

Satire's Corrective Function:
Jon Stewart and Post-Modern, Generative Satire

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“Once you figure out what a joke everything is, being a comedian’s the only thing [that] makes sense.”¹

I. INTRODUCTION

Jon Stewart engages in comedic satire on his self-proclaimed “fake news” show four nights a week on *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* (TDS) studio in New York City. Stewart examines the day’s news and repackages the material in a satirical and comedic way. His comedy includes sophomoric humor and slapstick comedy, cheap and easy puns, subtle irony and scathing satirical commentary and insight. Situated on Comedy Central, the show defies conventional genre boundaries of comedy, news and variety shows; along with *The Colbert Report*, it has emerged as a unique blend of comedy, entertainment/variety show and journalism, shaping the landscape of television in new ways. A 2008 article in *The New York Times* describes the emergence of *The Daily Show* as a “genuine cultural and political force.”² Likewise, a study conducted by the Pew Research’s Center Project for Excellence in Journalism, a nonpartisan organization dedicated to empirically evaluating and studying the performance of the press, concluded in a 2008 report that, “*The Daily Show* is clearly impacting American dialogue” and “getting people to think critically about the public square.”³ *The Daily Show* is a cultural force in American society and this thesis proposes that at least part of the reason for this is the traditional function of satire on the show.

Steven Weisenburger defines traditional satire as “a rationalist discourse launched against the exemplars of folly and vice, to rectify them according to norms of good behavior and right

¹ Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, *Watchmen* (London: Titan Books, 2007), Part II, 13.

² Michiko Katukani, “Is Jon Stewart the Most Trusted Man in America?,” *The New York Times*, August 15, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/17/arts/television/17kaku.html?pagewanted=all>.

³ Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism, “Journalism, Satire or Just Laughs?: The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, Examined,” (Washington, DC), May 8, 2008, <http://www.journalism.org/node/10961>.

thinking.”⁴ This definition encapsulates four elements commonly associated with traditional satire: (1) satire is rhetorical and puts forth a rational argument; (2) satire requires an object of attack in the “real world”; (3) satire proposes a corrective in society, an “ameliorative course of action”⁵, and finally; (4) satire is normative and thus makes reference to an “absolute moral code.”⁶ These four elements constitute what Weisenburger terms “generative” satire and falls squarely within formalist literary theory. The main purpose of satire in the generative mode is to “construct consensus”⁷ in the “hopes of a return to order and grace.”⁸ Weisenburger characterizes traditional, generative satire as a narrative mode that is not truly oppositional to entrenched hierarchies as it essentially retells the fable of a past utopian society.

Postmodern satire, or “degenerative” satire, has turned this traditional framework on its head. Weisenburger argues that “degenerative” satire is truly oppositional as it interrogates and subverts all codified knowledge⁹, even the narrative itself and thus lacks a concrete object of attack in the “real world”. Exposing and ridiculing the act of “fiction-making” itself serves as the object of attack in degenerative satire, and this is a marked difference in relation to generative satire. In addition, degenerative satire lacks “fixed norms or corrective goals”¹⁰ and is characterized by unstable and shifting narrative viewpoints, grotesque imagery and violence, and transtextuality (the complex interplay between prior texts and the current one). Put simply, according to Weisenburger, the only similarity between postmodern “degenerative” satire and traditional “generative” satire is that both forms are rhetorical. The corrective and normative

⁴ Steven Weisenburger, *Fables of Subversion: Satire and the American Novel* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 1.

⁵ *Ibid*, 15.

⁶ *Ibid*.

⁷ *Ibid*, 1.

⁸ *Ibid*, 14.

⁹ *Ibid*, 11.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 14.

functions of satire, as well a specific object of attack, are missing in postmodern satire, at least when using traditional definitions of satire.

This study seeks to challenge and test elements of Weisenburger's distinction between generative, traditional satire and degenerative, postmodern satire using *The Daily Show* as a context for study. The primary element to be tested is the corrective function of satire and this thesis will analyze the extent to which the show's satire performs a corrective function in society. Various clips from the show containing overt, targeted satire will be analyzed and discussed in correlation to research that has been conducted regarding the effect the show has on its viewers.

1.1 THE POST-MODERN AESTHETICS OF *THE DAILY SHOW*

Stewart's version of satire retains the corrective function found in traditional satire, even though the aesthetics of the show is decidedly postmodern in style and form. Jeffrey Jones, Associate Professor of Communication at Old Dominion University, argues that *The Daily Show* appears to be the "epitome of postmodern media, marked by border-crossing hybridity."¹¹ The boundaries that once shaped network news shows—the focus on fact over opinion, public service over private profit, and information over entertainment—are now deeply obscured.¹² To employ other terminology, a postmodern show such as TDS blurs the difference between hard news and soft news. Hard news generally refers to up-to-the-minute news and events that are reported immediately, while soft news is background information or human-interest stories with a focus on entertainment or advice to the viewer. This distinction is blurred on *The Daily*

¹¹ Jeffrey P. Jones and Geoffrey Baym, "A Dialogue on Satire News and the Crisis of Truth in Postmodern Political Television," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 34, nr. 2 (2010), 281.

¹² Ibid.

