on you to punish you. Your government just wants you to be honest about your mistakes.

**Eric Cartman:** I can be forgiven?

**Butters:** Yes!

**Eric Cartman:** For everything bad I have ever done?

**Butters:** Yes!

**Eric Cartman:** And then all I have to do is go back to this place every time I do something wrong and admit it and I am forgiven again?

**Butters:** That is right.

This episode ends with the host of WMZ News 4 announcing the breaking news on television that the DMV is closing down (see at P.8):



### **P.8: The DMV announcement**

“The DMV was shut down today after rampant allegations of sex with young boys. The heads of the DMV were arrested [...] With the DMV shut down, Americans have been asked to confess all wrongdoings at their nearest post office [...] We have just received word that the US Postal service has been shut down due to rampant allegations of sex with young boys. It now appears that the only people who can be trusted with confessions and guidance is your local news station. WMZ News will be back in... a young boy”.

Having examined the images and the language used in the WMZ host’s statement, I argue that “having sex with young boys” is not necessarily accusing DMV staff of committing paedophilia. Rather, the purpose of such taboo-breaking discourse as a part of carnivalesque strategy is to regard citizens’ privacy as “young boys”, who are constantly sexually violated in different places. With such invasive surveillance behaviour, citizens’ privacy is as vulnerable as “young boys”. The change of place from the DMV to the nearby postal office and eventually the local news station (ridiculed as

a church, in which citizens could confess all wrong doings), is to convey the message, as political knowledge, that no matter how strong the accusation of excessive use of surveillance power, the state will continue to use its invasive surveillance power. No matter how much the citizens might be aware of the government's surveillance behaviour, no matter how many oppose the surveillance programmes, and no matter how their behaviour is considered as a breach of human rights, the state will never stop monitoring citizens' communicative behaviour and gathering information in the name of the prevention of a potential threat. Despite Snowden's leakage of the surveillance programme, the NSA will most likely proceed and carry on expanding its surveillance measures.



### **P.9: Betsy died after getting stuck in the toilet**

Another example of how *South Park* satirises and uses a carnivalesque framing strategy to discuss political subjects that link to privacy and surveillance can be found in S16E01, “Reverse Cowgirl”. The narratives of this episode draw heavily upon the surveillance issues surrounding the TSA (Transportation Security Administration). However, this

episode uses toilet humour to satirise unreasonable surveillance measures imposed by the TSA. The TSA is parodied as the Toilet Security Administration, poking fun at its expanded surveillance measures. There are a few occasions on which this episode uses a carnivalesque framing strategy to satirise, parody and poke fun at the TSA. First, it parodies an incident where Clyde's mother, Betsy, has passed away due to Clyde's bad etiquette in using the lavatory, resulting in her getting her bottom stuck in the toilet. The firemen who are deployed to save her fail to do so. She also made a flush that created suction that is pulling out her insides. The firemen are not able to disconnect the lavatory from the plumbing since it will rip out her organs. However, while Clyde is blamed for failing to lift up the toilet seat, Betsy told Clyde and the firemen to "let her go" (See at P.9). After one of the firemen shuts off the plumbing, Betsy screams while her organs are ripped out and she passes away. Then, as *South Park* has fragmented story-telling sequences, the narratives jump into the TSA visiting Cartman's house straight after the funeral of Betsy.

**TSA Agent:** Hello ma'am, we are the Toilet Safety Administration.

**Liane Cartman:** The what?

**TSA Agent:** After the recent tragedy, new safety regulations require us to check every toilet for security. Can we come in?

**Liane:** Oh sure.

Granted permission to check the toilet's safety, the TSA agents also intend to install a safety belt (seatbelt) in Cartman's bathroom due to the Federal law requiring all toilets to be fitted with a safety harness so that nobody can fall in. In addition, the TSA agents suggest that this is for Cartman's safety as Betsy died of "unsafe usage of the toilet". However, Eric Cartman claims that "the blood is on Clyde's wiener, not his". The

dialogue here uses irony to poke fun at the unnecessary surveillance measure imposed by the TSA.



**P.10: The police officer charges Randy Marsh for not wearing the seat belt as a regulation of safety.**

The second occasion where the carnivalesque framing strategy can be found is in Randy's failure to fasten the safety belt in the toilet. While Randy Marsh is defecating, a policeman finds that he is not fastening the safety belt (See at P.10). The policeman suggests that if he sits on the toilet, he needs to wear his safety belt. Despite Randy Marsh's explanation, he receives a ticket from the policeman. This is, once again, using a private moment in which defecation is involved to ridicule of the unnecessary surveillance measures of the TSA.

The third occasion where the carnivalesque framing strategy can be found is in the dialogue of the TSA agents, a woman, Kyle Broflovski's father Gerald, and Eric

Cartman. Their dialogue starts with the TSA agents searching those citizens who intend to go through the booth while instructing them to take off their shoes and belts.

**TSA agent:** Taking a dump today, ma'am?

**Woman:** No, just need to pee.

**TSA agent:** I will just need to check inside your asshole.

While Eric Cartman comes in the booth, agitatedly saying that he is about to crap his pants and demand access to the toilet, one of the TSA agents tells Eric Cartman that a check of his genitals is required. While Eric Cartman furiously rejects the idea of having his genitals touched by the TSA agents, Gerald comes out of the toilet. He then gets investigated by the TSA.