Show because it “interweave[s] information with entertainment, politics with pop culture, and reasoned conversation with spectacle.”¹³

For example, the set of *The Daily Show* mimics traditional network news by employing many tropes of the news genre: the prominent anchor’s desk, a television monitor lurking over Stewart’s shoulder, and the slick background set—all these are visible after the show opens with a booming, God-like voice, informing the audience of the date and day of the program. “The initial emphasis on the date borrows a technique from broadcast journalism that seeks textual authority through a claim to immediacy.”¹⁴ Similarly, the phrase “world news headquarters in New York” invokes the power and prestige of New York City based news. Jon Stewart himself plays a reasonably believable news reporter, looking well-groomed and, most of the time, adopting a serious, measured tone. In these ways, the aesthetic qualities of the show mimic and parody what one has come to associate with the style and look of network news. Lisa Colletta argues that by parodying conventions of the news genre, the show embraces the postmodern notion that reality is constructed. “Television, the dominant media of postmodern culture, continually refers to itself, quoting other constructed forms” and mocking itself in the process. The TDS audience is made “conscious of the constructed nature of meaning and of its own participation in the appearance of things.”¹⁵ The TDS viewer finds humor in this parodying, while at the same time implicitly acknowledging the postmodern premise that reality is constructed. Lisa Colletta argues that the viewer not only enjoys the jokes, but is complicit in the joke-making, creating a sense of collusion between the viewer and Jon Stewart against the mainstream media and absurdities found in present political reality.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Geoffrey Baym. “The Daily Show: Discursive Integration and the Reinvention of Political Journalism.” *Political Communication*. 22, nr.3 (2005), 262.

¹⁵ Lisa Colletta, “Political Satire and Postmodern Irony in the Age of Stephen Colbert and Jon Stewart,” *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 42, nr. 5 (2009), 856.

Geoffrey Baym, Associate Professor of Media Studies at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro, notes that these references to the news genre is complicated from the start as the live camera quickly swings through the studio, a “technique of fast motion more common to entertainment than to news.”¹⁶ The connotation of a serious news network is undermined even more by an upbeat rock soundtrack and a cheering audience, and by a joking and sardonic “news” host. From the start, the show “interweaves two levels of discourse, borrowing equally from traditions of authoritative nightly news and the entertainment talk show.”¹⁷ Baym argues that these two discourses are not in “binary opposition” but rather complement each other. Stewart’s popularity no doubt arises from the show’s ability to combine a serious concern for current affairs with entertainment and humor. The element of entertainment and humor sets him apart from standard news networks, and is the element that initially attracts its relatively young viewing audience, as will be shown in more detail in chapter two.

Within seconds into the show, the first-time viewer realizes that as he reports on the news of the day in his opening monologue, Stewart uses words like “douche bag” and “dumbass”, blending fact and opinion in a single sentence. In the next section of the show, Stewart often turns to his fake news reporters, who always have important-sounding but vacuous titles such as “Senior Terrorist Expert” for in-depth deconstruction and blending of a topical item with popular culture. The third segment of TDS features a guest, usually a politician where the discussion centers on making sense of complicated political issues, or a celebrity/author promoting their new film or book where the discussion is intended to be light and funny. In each part of the show, TDS reflects the post-modern style of mixing genres, reworking the conventions of news, entertainment and comedy to form a new hybrid form of informative

¹⁶ Baym, “Discursive,” 262.

¹⁷ Baym, “Discursive,” 262.

entertainment. This may be part of the reason why Stewart describes his own show as “fake news”, a clear nod to the constructed nature of the aesthetics of this show.

Stewart’s own description, though, is a misnomer; it is only fake in the sense that it happily violates conventions that are traditionally associated with journalism, such as objectivity in reporting. It is not fake in the sense of counterfeit because it does provide actual news content, similar to what can be found on the news networks, as evidenced by studies that have done a content analysis comparing TDS to Fox News and CNN.¹⁸ Additionally, Ryan Teten, Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Louisiana, notes that, “Research illustrates that the show provides as much, if not more, information, as news broadcasts on CBS, NBC and ABC.”¹⁹ People are not fooled by the show’s self-proclaimed title of “fake news”, which is why Stewart was nominated as “America’s Most Trusted Newscaster”²⁰ after the passing of veteran newsman Walter Cronkite. The show’s blending of hard and soft news, information and entertainment, represents a new kind of powerful journalism, according to Jeffrey Jones.²¹ Though the post-modern form of the show is radically different from Walter Cronkite’s nightly news, it embraces the modernist agenda of a search for truth through the privileging of facts and reasoned public discourse. TDS thus complicates strict delineations between post modernism and modernism.

¹⁸ See the Pew Research Center, “Journalism, Satire or Just Laughs?,” 2008;

----- See also Jeffrey Jones, “Fake News vs Real News: The Case of The Daily Show and CNN,” *Entertaining Politics*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2010) 167-184;

----- See also Paul Brewer and Emily Marquardt, “Mock News and Democracy: Analyzing the Daily Show”. *Atlantic Journal of Communication*, 15, nr. 5 (2007): 249-267.

¹⁹ Ryan Lee Teten, “Mouthpiece of the Liberal Left? Jon Stewart and *The Daily Show*’s “Real” Coverage of the Election 2008, *Public Integrity* 14, nr.1 (2011-2012), 72.

²⁰ Jones and Baym, “Dialogue,” 278;

----- See also Teten, 71.

----- After the passing of Walter Cronkite in 2009, *Time* magazine conducted an online poll posing the question, “Now that Walter Cronkite has passed on, who is America’s most trusted newscaster?” The respondents could choose from Katie Couric, Charlie Gibson, Brian Williams and Jon Stewart with Stewart receiving the most nominations.

²¹ Jones and Baym, “Dialogue,” 281.

1.2 WHAT, IF ANYTHING, COMES AFTER THE LAUGH?

The fundamental question of this thesis is whether or not the post-modern aesthetic of the show automatically negates or undermines one of the traditional functions of satire, which is to serve as a corrective in society. This speaks to a classic literary debate: the relationship between form and content. I argue that the form does not undermine the content, but this raises some problematic questions. For instance, what constitutes “a corrective”? How and when can one say that Stewart’s satire has been responsible for a corrective? What evidence is needed to make the claim that Jon Stewart’s satire on *The Daily Show* demonstrates the corrective function of traditional satire on a societal level?