**Gerald:** I am done.

**TSA agent:** Alright sir, I just need to check inside your asshole.

**Gerald:** I don't need you wiping my ass for me. I am a grown man.

**TSA agent:** Yes, you are a big boy, aren't you sir?

**Gerald:** Yes, I am a big boy.

**TSA agent:** That is a big boy, sir.

**Gerald:** I am a big boy. I took a big boy poop.

This occasion once again uses a carnivalesque framing strategy to ridicule the TSA's unnecessary surveillance by mocking the staff from the TSA as "anus checkers". What's more, there are other occasions in which the characters' bottoms are checked by the TSA agents. For instance, when Randy Marsh needs to go to the toilet while

holding a cup of coffee, the TSA agents are already standing by the toilet, instructing him to put his coffee in the plastic tray and to take his shoes and belt off. The whole procedure, once again, is similar to what they did to Gerald – to impose a bottom check. Moreover, the TSA install a security camera in Randy’s toilet. Shortly after, the scene jumps to the TSA security camera monitoring room (see at P.11). There is one member of staff sitting in front of monitors, while constantly masturbating over the views of numerous individuals’ usage of the toilet shown on the screen.



**P.11:** The TSA officer is masturbating while using surveillance power to watch citizens defecating as a monitoring process.

As Eric Cartman is agitated with TSA’s surveillance measure, he states that the freedoms of using the toilets privately are stripped away one by one. Hence, he suggests that the government should be out of the bathrooms. After that, Eric Cartman gets ready to protest against the TSA.

This episode then switches to the TSA staff monitoring centre, once again, the officer masturbates over the sight of individuals' defecating behaviour. He switches different cameras by monitoring the citizens defecating until it focuses on Eric Cartman standing in front of the camera. He carries on masturbating though his motions are somehow disrupted. Nonetheless, Eric Cartman puts a gun on a small stool, brings in a baby and one of the TSA staff tied with rope. He climbs up a small ladder and sprays the camera with black paint shortly after. The member of the TSA at the TSA monitoring centre shouts "security breach" after Eric Cartman's actions.

While this episode takes on the etiquette of the toilet, it also pokes fun at the TSA's extensive surveillance and exaggerated security measures. Despite its fictionality, it ridicules the Transportation Security Administration's security control over those tourists who go through the security check booths, while enforcing a series of bureaucratic check-ups, whether the tourists are dangerous or not. It also points out that the unnecessary deployment of extensive surveillance more or less harasses citizens. This episode uses the death of Craig's mother as an opening plot to discuss the surveillance measures that the TSA uses in the real world.

As the TSA is concerned with potential threats, it extends its surveillance measures by toughening its security checks. For instance, Blalock et al. conduct research, which examines the effect of changed security regulation in the TSA since 9/11. Interestingly, they find "increased inconvenience in the need for passengers on domestic flights to arrive at the airport as much as two hours prior to scheduled departure" (2007:8). There is also a survey revealing that the increased security has made flying less convenient – about 63 percent of travellers say that the airport security "is becoming more of a hassle"

(Woodyard and De Lollis, 2003). Moreover, while the increased airport security imposed by the TSA negatively affects passengers' journeys, it also costs the airline operators billions in "lost ticket revenues, since potential business travellers would rather stay home (Sharkey, 2002).

Both of the episodes, S16E01 and S17E01, effectively provide the sources of political knowledge that link to surveillance and privacy concerns, despite each of the episodes establishing different plots to convey their political messages. These political messages provide a couple of pieces of political knowledge that involves the operation of the NSA's surveillance programme, as well as the privacy concerns. They also provide the critique of unnecessary intensive surveillance established by the NSA.

These two episodes use a carnivalesque framing strategy to establish 'bad taste' humour through the narratives that have 'good values', as a result of the presentation of political knowledge. S17E01 has the potential to suggest critical views of the dilemma between surveillance and privacy, and especially the disclosure of the NSA's massive surveillance programme as political knowledge. S16E01 is providing the information, as political knowledge, associated with the unnecessarily extensive use of surveillance and overreaction by the authorities, while mocking and poking fun at the TSA.

The next section will open up the discussion based on the ideas of political correctness in an episode from *South Park*. The section will examine what political knowledge this episode tries to convey based on a carnivalesque framing, in which subjects of political correctness are specifically discussed. Ultimately, the next section will argue that, similarly to the episodes analysed in Chapter Two and above, the narratives from *South*

*Park* have ‘good values’, as it provides political knowledge, despite the ‘bad taste’ humour used in the narratives based on the carnivalesque framing. This political knowledge, embedded in each plot in the episodes, can serve as an alternative source of commentary on particular current issues, allowing viewers to critically look at them at a different angle.

#### **2.4: The analysis of S19E01, “Stunning and Brave” - What is “incorrect” of PC (Political Correctness)**

As discussed above, the narratives from *South Park* have the potential to provide a source of political knowledge. This section will also carry on assessing the narrative of an episode, S19E01, “Stunning and Brave”, to explore what messages critical of politics, as political knowledge, they try to convey. Since Anderson (2005), as mentioned in Chapter One, points out that *South Park* potentially takes an anti-PC stance, this section is, therefore, using S19E01 as an example to find out the extent to which *South Park* is drawing critiques of the ideas of political correctness.

By doing so, this section will first analyse the content affiliated with the ideas of PC discussed in *South Park*, in order to find out whether there are critical messages about the practice of the ideas of PC in this episode, which can be linked to particular critical literature about PC, with works from scholars such as Geser (2008), Gross (1997) and Spencer (2004). Therefore, this section will provide an overview on their work along with what has been concluded from the narrative analysis. These scholars’ critical literature is important to this analysis because the plots in this episode may suggest the

criticism relevant to their critical analysis of the ideas of PC. Their criticism also helps understand what political knowledge this particular episode tries to provide.

S19E01, “Stunning and Brave”, has a character called “PC Principal”. The reason that *South Park* introduces this character is to deal with the subject of political correctness. S19E01 starts with Mr. Mackey, who is also the counsellor at South Park Elementary School, introducing “PC Principal” to the class, after the original Principal Victoria (the former Principal of South Park Elementary School) has been fired:

**Mr.Mackey:** And a new person has been appointed to try and make South Park Elementary a..a....more progressive place that....fits in with today’s times. Heh Okay?

**PC Principal:** All right, listen up. My name is PC Principal. I don’t know about you, but frankly I am sick and tired of how minority groups are marginalised in today’s society. I am here because this place is lost in a time warp! Students who still use the word “retarded”, a teacher who said women without wombs should get an AIDS test!

Seemingly, this exchange suggests that PC Principal is a pioneer of “progressive” political views. Additionally, the way PC Principal introduces himself is to suggest that he is “representative” of political correctness and a person who practices political correctness. More importantly, he seems to try to “protect and represent” the minority groups, which are “marginalised”. *South Park* here is trying to use PC Principal as a character to explore and discuss the idea and the practices of political correctness. What this dialogue also tries to address is one of the practices of political correctness – “the regulation of speech”. PC Principal condemns and regulates those who use demeaning words. This practice is similar to what Geser (2009) and Fankboner (2004) refer to as

the “regulation of speech”, which is the most widespread feature of political correctness - the banning of presumably offensive or insulting words and verbal expressions in the public media as well as public institutions like schools, clinics or administrative agencies. Unsurprisingly, PC Principal is there to regulate the speech rules in *South Park*. Here is a dialogue that indicates how the practice of Political Correctness restricts and punishes individuals in South Park Elementary School:

**PC Principal:** A chef - “person of colour” who the children had sing soul songs and who the children drove to kill himself!

**Butters:** No, he got brainwashed by a cult.

**PC Principal:** And that’s two days’ detention for you, young man! We will see you at 4!

**Butters:** What?

**PC Principal:** Let me ask you this we are in Colorado, right? Where are the Hispanic kids? Huh? Where are the ethnic and racial minorities?

**Mr.Mackey:** Well, we have Token, he is black.

**PC Principal:** And that is two days’ detention for you, Mackey! Congratulations!

**Mr.Mackey:** What? I got detention?

**PC Principal:** I googled South Park before I came here, and I cannot believe the shit you are getting away with! People claiming to be advocates of transgender rights, but really just wanting to use the women’s bathroom. A white man who thinks he is Chinese and built a wall to keep out Mongolians.

The dialogue here suggests that those who practice political correctness tend to promote an ideal political speech sphere. What *South Park* is suggesting here is that one of the

features of political correctness emphasises is that the “majority” (white people) should not use any words that imply any offensiveness to the “minorities”. These minorities can “mostly be anyone but white males” (Geser, 2008:18). What the dialogue above articulates is that, as a representative of PC, PC Principal exerts every effort in regulating every individual’s speech in South Park Elementary School. Those who mention any words associated with his idea of “minorities” deserve punishment. In other words, the dialogue suggests that one of the notions of political correctness is the standardisation of speech, stressing that individuals who fail to meet the speech standard deserve “punishment” by being labelled and being given a “lesson”. The example of “punishment” and “being labelled and given a lesson” can be found in the dialogue below:

**Gerald:** Well, what is this about, Kyle?

**PC Principal:** Your son said some things to a fourth-grade girl that frankly make me want to puke! Now that I am principal. I am not going to allow anyone at this school to be made feel unsafe and harassed!

**Gerald:** Wh.....What did he say?

**PC Principal:** You will have to excuse my language. “I don’t think Caitlyn Jenner is a hero”. This kind of transphobic and bigoted hate speech isn’t going to fly here, bro! Well I thought we were all on board that Caitlyn Jenner is an amazing, beautiful woman who had the exquisite bravery of a butterfly flying against the wind. And then this shit comes out of people’s mouths!

**Gerald:** PC Principal, I, I am sure Kyle was just referring to Bruce Jenner as a person, and not trying to say anything against....

**PC Principal:** You got a fucking problem bro?

**Gerald:** No.....

**PC Principal:** Cause it is not Bruce fucking Jenner! It is Caitlyn, and she is a fucking stunning woman! Or maybe you are the one teaching him to demean women in the first place! Huh? What's up? What is fucking up, bro?

**Gerald:** Look, maybe we can all just ta.....

**PC Principal:** Get the fuck out of here, dude!

The dialogue between Gerald, Kyle's father, and PC Principal raises a couple of issues associated with political correctness that involve standardisation of speech (e.g. regulating individuals' speech) and the ideal speech sphere that frees "minorities" from being "insulted" (e.g. PC Principal does not want any "demeaning" words being used to describe Caitlyn Jenner, who is transgendered). The "non-majorities" are usually "women, non-white races, homosexuals and other ethnics" (Geser, 2008:3). In this episode, Kyle only addresses his point of view that Caitlyn Jenner is not a hero. His statement does not seem to have any "demeaning" content and does not offend or insult her. He only dislikes her as an individual, not as someone who is in a "minority". However, PC Principal seems extremely irritated as he thinks she is a hero. It seems the way that PC practitioners urge individuals to protect the safety of "minorities" or their well-being is to use positive statements about them rather than any neutral, critical or even negative statements. It also seems that any points of view that do not coincide with those of PC Principal will not be tolerated and will be labelled as whatever-phobic.

As this episode carries on, the kids are sick of PC Principal giving them detention when they failed to meet PC Principal's standards when they talk. Kyle persuades Eric

Cartman to stand up and fight against the detention that PC Principal constantly gives to them.

**Kyle Broflovski:** You are Tom Brady, Cartman! And that new principal in there is the football commissioner trying to dictate his punishment to you. And what happens when an invulnerable cheater comes up against an elitist corporate dictator?