It will be useful to begin by exploring the historical and rhetorical qualities of satire as a genre in order to answer the first question: what constitutes a corrective. To address the second question, I will then look at specific episodes of TDS to ascertain if, in fact, a tangible corrective has been achieved as a result of Stewart and his brand of satire. The examples used will show from an objective perspective that on at least on a few occasions, a corrective has been achieved. Then I will analyze the effect of the show from a broader perspective, looking beyond the concrete impact of specific episodes. The focus here will be to analyze the show’s role in changing public and political discourse to ascertain if a corrective has been achieved on a societal level. To do this, I will utilize the growing body of quantitative research about the show which, broadly speaking, seeks to quantify the impact of the show on its viewers in terms of political knowledge, opinions and participation. Together with demographic data regarding the show’s viewership and correlating that with data regarding political participation in the 2008 election, I will draw conclusions regarding the societal impact of Stewart’s brand of political satire and comedy in response to the third main research question as outline above.

2. CHAPTER ONE: THEORIES OF SATIRE

2.1 THE CORRECTIVE FUNCTION OF SATIRE

Generally, satire exposes a moral issue in a (mostly) humorous way, producing social scorn and indictment through playful means. Through ridicule and rhetoric of persuasion, satire leads its hearers (viewers) toward a better course of action. Dustin Griffin in *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction* notes that the satire of Erasmus was intended to foster a critical spirit, and to urge his readers toward a better choice.²² George Test in *Satire: Spirit and Art* writes that, “the core of satire can be understood on an everyday level. Everybody at some time or another becomes angry or indignant at people and events [...] One way of letting our feelings out is to attack verbally the conditions so as to change them or at least get rid of the anger and frustration.”²³ The notion of satire leading to some sort of positive change or rectification is apparent in this definition, as it was in the definition provided by Weisenburger. The purpose of satire is positive change in society, not just the proliferation of negativity and unabated cynicism, a potentially paralyzing concoction of distrust, skepticism and contempt. It should be noted, however, that cynicism need not necessarily be construed negatively; “cynicism seems to be part of a contemporary civic toolkit that tends to be used along with other tools, such as the daily news, to produce healthy levels of knowledgeable engagement with the political process.”²⁴ A measured degree of cynicism can be healthy for an engaged citizenry: unabated cynicism, however, can lead to greater disengagement from the political sphere. As Griffin notes, “skepticism and discontent can lead to a kind of passive obedience ... that permits a government to maintain its authority and to control dissent.”²⁵ The relationship between the

²² Dustin Griffin, *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University of Kentucky Press, 1994), 56.

²³ George Test, *Satire: Spirit and Art* (Tampa: University of South Florida, 1991), 2.

²⁴ Lance Bennett “Relief in Hard Times: A Defense of Jon Stewart’s Comedy in an Age of Cynicism” *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 24, no 3 (2007), 282, as quoted in Teten, 73.

²⁵ Griffin, *Satire*, 158

more cynical (or is it critical?) audience of TDS, and the political engagement of young voters will be explored in the analysis section in chapter two.

Griffin's study provides a comprehensive theoretical account of satire based on both literary and scholarly studies as well as detailed analyses of specific historical satirists such as Horace, Juvenal, Pope and Swift. When discussing the context in which satire has typically or historically flourished, Griffin writes, "If open challenge to orthodoxy is freely permitted, then writers will take the most direct route and debate the ideas and characters of political leaders openly in newspapers, protected by guarantees of free speech. It is difficult, or unnecessary, to satirize our political leaders when the newspapers are filled with open attacks on their integrity and intelligence. But if open challenge is not permitted, writers will turn to irony, indirection, innuendo, allegory, fable—to the fictions of satire."²⁶

One can argue that twenty-first century America has seen the development of an environment that is less tolerant of provocative and constructive criticism of political leaders. This period has been marked by unpopular wars, increased political partisanship, and mind-numbing manufactured realities, an era when "cognitive dissonance has become a national epidemic."²⁷

Cognitive dissonance is a psychological concept that refers to the ability to hold two or more contradictory beliefs simultaneously. One set of circumstances that has led to this, according to Jones, was the Bush administration's "War on Terror," as it was termed by George Bush himself shortly after September 11, 2001. Stewart was "dumbfounded by the Bush administration's willingness to assert boldface lies and expect the public to believe them."²⁸

In an interview in 2002, Stewart argued,

²⁶ Ibid, 139.

²⁷ Katukani.

²⁸ Jeffrey Jones, *Entertaining Politics: Satiric Television and Political Engagement* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2010), 75.

This administration, more than any other I've ever seen, is gaslighting us! Literally, it's raining on us, it's cloudy, and they go, "And on this sunny day"—No, it's not sunny. And they say, "Uh—this sunny day," and then you look at the backdrop they've got and it says sunny and they say, "See, sunny?" It's just a lie. They just don't acknowledge it. And by not acknowledging it, what they say becomes true!²⁹

Even though the aesthetics of TDS embrace postmodernity, Stewart seems to reject the postmodern notion that reality is constructed, rather than perceived or understood. The quote above by Stewart reflects his belief that there is something called truth and fact in the world, and that merely saying something is true is not the same as it actually being true. As Colletta writes, "Politicians perform their roles with a smirk and a wink aimed at a television audience, knowing that saying something is true is equivalent of its being true, that appearing is the same as being."³⁰ In an age of cognitive dissonance, where there is a disparity between words and reality, Stewart employs satire to hold the powerful accountable to both.³¹

Geoffrey Baym notes that critical inquiry of the powerful is a task one would typically assign to journalists, but this is becoming increasingly absent in the mainstream media. "A journalism of supervision and accountability has been replaced by one of conformity and complicity,"³² a sentiment Stewart agrees with and one that becomes an object of attack in his satirical comedy. The collusion of politics, business and media in twenty-first century America provides plenty of material for the satirist.