**Eric Cartman:** A perfect storm of hypocrisy that everyone in the country has to deal with for months on end.

Eric Cartman, Kyle and the boys agree that it would be a good time for Eric to confront PC Principal, as Eric has had enough of detentions for “wrongful speech”. Eric Cartman picks up Butters’ underwear, then confronts PC Principal in the bathroom:

**Eric Cartman:** PC Principal, you have Butters’ underwear and now... (drops it into the urinal and soaks it in PC Principal’s urine, while PC Principal forgets flushing the urinal – and pulls the briefs out). Oh my gosh, it has got your DNA all over it (Kyle, Butters, Craig, Stan and Token watch the action through the windows above the bathroom). This certainly doesn’t look good for you. I don’t need to tell anyone about this. No, I think we have an understanding, Capisce?

**PC Principal:** What did you just say?

**Eric Cartman:** You mean about keeping your dick out?

**PC Principal:** “Capisce”?! You are associating Italian-Americans to intimidation tactics? You’d better watch your micro-aggressions, bro!

**Eric Cartman:** Oh, Okay. Look, you don’t want to end up like the spokesman for Subway, so you?

**PC Principal:** Did you just use a term that excludes women from an occupation (grabs Cartman's neck and hangs Cartman in the air)

**Eric Cartman:** Okay, let's back up....

Cartman is being pushed up against the wall by PC Principal, continuously punched and beaten up by him, while he says:

**PC Principal:** Did you just say "spokesman" instead of "spokesperson"? When women are just as capable at selling sandwiches as anyone? Are you purposely trying to use words that assert your male privilege?

**Eric Cartman:** No, I am sorry. I was just trying to frame you for raping Butters!

**PC Principal:** Do you think Italian-Americans and women are less important?

**Eric Cartman:** Oh God!

**PC Principal:** You dare use words that alienate two communities of people who have to deal with biases like your son a daily basis?

Eric Cartman is badly injured by PC Principal. He is then left in the bathroom, while the rest of boys, who peep through the windows and witness the whole scene, end up leaving. The confrontation apparently does not end well, as Eric Cartman does not succeed in what he planned as revenge on PC Principal, by defaming PC Principal as a child sex molester. Nonetheless, the dialogue between Eric Cartman and PC Principal might be suggesting that the fanatic behaviour of the PC practitioners is to regulate the individuals' speech, regarding them as "marginalising", "demeaning" and "inappropriate". This dialogue among Gerald, Kyle and PC Principal above suggests that PC practitioners want to "protect" the minorities by banning "certain speeches" and establishing the idea of PC. Individuals who fail to meet this standard will deserve punishment, harassment and labelling.

Additionally, Geser provides a critique of such practice of the ideas of political correctness, which can be seen in this dialogue. The critique involves that “PC zealots (parodied as PC Principal in this episode) are thought to be ‘right’, even if their attitude is not shared by a majority of others. Without relying on any religious authority, they maintain a belief in conditional truth that goes along with intolerance and disdain against dissidents” (2008:4). This critique is suggested through this dialogue by presenting PC Principal’s self-righteous behaviour via a carnivalesque framing strategy to mock the ideas of political correctness (the soaked pants in the urinal). PC Principal urinates on Butter’s pants, in which case he can be labelled a “child molester” and a “child beater” because he beats Eric Cartman up. However, he accuses Eric Cartman of marginalising the minorities and privileging the white male. The critique from this dialogue may also suggest that the PC Principal always thinks his “judgments” on others are the only correct ones. Due to being intimidated, beaten up and badly injured, Eric Cartman tries to change himself. He decides to put an end to the “bigotry”, “foul-mouthed” and “insensitive” speech by accepting what PC Principal believes in.

**Eric Cartman:** There’s nothing left to do. I am going to admit I did something wrong, take my punishment, and move on. I am not Tom Brady.

**Kyle Broflovski:** Dude, if we all tell the police what the principal did, he’ll be fired!

**Eric Cartman:** No way.

**Kyle Broflovski:** Why?

**Eric Cartman:** Because PC Principal is right, Kyle. You and I are bigots, and it’s time for us to grow up.

**Kyle Broflovski:** No, you are a bigot.

**Eric Cartman:** If I can face my prejudice, why can't you? We are two privileged, straight white boys who have their laughs about things we never had to deal with.

**Kyle Broflovski:** I am not going to apologise for saying Caitlyn Jenner isn't a hero! In fact, personally, I think she is most likely not a very good person!

**Eric Cartman:** Ahhhhh! Kyle, believe me! I know the struggle with hatred. Let's make ourselves better people.... together.

**Kyle Broflovski:** Come on, fat ass.

**Eric Cartman:** No more fat-shaming, Kyle. Let's start a new chapter.

**Kyle Broflovski:** So you are never going to call me a dirty Jew again?

**Eric Cartman:** No, I am going to call you... my friend.

**Kyle Broflovski:** Oh fuck you!

**Eric Cartman:** I... guess we never realised how bad he really was.

The dialogue between Eric and Kyle here addresses two different kinds of messages. The first one implies that the ideas of PC categorise the "majority" as "privileged white males". This majority most likely gets condemnation from PC practitioners for "marginalising" the minority. Secondly, this dialogue suggests Geser's critique of the idea of PC that divide the individuals in society into two groups – "the majority and the minority". Everyone is "a victimiser or a victim, an oppressor or an oppressed, an exploiter or an exploited. As a rule, women and ethnic minorities tend to be unconditionally seen in the role of victims, while males and white are always identified as oppressed" (2008:17).

The notion of "privileged white males" is not only mentioned in the dialogue between Eric Cartman and Kyle Broflovski, but also discussed between Stan's father, Randy,

Stan and Kyle. Randy has decided to take part in the PC community. He later bullies and shames Kyle in a late-night party organised by those individuals who practice the ideas of political correctness, described as PC Bros in this episode.

**Stan Marsh:** Dude, what happened?

**Kyle Broflovski:** Your dad was on my lawn yelling at me all night, and after I finally fell asleep I woke up Saran-wrapped to a tree with penises on my face. And this...

**Stan Marsh:** Hang on. Dad, did you draw dicks on my friend's face?

**Randy Marsh:** Did I check his privilege? Yes, I had some refreshments and I checked your friend's privilege.

**Stan Marsh:** That's my best friend, Dad!

**Randy Marsh:** Stan, straight white males in a capitalistic society have little understanding of victimisation compared to injustices against the under-privileged. Dicks on your face is a very first world problem.

**Stan Marsh:** Look, Kyle, maybe you should just say Caitlyn Jenner is a hero.

**Kyle Broflovski:** I didn't even say she wasn't a hero! I just said she isn't a hero to me! I didn't like Bruce Jenner as a person when he was on the Kardashians, and I don't suddenly like him now!

There are three messages this dialogue is trying to convey. Firstly, the dialogue implies that the ideas of PC have double standards. For example, Kyle simply does not like Caitlyn Jenner (formerly Bruce Jenner). According to PC Principal, Kyle's dislike is a result of discrimination on the grounds of Caitlyn's transgendered status. The double standards here suggest that it is not acceptable to dislike a transgendered person for whatever reasons, but it is acceptable to dislike the "majority". In other words, Kyle

only dislikes Caitlyn Jenner for who she is instead of her gender identity. Here is a question for the idea of PC: if Caitlyn Jenner did not have a transgendered operation while he was a white male, could Kyle dislike him without being labelled as whatever-phobic? What this dialogue suggests is that it seems justifiable to dislike the “majority”. However, any dislike towards the “minority” deserves being punished and negatively labelled.

Secondly, this dialogue emphasises the division of society into two groups by the ideas of political correctness mentioned above. This division can be regarded as binary positioning. Apart from the white males, almost everyone is “oppressed” in a capitalistic society. The “oppressors”, in PC Principal’s mind, perhaps deserve to be “punished “and “harassed” as they are privileged, whereas the minority needs “constant protection”. Such a critique of the ideas of political correctness is raised by Geser below:

“Males are modelled as ‘bad actors’ who need punishment, while the women and the other minorities are the ‘good victims’ in need of protection” (2008:18).

Likewise, in this episode, PC Principal’s punishment of Eric Cartman, Kyle Broflovski and Gerald Broflovski, indicate that they are “white males” who are “bad actors”, needing punishments because of their “privilege”, while Caitlyn Jenner deserves “protection” from any potential “harmful speeches” that PC Principal considers as “offensive and insensitive”. Such a binary categorisation becomes one of the features of the ideas of PC – the majority and the minority. This categorisation generalises the ultimate “good” and “evil” – white males are automatically bad, while the rest of other human kind are considered as automatically “good” (Gross, 1997).

The third issue that this dialogue suggests is that what PC practitioners exercise is a paternalistic behaviour. If the ideas of PC, as “enlightened thoughts” are not accepted or exercised, the “oppressors” would deserve harassment and the accusation of “suppressing and marginalising the minority”. The critique suggested in this dialogue is that PC practitioners are very “paternalistic”, as they tend to “defend the minorities’ interests as they appear from their own point of view – without asking the minority members themselves whether they agree” (Geser, 2008:22). More importantly, the oppressed are not necessarily “oppressed”. As Spencer argues that (2004: 560):

the victims are morally superior to their oppressors, who are generally White, and often particularly white males, depending on the group levelling the charge. This is seen in the definition of ‘racism’ and ‘sexism’ in association of the lexicon of political correctness. It seems that only Whites can be racist, and are intrinsically so, whether they are prepared to acknowledge this fact or not.

Such behaviour, as Geser states, above can be seen in this episode (S19E01) where Randy Marsh harasses Kyle and tells him what to do for his “wrongdoing” by not calling Caitlyn Jenner a hero. Randy Marsh, one of the individuals who practices PC as a belief, keeps pestering Kyle to check his “white privilege” as he uses the idea that white males are “privileged and oppressors” as an accusation of Kyle. However, he does not even ask those who are not privileged or oppressed minorities if they are in need of help to fight against discrimination by the privileged. Likewise, in this episode, the PC Principal, along with other PC practitioners, never ask those minorities whether

they are in need of what they call “protection”. Instead, this episode articulates that their behaviour towards the “white males”, who are “oppressors”, does not necessarily justify that the minorities are “always oppressed”.

As Eric Cartman, who still stays in a hospital room, hears that Kyle has been the target of PC Principal, he decides to take action to fight back against PC Principal:

**Eric Cartman:** Oh, Eh, oh it is no use, Butters. I want to get out there and start making positive changes, but I...can barely even work. How is everybody doing?

**Butters:** Well they are fine. Everyone is just kind of keeping their mouths shut. It is kind of nice, so the PC guys are leaving people alone. Well, except for...

**Eric Cartman:** Who?

**Butters:** Well, well now they have made Kyle their main target.

**Eric Cartman:** Kyle? My friend Kyle? (Slowly removing his hospital clothes and replacing them with his own clothes)

**Butter:** Eric, what are you doing?

**Eric Cartman:** I don't have a choice. I have to take these PC people out.

**Butters:** Oh, but I thought you agreed with them.

**Cartman:** I do, but I have to help Kyle, even if I don't agree with his hateful, bigoted thoughts. Kyle's view may be warped. I personally think Caitlyn Jenner's a stunning hero, but that doesn't mean I'll stand by while Kyle's intolerance is dealt with violently. We are going to war with these PC people once and for all! Butters, I am going to need 200 pregnant Mexican women and some taco launchers.