Brian Williams, prominent journalist and NBC Nightly News anchor, has said of Stewart that he has become the "citizen's surrogate,"³³ holding the powerful to task on behalf of the average citizen. Stewart himself embraces this notion, commenting that, "I represent the distracted

²⁹ Simon Houpt, "The World According to Stewart", *The Globe and Mail* (Canada), October 3, 2002. http://jon.happyjoyfun.net/tran/2002/02_1003globe.html

³⁰ Colletta, 858.

³¹ Baym, "Discursive," 267.

³² Baym. "Discursive," 268.

³³ Katukani.

center. My comedy is not the comedy of the neurotic. It comes from the center. But it comes from feeling displaced in society because you're in the center. We're the group of fairness, common sense, and moderation. We're clearly the disenfranchised center... because we are not in charge."³⁴ Stewart claims to speak for those Americans who are frustrated with the toxic political environment, and a news media that colludes with wealthy interest groups. Stewart's public service role then is to provide cathartic relief to the "disenfranchised center" he happily represents, rather than to promote social change,³⁵ a stance that at once seems to contradict a fundamental convention of satire. Distancing himself from claiming to be a catalyst for social change is perhaps rooted in the tenuous history of satire's power to serve as a corrective in society.

In terms of the corrective function, Griffin notes that satire is historically ambiguous when it comes to its persuasive power: "Despite the fears of political authorities from ancient to current times, it has not been convincingly shown that satire has the power to encourage the actions or alter the attitudes of its readers."³⁶ Yet he writes later, "By conducting open-ended speculative inquiry, by provoking and challenging comfortable and received ideas, by unsettling our convictions and occasionally shattering our illusions, by asking questions and raising doubts but not providing answers, satire ultimately has political consequences."³⁷ A casual viewer of the show need not be told that Stewart engages in open-ended provocative inquiry, one that shatters the façade of trustworthy authorities. However, it is much more difficult to specify any resulting political consequences if there are, in fact, any at all. Moreover, Griffin does not

³⁴ Jonathan Gray, Jeffrey Jones and Ethan Thompson (Eds). *Satire TV: Politics and Comedy in the Post Network Era*. (London and New York: New York University Press, 2009), 16.

³⁵ Joanne Morreale, "Jon Stewart and The Daily Show: I Thought You Were Going to be Funny" in *Satire TV: Politics and Comedy in the Post-Network Era*, Eds Jonathan Gray, Jeffrey Jones and Ethan Thompson (London and New York: New York University Press, 2009), 117.

³⁶ Griffin, 154.

³⁷ Griffin, 160.

specify the nature of those political consequences. He writes that “Except in mythical Ireland, satire does not cause the fall of princes or bring on revolutions. One doubts too that satire ever brought the wicked to repentance.”³⁸

Here it is necessary to clarify the nature of what constitutes a correction. One of the four properties of satire is that an object of attack is required—something or someone is the target of ridicule and scorn. It would be convenient and expedient if that object of attack, whether it is the news media itself or a politician, admitted their folly and changed their behavior, opinions or policies as a direct result of a satirical barb. One could then easily determine a cause and effect relationship. Unfortunately, the consequences of satire will rarely be as clear and obvious as that. Griffin notes that the great English satirists, Pope and Swift, “expressed considerable doubt” as the effectiveness of satire to induce any correction,³⁹ and that satire only “angers the fools” but does not “mend your foes.”⁴⁰ It is all too easy for the ridiculed object to simply dismiss the satirical attacks for any number of reasons. In fact, it may even have the opposite effect of emboldening the behaviors and opinions of those who are the object of attack. For example, Stewart’s frequent and harsh criticism of the Fox News tagline ‘Fair and Balanced’ has not resulted in any modification to the way the cable channel brands and markets itself. In fact, it only seems to further the network’s perspective as a bulwark against the liberal “lamestream” media, of which no one, not even Comedy Central and *The Daily Show*, is spared. The difficulty in tracing a clear cause-and-effect relationship is perhaps why Griffin concludes that “it is not surprising to discover that modern empirical research has been unable to document that satire has any persuasive power.”⁴¹ Griffin is not the only person to make this

³⁸ Griffin, 160.

³⁹ Griffin, 38.

⁴⁰ Griffin, 39.

⁴¹ Griffin, 39.

observation. Writing in 1999, Peter Keighorn in *The Politics of Ridicule: Satire and Television*, notes that given the empirical evidence of the previous 35 years, “one struggles to find any real examples of comedy directly undermining politics or politicians.”⁴² Test would agree with these statements, yet remarks that “despite the lack of evidence to support the claim of reform, the justification and convention persist [...]”⁴³ The reason why this convention persists is the notion that satire works less overtly; the political consequences lie not with the object of attack, but with those who are on the sidelines witnessing the satire and irony. The political consequences are then played out in the public sphere, the effects diffused over time and space and among untraceable players. This effect is amplified with the development of a new medium for satire: satire TV.

While there is certainly some truth regarding the scant availability of empirical evidence documenting the corrective nature of satire, one wonders if the case is different when satire is transferred to a different medium other than written texts.⁴⁴ Does the visual element inherent in TV, as well as its pervasive influence in the average American home, enable satire to have more “political consequences,” in both overt and subtle ways, in society? This question will be more thoroughly explored in chapter two.

Gray, Jones and Thompson note that satirical television has risen in prominence and popularity in the post-network era,⁴⁵ giving rise to a new genre: satire TV. They argue that satire TV plays a role in nurturing civic culture because it not only offers “meaningful political critique” but also “encourages viewers to play with politics, to examine it, test it, question it, rather than simply

⁴² Peter Keighorn, “The Politics of Ridicule: Satire and Television,” in *Dissident Voices: The Politics of Television and Cultural Change*, Ed Mike Wayne, (London: Pluto Press, 1999), 137.

⁴³ Test, 11.

⁴⁴ Griffin, 158.