**Butter:** Well, okay!

The dialogue here between Eric Cartman and Butters conveys three different messages associated with PC. One of them is to make a political critique of PC Principal's unnecessary punishment of Kyle for his uncomplimentary comment about Caitlyn Jenner. This exchange uses PC's habitual labelling of Kyle as "bigoted and hateful", and as someone who fails to see eye to eye with PC Principal's compliment to Caitlyn Jenner, to suggest that PC practitioners think the ideas of PC are the only correct one. Cartman's line, in which he says "that doesn't mean I'll stand by while Kyle's intolerance is dealt with violently", suggests that PC's Principal's regulation of speech is excessive.

The second message in this dialogue has carnivalesque elements. In an early scene in this episode, PC Principal intends to establish rules for, and restrictions on, individuals' speech. Despite Eric Cartman's confrontation PC Principal does not stop regulating individuals' speech in South Park. However, in this dialogue, Eric Cartman plans to confront PC Principal and those who are part of the PC Bros (a group of PC practitioners in South Park) again by setting up a strategic plan – a war on PC, by deploying 200 pregnant Mexican women and tacos. Such a dialogue, which has 'bad taste' humour, framed in a carnivalesque manner serves to mock the idea of PC, which has become epidemic in South Park as a town.

At Rho Delta House, where the PC Principal and his fellows are having a party and chanting, there is a dialogue between the PC Bros. The dialogue satirises and pokes fun at PC practitioners in general, by ridiculing them as a group of a "silly party animals".

**PC Bros:** Social Justice 1 2 3 Woowoo! I want to be PC Woowoo! It's just the way to be for me! And you! Woowoo! Your hateful slurs are through! Woowoo!

**PC Bro 9:** I call woowoo on you!

**PC Bros:** Woowoo! We'll fight until you are PC black and blue!

**Randy:** Woowoo!

**PC Bros:** We are language police fighting bigotry! Hurtful words can suck our turd, 'cause it's PC for me!

**PC Bro 5:** And you!

**PC Bros:** Woowoo! Yeah! Yeah! Fuck Yeah!

**PC Bro 5:** Fuck yeah, bro! PC bro!

The dialogue here is serving to ridicule the ideas of PC. The irony presented in this dialogue pokes fun at PC's linguistic regulation. Meanwhile, the dialogue between PC Bros mostly involves words such as "woowoo" and "fuck yeah". Another purpose of this dialogue is to make the ideas of PC seem silly. While the PC Bros and Randy have their party in the Rho House, Eric Cartman is standing yards away from it and getting ready for his attack on PC Bros:

**Cartman:** Fire the taco launchers! (The boys load the launchers with tacos and fly. Tacos rain down upon the Frat house. The Mexican women arrive and run into the house, picking up tacos on the way.) Syrian refugee children, flank from the left! (A truck load of Syrian refugee children is waiting for the truck to get empty out. Butters releases the truck door and the Syrian refugee children rush out of the truck and run towards the house.)

**PC Bro 2:** Dude, what is this, bro?

**PC Bro 6:** I don't know bro!

**Cartman:** The Syrian refugee children are in, send in Jared! (Jared appears with his arms stretched out, ready to grab anything. He follows the Mexican women and the Syrian refugee children into the frat house. The rest of the neighbourhood gathers and marches towards the house.)

**Stephen:** What in the world is going on?

**Cartman:** All right, good. The pregnant Mexican women are falling asleep on the tacos. (Jared is on the balcony trying to grab some of the kids, and some PC Bros try to stop Jared.) All right, the Syrian refugees are trying to protect their children! (a few seconds later two cars crash into each other in front of the house.)

Soon after, one of the PC Bros falls from the balcony and dies as he lands his head on the ground. There is a graphic scene where during his death a PC Bro's blood is splashing out of his body.

Such a carnivalesque framing strategy used in these exchanges is to “degrade” (Bahktin, 1984) the ideas of PC. Particularly, the exchanges involving Syrian refugee children might be considered as ‘bad taste’, as they were caught up in a civil war when the episode was released. These carnivalesque exchanges might be considered as “insensitive”. However, such a use of a carnivalesque framing strategy is not necessarily to establish insensitive and taboo-breaking discourse in order to exploit cheap attention (Nestler, 2009). Instead, as stated in Chapter two, carnivalesque framing serves the purpose of deconstructing and juxtaposing what is considered as correct and incorrect, to reshape them as a set of messages that allow viewers to think about politics more critically.

As the conflict carries on, Kyle intervenes and stops the chaos created by Eric Cartman by stating that Caitlyn Jenner is a stunning and brave hero. Soon after, this episode ends with Randy's butt being ironed with a brand as "PC" and Cartman's dialogue with Stan runs like this:

**PC Principal:** I gotta hand it to you, Marsh. You really checked that little boy's privilege. Using those Syrian refugees was genius, bro.

**PC Bro 4:** Yeah, I would have never thought to use offensive imagery and outrageous stereotypes to provoke someone to open their eyes.

**Randy:** So I am PC now?

**PC Principal:** You are not only PC, you have actually changed my PC. Congrats, here's your Oakleys.

**Randy:** Oh wow. Oakleys! Oh yeah bro, these are sweet!

**Stan:** So I guess PC Principal is here to stay, huh?

**Eric Cartman:** Yes, but at least we know him that sometimes joking about un-PC things can actually be important, because it starts a dialogue. What's wrong, Kyle? You have your cake. Eat it, too.

**Stan:** It just seems to me like we all lost in this, and that the only person who won was you.

**Eric Cartman:** Hmmmm....and who does that remind you of, Kyle? Now if you don't mind, I am going to go home and fuck my hot wife, who, kind of looks like, a dude.

There are three messages that this dialogue tries to convey. The first one is that, after the chaotic conflict ceased, PC Bros put a "PC" logo on Randy's butt, and that this may

serve to ridicule PC via carnivalesque framing. The second message is that after the conflict, both PC practitioners and individuals who do not use the ideas of PC, ought to know that the moderate regulation of speech is necessary, aiming to protect the minority and women from verbal abuse and discriminating attack. More importantly, “making a joke” to start a dialogue is important too. The third message is a “joke” that Eric Cartman makes in carnivalesque style by saying that “I am going to go home and fuck my hot wife, who, kind of looks like a dude”. It is perhaps an extension of the first message that this dialogue tries to convey - it is not as harmful to make a joke as the doctrine of PC believes. Making jokes can be equally as important as regulation of speech. The statement from Eric Cartman does not only ridicule PC’s extreme regulation of speech established earlier in this episode, but also creates laughter for his “un-PC” joke.

In short, this episode discusses the idea and the practice of political correctness. Although it establishes based on fictional plots where the idea of PC is introduced that is put into practice, it provides the political knowledge that gives a capacity of critical thinking of this particular ideology. Despite ‘bad taste’ narratives in this episode, they have ‘good values’ that present a set of political knowledge, suggesting that the practices of political correctness are an act of reductive ideology without critical scrutiny. Another set of political knowledge this episode tries to provide is that it suggests that the ideas of political correctness is not necessarily “correct”, which involves intensive regulation of speech, reductive binary positioning and so forth. Although this episode uses “bad taste” as a way of carnivalesque framing, it conveys the messages critical of the ideas of political correctness, the political knowledge embedded in the narratives of this episode has the potential to perhaps allow viewers to

look at a particular political ideology in a different light, as a presentation of ‘good values’.

### Chapter 3: Conclusion

To conclude, this thesis focuses on whether *South Park*, as an example of popular culture, provides what van Zoonen regards as political knowledge that potentially engages individuals in politics. This thesis discusses the extents where popular culture, and especially satire, plays an important role in conveying political messages through framed fictional plots – using van Zoonen’s analysis of *Yes, Prime Minister*, Jordan and Torchin’s analysis of *Borat* and Anderson’s analysis of the extent to which *South Park* takes an Anti-liberal stance. In spite of their fictional nature, these satirical programmes as examples of popular culture, provide an overview of the political potential of popular culture. Popular culture, as stated by van Zoonen (2005), is a source of political knowledge that potentially allows citizens to engage in politics. Although *South Park* uses a carnivalesque framing as a way to establish its ‘bad taste’ narratives, by mocking, ridiculing, presenting irony and grotesque images, it serves the potential to present critical political messages as part of political knowledge. In other words, as a result of providing political knowledge, *South Park*’s narratives have ‘good values’.

In this thesis, the purpose of selecting these five episodes as examples is to articulate and discuss the debate revolving around the political potential of popular culture. The selection of these five episodes is also to emphasise that despite *South Park*’s presentation of its ‘bad taste’ narratives, it provides a set of political knowledge that allows critical thinking of particular political matters, ideologies and so forth. After the analysis of these five episodes, it is clear that the narratives of *South Park* convey messages critical of politics as a part of political knowledge. In S15E01, “HumancentiPad”, *South Park* uses such a carnivalesque framing strategy to address

issues regarding individuals who fail to realise terms and conditions and poke fun at the technological giant, Apple Inc, which does not necessarily serve its customers, particularly in the long terms and conditions. It uses the kids in South Park Elementary school as a way to address everyday life. It also uses Eric Cartman to ridicule modern materialism in the form of the iPad, which is a product to show-off instead of a necessity for every day. On the one hand, *South Park* uses carnivalesque framing to ridicule individuals, political affairs and societal events. On the other hand, it tends to take a stance to point out different issues in this episode – the technological giant and its users.

S17E01, “Let Go, Let Gov”, provides political knowledge associated with the matters of surveillance and privacy in the U.S. It on the one hand points out and ridicules the measures that the US government takes to secure the national interest, freeing it from any terrorist or public attacks. On the other hand, it suggests that if individuals submit their information on the Internet, their information would not be “private” anymore. This episode also uses irony, ridicule and grotesque presentation as parts of carnivalesque framing to discuss and mock the contemporary surveillance and privacy matters in the US. Likewise, S16E01, “Reverse Cowgirl”, extensively uses toilet humour and grotesque presentation to poke fun at the intensive measure of individuals’ surveillance by the TSA, which is parodied as the Toilet Security Administration.

S19E01, “Stunning and Brave”, aims at addressing political matters in regard to political correctness. It points out what is incorrect in political correctness. By doing so, this episode uses PC Principal and PC Bros to establish the plots that include PC doctrines, such as regulation of speech, the ideas of the “minority” and especially the terminology that stresses the notion of “white males” who are the “oppressors”. While

this episode illustrates the politically judgmental habits of those who exercise PC, it also addresses the critical political messages of the practice of political correctness. Rather than constant accusations of individuals who are being “insensitive”, the doctrine that the PC community believes in is “over-sensitive”. What is illogical of the ideas of political correctness, as revealed in the exchanges in *South Park*, are that they tend to negatively label those who do not practice what they believe in. Such a judgement of being whatever-phobic is in need of more scrutiny. Moreover, PC guardians are allowed to punish those whose dialogue or speech fails to meet their standards.