⁴⁵ The post-network era, as defined by Gray, Jones and Thompson, refers to the rise of competitive cable news channels and their need to fill their 24/7 programming schedules. “Cable improved the atmosphere for TV satire [...] by expanding the channel spectrum” which made “more room on television for virtually everything.” (xi).

consume it as information or 'truth' from authoritative sources."⁴⁶ Jones and Baym argue that *The Daily Show* "provides audiences with meaningful resources for citizenship and civic engagement."⁴⁷ This would imply that although the cause and effect relationship is considerably diluted and the consequences are subtle and diffused, there are nevertheless political consequences to the show's satire. Though speaking of the power of satire in written texts, Griffin notes this as well, writing that "There is reason to believe that ideas have power, and in the long run they can move mountains and topple tyrannies" and that the "satirist who writes for truth and honesty may lose some battles yet will ultimately win the war."⁴⁸ This is perhaps why Bill O'Reilly, Fox News host of *The O'Reilly Factor*, laments the immense influence of Stewart and TDS: "There is not one Democratic pundit in America that has as much influence, not one [with a wag of the finger]. No radio superstars, no TV superstars [shake of head]. So it is up to comedian Jon Stewart, who is a superstar, to define how the Left sees the political arena."⁴⁹ Given that O'Reilly is partial to hyperbole, it is tempting to laugh off his remark, but there are many reasons to believe that there is some truth to this statement. Yet, it may be that O'Reilly senses that Griffin is correct, that ideas do have power, and that when coupled with a large and growing TV audience, the political consequences of Stewart's satire are so far both unknown and unrealized.

Jon Stewart dismisses the idea that his show's satire performs any kind of corrective function in society. In an interview with *Rolling Stone* magazine in September 2011, Stewart said, "Everyone overestimates the power of satire." He went on to relate an anecdotal story told to him by a man named Peter Cook: "Somebody said to him that the most powerful satirists in

⁴⁶ Gray, Jones and Thompson, *Satire TV*, 11

⁴⁷ Jones and Baym, "Dialogue," 279.

⁴⁸ Griffin, *Satire*, 158-159.

⁴⁹ The O'Reilly Factor, "Impact Segment," The O'Reilly Factor video, 4:22, February 17, 2012, <http://www.mediaite.com/tv/bill-oreilly-breaks-down-jon-stewarts-takes-on-obama-and-romney/>

history were the cabaret artists in Berlin during the 1930s. And Peter Cook replied (sarcastically), ‘Yeah, they really showed Hitler, didn’t they?’⁵⁰ In other words, satire is overrated in terms of its corrective power. Satire is meant to correct an ailment in society, but “if making fun of something turns outrage into entertainment, you wind up having the opposite effect of what you intended.”⁵¹ What space, if any, is there for moral seriousness and truth-telling when the satirist’s goal is to make people laugh? When looking at how the political discourse has only become progressively more vitriolic over time, Stewart remarks that this only goes to prove how “incredibly impotent we are. To get in the game you would have to run your own news network. You would have to do things right that you think are wrong, rather than just sit back and make fun of them.” Rather than attempting to correct the vice and follies in society, Stewart insists that the agenda for his show is simply to entertain, “to make people laugh.”⁵² Griffin also points out that a review of the “major English satirists from Butler to Swift” confirm the belief that satirists are mainly interested in writing good satire in response to a particular occasion, rather than championing lofty political principles; making people laugh is the first priority, but this can be viewed as a disguise for the serious nature of the satire.

In an April 2007 interview with Bill Moyers, Stewart remarks that his show “functions like an editorial cartoon” and is made up of “a group of people that really feel that they want to write jokes about the absurdity that we see in government and the world and all that, and that’s it.”⁵³

Stewart’s remark point to a paradox: he describes his work as satirical, yet consistently denies that his satire fulfills one of the genres basic, traditional functions. Perhaps Stewart is aware of one of the ironies of his show: because his satire attacks everybody, it paradoxically touches

⁵⁰ Eric Bates, “America’s Leading Satirist on Obama, fart jokes and how his show is like Fox News,” *Rolling Stone*. September 29, 2011, Issue 1140, 44-52

⁵¹ Bates.

⁵² Baym, “Discursive,” 260.

⁵³ The Bill Moyers Journal, “Jon Stewart,” The Bill Moyers Journal video, 26.09, April 27, 2007. <http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/04272007/watch.html>.

nobody and thereby remains mere entertainment: its power is undermined and rendered harmless and impotent. Or perhaps he concedes a different sort of irony inherent in most satire: it cannot be pure entertainment because it contains too many indications of its serious import; yet on the other hand, it cannot be seriously moralistic or serve a didactic function, as its reliance on comedy precludes any kind of systematic teaching.⁵⁴ In a final irony, Stewart may agree with many of his critics who assert that he cannot simultaneously be a comedian and a pedagogue, though clearly he would disagree with their final assessment that his primary motivation is to promote an ideological agenda (Stewart is steadfast in asserting the show's primary focus is to entertain). Or perhaps Stewart unknowingly agrees with Test, that though satire has the potential to reform, "such a change, if it occurs at all, doesn't last long and satirists are sometimes forced to back away from remedial claims of their art."⁵⁵ This raises the question: Is a corrective really a corrective if it only lasts for a short time?

The increase in scholarly interest in *The Daily Show*, on the other hand, would indicate that the show has a more prominent role in public discourse than its self-proclaimed goal. A growing body of scholarly literature and research examines the effects of 'soft news' television programs, and much of it suggests that, under certain conditions, the influence of such shows can have an impact on public opinion, public attention to politics, public knowledge about politics and even political participation.⁵⁶ "[...] Soft news may not only provide incidental political sophistication, but also may directly lead to political learning and political efficacy."⁵⁷

⁵⁴Ralph Rosen, "Efficacy and Meaning and Ancient and Modern Political Satire: Aristophanes, Lenny Bruce, and Jon Stewart," *Social Research*, 79, nr 1 (2012), 4.