According to this episode, it is suggested that the illogical side, and perhaps hypocritical side, of the ideas of political correctness is their regulation of speech. The core of the regulation of speech is to protect minorities and women from any negative verbal abuses, racial slurs and discriminating speech. However, in *South Park*, while the PC communities attack those “bullies” who, in their eyes, use negative verbal abuse, racial slurs and discriminating speeches that demean women and minorities, they seem to forget that they too use such bullying tactics to regulate individuals’ speech. *South Park* suggests that they are being oversensitive about whichever words or sentences are coming out of individuals’ mouths. In other words, while they strongly oppose labelling an act as bullying others who are “minorities”, they tend to label “the majority” who are oppressors. This episode provides a source of political knowledge which suggests that such a method from PC does not necessarily facilitate a more “correct” discursive atmosphere in which minorities and women are free from PC’s notion of “marginalisation”. Instead, this episode suggests that it only justifies PC’s self-

righteously paternalistic role in the society that individuals have to be obedient to their moral standards and doctrine.

Similar to the other episodes of *South Park*, the carnivalesque framing in this episode is also quite prominent. Minorities, the individuals whom PC thinks need to be protected, are used as a weapon to fight back against PC. It is to poke fun at their self-righteous act in *South Park*. The oppositional narratives are used to ridicule PC Principal and the rest of the PC practitioners.

The episodes analysed in this thesis are examples of where the narratives and the dialogue from popular cultural products can be linked to political subjects. These popular cultural products try to convey critical political messages. Films, songs and plays are produced to “make a political point”. They “form part of well-established patterns of political discourse” (Street, 2007:34-35). In this case, *South Park* provides a kind of political discourse that urges looking at politics more critically. As analysed, *South Park* does take a political stance. However, it uses extreme textual features (such as the carnivalesque style of narratives) to promote a moderate view of politics by poking fun at the binary, the technological giant, Apple versus users, surveillance versus individuals’ privacy. Although in the final example, aside from its take on Caitlyn Jenner, *South Park* does not necessarily always take a stance on which fits on one side of the other political spectrum. However, it takes a critical position to discuss politics differently. In this episode, political correctness does not stand for utter correctness in any political behaviour. Similar to the other analysed episodes, the messages that are critical of politics are quite prominent. The narratives from *South*

*Park* can be seen as what van Zoonen defines as a source of political knowledge, allowing a capacity for addressing and discussing particular political subjects.

By providing a source of political knowledge, *South Park* uses a carnivalesque style of narrative to present the political plots. These narratives involve the comedy “derived from fart jokes, racial slurs, talking turds, a kid in a Hitler costume at Halloween, and a child who shows his love for his girlfriend by vomiting” (Halshall, 2008:23). Such narratives also involve “mocking many of the figures and symbols that are iconic of American culture”. Matt Stone and Trey Parker, the creators of *South Park*, perhaps tend to “reject official dogma and mock ‘high’ culture to make *South Park* so deliciously liberating and important as a popular text” (ibid, 2008:23). The grotesque images, use of vulgarity and taboo-breaking, oppositional irony and unconventional degrading abuses, do not tend to insult purposely, they enable carnival laughter, that “is a method used by *South Park* in particular, providing liberation from constraint” (Halshall, 2008:24).

However, *South Park* might be decoded in an unexpected way in that it does not necessarily facilitate critical thinking of politics. Although *South Park* may have its pedagogical functions to provide a source of political knowledge of socio-political issues in the US, or perhaps reinforce the comprehension of the binary sides of a particular political subject, the texts might be perceived by the audiences in a manner that may fail to comprehend the particular plot conveying the messages critical of politics. Although *South Park* has a vastly devoted fan base and has been a popular TV cartoon satirical programme on Comedy Central for more than a decade (as of 2009) (Gournelos, 2009), it might not be that all fans will perceive the texts as critical

messages encoded in the narratives. *South Park* may require audiences to understand its satirical nature in order to acknowledge the political communicative potential in its narrative. The vulgarity and the taboo-breaking discourse may not encourage the viewers to look at the plots which are political and critical.

Nonetheless, although there is a limitation to this research, which so far seeks to find out the political knowledge that is situated in the narratives in *South Park*, this research project is concerned to see how these sources link to US contemporary politics, and especially how this carnivalesque framing enables a different experience that can perhaps facilitate knowing politics critically and hedonically. As Weinstock (2008: 13) writes:

The narratives, as all or nothing, provides the necessary alibi for socially sensitive viewers to laugh at ‘politically incorrect’ humour – the idea being that if everyone is offended equally, no one is singled out, and therefore anyone who takes offence is being overly sensitive and can’t take a joke.

Binder, on the other hand, rejects the claim that the episodes which deal with racial tension - particularly, S11E01, “With Apologies to Jesse Jackson”, - reinforces the “white privilege Anglo-Saxon culture” and is supportive of “bigoted thinking” (Binder, 2014:62):

The debates about *South Park* indicate that the application of satire or irony in the series “runs the risk of sending mixed messages to viewers,

especially with regard to race”. However, it does not necessarily cause viewers to adapt’ “bigoted thinking, especially after having viewed the episode in its entirety”.

Since it possesses satirical and carnivalesque features, the ultimate purpose of it is not to provide support for any sort of vulgarity, taboo-breaking and demeaning abuse. Instead, it conveys a set of critical political messages in the plots of *South Park* which might be cases in the real world. *South Park* “functions as a miniature representation of all of the United States and, as such, is rife with social, political, and racial tension” (Halshall, 2008:24).

Before every episode, *South Park* has a disclaimer that notifies the audiences that this TV programme is not for everyone, as some people may find it offensive. Particularly, as the creators of *South Park*, Matt Stone and Trey Parker, are equal offenders, as individuals who tend to offend everyone. In other words, it means that viewers will be offended in some degrees – perhaps no one is singled out from such politically designated plots. Perhaps some viewers find it difficult to grasp its ultimate purpose. However, its politically informative potential ought not to be ignored. It likely facilitates the joyous experience of knowing politics more critically. *South Park*’s ‘bad taste’ narratives via a carnivalesque framing have ‘good values’ – conveying messages critical of politics as parts of political knowledge.

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