⁵⁵ Test, 10

⁵⁶Some of the researchers who have studied the influence of soft news on the public include, for example, Baumgartner and Morris, 2006; Cao and Brewer, 2008; Moy, Xenos and Hess, 2006; and Young, 2006.

⁵⁷ Teten, 68.

So far, several aspects of the corrective function of satire have been explored in this section. The first aspect is that satire is widely seen as having a higher purpose than mere entertainment: that, indeed, it has the power to reform or rectify a situation. Satire is a hopeful genre: it suggests progress and the betterment of society. This conventional belief persists despite the lack of empirical evidence to support it. The question was raised that perhaps what constitutes empirical evidence has been too narrowly defined in the past: there may indeed be a lack of evidence to support a clear cause-and-effect relationship between satire and the object of its attack, but there are political consequences nonetheless. These consequences reside among those who are on the sidelines, the readers and viewers. It was further suggested that these political consequences have been amplified in the post-network era due to the rise of satire TV. Another aspect of the corrective function is that if it occurs, it is short-lived, and therefore its potential benefits to society are nulled. A third aspect is that is that satire is largely historically and materially contingent: Stewart's satire reflects the need for expression among many Americans who are disillusioned with the current political environment. The corrective function arises from a need for expression, providing fertile ground for more public engagement. The analysis section in chapter two will more fully explore the evidence for concrete and tangible political consequences. The power of satire to stimulate a corrective will first be analyzed by looking at specific examples and episodes from TDS, and then by exploring the show's more subtle effects on America's traditionally least politically-active demographic, the 18-30 year olds. I will now examine how satire combines rhetoric of inquiry and provocation as well as the notions of "display and play" to achieve its effect, moving from theory to examples from TDS.

2.2 INQUIRY, PROVOCATION, DISPLAY AND PLAY: HOW SATIRE WORKS

Griffin's basic theoretical framework regarding satire is that it encompasses the rhetoric of inquiry, provocation, display and play. Satire is "problematic, open-ended, essayistic, ambiguous in its relationship to history, uncertain in its political effect, resistant to formal closure, more inclined to ask questions than provide answers and ambivalent about the pleasures it offers."⁵⁸ These elements of satire are similar to those outlined by George Test. Test notes that satire contains four basic elements, and this includes "attack or aggression, laughter or humor, play and judgment."⁵⁹ Griffin's framework is useful in thinking about how satire achieves its effect on Stewart's show.

In terms of rhetoric of inquiry, Griffin argues that satire is open-ended, and dialogue is its characteristic form. As a discourse of inquiry, satire poses a "challenge that seeks through the asking of unanswered questions to clarify the morality of a situation."⁶⁰ By contrast, a monologic work "pretends to possess a ready-made truth", and a dialogical one involves "searching for the truth" in the process of "dialogic interaction"⁶¹ where multiple voices are played against each other. This is the fundamental difference between the objective, "fair and balanced" news media and a political comedy show as Stewart's. Typical "hard news" presents the news of the world without any subjective interaction on the part of the newscaster. As a comedian acting the part of a newscaster, Stewart is not bound to journalistic conventions of objectivity. He is free to engage subjectively with the news footage the show presents. This often takes the form of Stewart presenting a clip, and then pausing it frequently while the camera turns to a quizzical, critical or incredulous Stewart. This double-view of news plus reaction to the news is an important element in understanding how and why Stewart's version of

⁵⁸ Griffin, 5.

⁵⁹ Test, x.

⁶⁰ Baym, "Discursive," 267.

⁶¹ Griffin, 42.

rhetoric of inquiry is so effective: it implies a normative ethos and gives important cues to the viewer regarding attitude and perspective.

A typical example of this dialogic interaction is drawn from the show's coverage of the scandal in 2004 of Iraqi prisoners. Stewart introduces the May 6th segment with a statement that sets up the satirical bite: [the revelation of torture] is "difficult for all of us to wrap our heads around. Clearly this is a time for our defense secretary to speak clearly and honestly to the American people about these egregious instances of torture."

[Donald Rumsfeld]: Uh, I think that....uh [scratches his head]... I'm not a lawyer, my impression is that what has been charged thus far is abuse, which I believe, technically, is different from torture [audience groans], and therefore I'm not gonna address the torture word.

The clip ends and the camera focuses on Stewart.

[Stewart]: I'm also not a lawyer, so I don't know, technically, if you're human, but as a fake news person, I can tell you, what we've been reading about in the newspapers, the pictures we've been seeing... it's f***ing torture.⁶²

Conventions of news would not permit subjective comment here, but since Stewart is not bound by these, he can respond with his personal perspective ("I can tell you"). By mimicking his language and speech pattern, Stewart demonstrates how Rumsfeld's response is ridiculously inadequate. Rumsfeld based his defense on the semantics of torture, which Stewart exposes to be disingenuous at best. Stewart's ironic response reveals that some concepts, such as whether an act constitutes torture or if someone is human, are so clear and obvious that a defense based on semantics is insulting to the public, showing that he both fails to fully appreciate the gravity of the situation or to take responsibility for it. Stewart's comments

⁶² The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, "Giant Mess O'Potamia—Abu Ghraib," The Daily Show with Jon Stewart video 4:43, May 6, 2004.

juxtaposed with the chosen clip serves as a lesson to his viewers on how to question received information, a lesson in critical thinking that is conducted in a playful and humorous way.

Juxtaposition is a common technique found in the rhetoric of inquiry because it pits the pretensions of politicians against the common sense of the average citizen.⁶³ The result is that Stewart's viewers report an increase in their internal political efficacy, the belief in one's own competence to understand and participate effectively in politics.⁶⁴ Researchers Cao and Brewer (2008) attribute this finding to the way *The Daily Show* implicitly validates viewer's faith in their ability to understand politics when they "get" the show's jokes.⁶⁵ The satire becomes effective when the audience recognizes the irony that is at the heart of the humor. If the irony is missed, so too is the effective social critique of the satire. What Jon Stewart does so well for many of his viewers is to make the irony clear and easy to understand. By cutting through rhetorical obfuscations, Stewart confirms the common intuition that when comparing official announcements with our own common sense, what the public is expected to swallow is incredible. One fan of the show, a 78-year-old woman says, "He can really see through things and some of the shams that we're being fed. And I'm tired of the shams. I want a little truth to come out. I want somebody to see some of the things I see and Jon does that for me."⁶⁶ Such comments are evidence of the intangible consequences of the show.

If rhetoric of inquiry is positive, seen as exploration to discover the truth, then the rhetoric of provocation is negative, a blistering critique, designed to expose foolishness, to taunt and provoke. Provocation works by exposing a paradox—statements or situations which are

⁶³ Baym, "Discursive", 266.

⁶⁴ Xiaoxia Cao and Paul Brewer, "Political Comedy Shows and Public Participation in Politics," *International Journal of Public Opinion*, 20, nr.1 (2008), 91.

⁶⁵ Cao and Brewer, 91.

⁶⁶ Kevin Thompson, "Faking News Alert! Faking News Alert! On the Set of Jon Stewart's 'Daily Show'," *Palm Beach Post*, October 29, 2004.

revealed to be untrue, or lacking in logic or reason. This carries with it the notion of a challenge to orthodoxy, or received opinion. Griffin notes that some of the best known satire in English literature makes use of paradox, and certainly Stewart routinely employs paradox to awaken and provoke his viewers to the hypocrisies and absurdities of the politicians and the news media. For example, he achieves this by contrasting a politician's recent statement with those made in the past, ridiculing him/her for obvious contradictions. This provokes and unsettles the viewer as it forces him/her to not accept the received wisdom of supposedly trustworthy sources. Stewart's critics, or even Stewart himself, may be prone to dismiss himself as "only a comedian" but it is not easy to dismiss the truth that lies at the heart of the jokes.

Another important aspect of satire, apart from inquiry and provocation, is the notion of display and play. "From its earliest days satire was associated with public performance,"⁶⁷ designed to delight its audience with its wit. In this sense, Stewart is merely following in the great tradition of entertaining and witty satirists. Part of the show's appeal for Stewart's audience is undoubtedly that it is funny. One way Stewart achieves humor is to intersperse everyday vernacular, words like "douchebag" and "dumbass" as well as common swear words, into serious discussions on the issues of the day. The incongruous effect of these words invariably draws a laugh from the in-studio audience. The use of colloquial expressions also has the effect of making the news more real and sincere as it attempts to mimic the voice of the audience. This vernacular-based communication reflects how young people communicate with each other, and therefore seems more reliable and trustworthy because it lacks pretensions. This type of speech stands in contrast to what is seen on "hard" news stations.

⁶⁷ Griffin, 71.

Typical political discourse, as seen on nightly news and cable network channels, is far from being funny. Some scholars have made the argument that this type of speech entails a kind of “discursive hegemony”, where participation in the public sphere necessitates conformity to this particular style of speech.⁶⁸ Rational political discourse, which is central to the democratic process, is, and has traditionally been, serious and academic. Mikhail Bakhtin would argue that this tradition extends from medieval times. Referring to the “icy petrified seriousness” of medieval ideology, Bakhtin writes that this tone was “supposedly the only tone fit to express the true, the good and all that was essential and meaningful.”⁶⁹ This opinion still prevails regarding political discourse and it is therefore tempting for critics to dismiss the potential political consequences of TDS because of lack of a serious tone, which includes the element of humor as well.

However, Jones and Baym contend that the laughter on TDS is “the central ingredient”⁷⁰ that makes these shows a formidable antidote to the divisive political talk that infects American society. Bakhtin makes a more forceful argument by stating “laughter presents an element of victory, not only over supernatural awe, over the sacred, over death; it also means the defeat of power, of earthly kings, of the earthly upper class, of all that oppresses and restricts.”⁷¹ Humor and laughter are far from being unserious, and the ridicule of social norms through humor is necessary in rebalancing the power relationship between the audience and the laughed-at-object. “Laughter has a deep philosophical meaning, it is one of the essential forms

⁶⁸ Jones and Baym, “Dialogue”, 283.

⁶⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*. Trans. Helene Iswolsky, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 72.

⁷⁰ Jones and Baym, “Dialogue,” 282.

⁷¹ Bakhtin, 92.

of truth [...] the world is seen anew, no less (perhaps more) than when seen from a serious standpoint [...] certain aspects of the world are accessible only to laughter.”⁷²

Humor is a tool for the public to reflect on and criticize prevailing systems of power. It breaks down entrenched power structures in society thereby allowing citizens to feel more empowered to engage in politics. Satire utilizes humor and laughter to deal with important issues, thereby making those issues more approachable and manageable. Studies of humor reveal its positive effects in helping to relieve tension and to help people cope with stress and adversity. Detractors from this perspective do not see the value of laughter and humor, arguing that the only outcome of satirical TV is a greater sense of cynicism among the population.⁷³

The importance of laughter and humor in the cognitive process was the subject of a master’s thesis submitted in 2009 at Georgetown University. The conclusion was that the power of a joke contributes to the effectiveness of comedy as a vehicle of the dissemination and retention of information.⁷⁴ Humor and comedy is a highly subjective matter; what is funny to one person is most certainly different from another person. Yet the determination of what is funny involves an extra cognitive step in comparison to the standard method of information delivery found on the nightly news. In other words, when we receive humor, we have to absorb the information, process its meaning and evaluate its message to determine if it is funny, playful or serious. The extra step involved in analyzing the comedic value of a message helps the brain retain information, which is a cognition-based explanation as to why viewers of *The Daily Show* are

⁷² Bakhtin, 66.

⁷³ Roderick P.Hart and Johanna Hartelius, “The Political Sins of Jon Stewart,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 24, nr. 3 (2007), 263.

⁷⁴ David Jacobs Garr, “The Duty of Comedy is to Amuse Men by Correcting Them: Analyzing the Value and Effectiveness of Using Comedy as an Information Tool” (Master’s thesis, Faculty of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of Georgetown University, 2009), 21.

more informed and politically aware than “almost any other news-watching or non-news watching group in America.”⁷⁵

Additionally, humor is known to produce positive physiological, altering the biochemistry in a person’s brain. Research into the effects of humor on the brain reveal that people who are in a heightened state of positive emotions demonstrate greater cognitive flexibility, greater ability for problem solving, more efficient and organization of memory, more effective thinking and planning and greater levels of social responsibility.⁷⁶ All of these effects of humor on the cognitive process is positive news in support of the efficacy of satire TV and its role in informing and engaging the electorate. This is especially true for the demographic that is Comedy Central’s target audience: males between the ages of 18-34. Comedy Central’s audience skews “65 percent male” and in a recent report, Nielsen Entertainment Television found that for this particular demographic, humor is the most important element in self-identity.⁷⁷

To summarize this section on how satire works, Griffin’s basic framework of satire as rhetoric of inquiry, provocation, display and play was employed. Stewart uses all four elements in his satire on TDS. Stewart uses juxtaposition in his rhetoric of inquiry, which has the effect of questioning received information from politicians and other news outlets. This is often quickly paired with rhetoric of provocation through the use of paradox, which has the effect of provoking and unsettling his viewers rather than to merely making them laugh. Equally important in satire are the notions of display and play: satire has a long tradition as a performative art, and is meant ultimately to delight and please the audience through its wit and humor. This framework

⁷⁵ Teten, 74.

⁷⁶ Rod A. Martin, *The Psychology of Humor: An Integrative Approach*, (Burlington, MA: Elsevier Press, 2007), 3.

⁷⁷ Bill Carter, “In the Tastes of Young Men, Humor is Most Prized, a Survey Finds,” *New York Times*, February 19, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/20/business/media/comedy-central-survey-says-young-men-see-humor-as-essential.html?_r=0

enables a more thorough analysis of how and why Stewart's satire has social and political consequences, and why it is entertaining to so many viewers in the United States.

3. CHAPTER TWO: EPISODE ANALYSIS

As mentioned before, there are three primary segments to the show—the satirical daily news monologue where Stewart typically uses redaction (selective editing of publically available news footage) to present an ironic and humorous reaction to the main news events. The middle segment consists very often of a parody of contemporary news, often incorporating a fabricated interview or report from one of the show's "Senior News Correspondents," either in-studio or out in the field. These segments offer a measure of insight into topical political issues, but "their deeper thrust is subversion, an attack on the conventions and pretensions of television news"⁷⁸ itself. The "reporters" swap lofty-sounding titles such as "Senior Black Correspondent" or "Senior Election Correspondent," a practice which casts doubt on their claims to expertise and suggesting that in the news world, expertise is often conferred rather than earned.

The third element is the studio interviews. The show courts high-profile politicians, political insiders, businessmen, journalists, actors and actresses, musicians and authors on a regular basis—current and former heads of state, both domestic and foreign, including Barack Obama, down to pop culture stars such as Justin Beiber. Stewart generally presents himself as an amicable and congenial host with extensive knowledge and sharp wit. He engages these guests in an intelligent exchange about ideas that is absent in the cable-news world of punditry and predictable partisan talking points. The satirical edge is typically toned down in this portion of

⁷⁸ Baym, "Discursive," 269.

the show, and sometimes Stewart leaves out humorous jokes when the subject matter is especially serious.

In *Entertaining Politics: Satiric Television and Political Engagement*, Jeffrey Jones argues that through the use of redaction, Stewart “holds the powerful accountable by exposing their lies, demonstrating their propaganda techniques, and challenging their rhetoric.”⁷⁹ An alternative to the mainstream news is created through this use of redaction, and this is where, according to Jones, Stewart changes the public conversation from one of “accommodation and spectacle to confrontation and accountability.”⁸⁰ One way in which redaction is used to create satirical social commentary is through juxtaposition of different clips—for example, juxtaposing two clips to reveal hypocritical statements or stances. In other words, in using their own words against them, as assembled through edited video, Stewart attempts to hold the powerful accountable and to raise critical awareness among his viewers. This speaks to the corrective function of satire, though the effects are largely subtle and diffused. However, on occasion, the object under attack appears to change their opinion as a result of Stewart’s satirical attacks, illustrating how the show does play a role in changing the political discourse. Such an occasion is rare, but occurred in 2009 during the “Stewart-Cramer Showdown.”

3.1 STEWART VS. CNBC

Early on in the Obama administration, in March 2009, President Obama proposed that a small portion of the bailout funds go towards troubled mortgage holders (not just failed banks and auto companies), which prompted an on-air tirade by CNBC’s Rick Santelli. Santelli blamed “loser” homeowners who were stupid enough to accept money that was offered to them from

⁷⁹ Jones, *Entertaining Politics*, 114.

⁸⁰ Jones, *Entertaining Politics*, 117.

the bank, of buying more house than they could afford, and that hard-working Americans should not pick up the tab for these “losers”. Stewart was enraged that homeowners should be blamed for stupidity, while sparing Wall Street executives of any responsibility or accountability. Stewart prepared an eight-and-a-half minute segment that featured in the news segment of the show, and he also scheduled Santelli for an interview.

The segment begins with a brief introduction to the topic by Stewart and then quickly cuts to the CNBC clip of Santelli on the floor of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, proposing a public referendum on Obama’s proposal. With deep moral indignation, Santelli exclaims, “This is America. How many of you people [he turns to the traders who are working on the floor of the Exchange] want to pay for your neighbor’s mortgage that has an extra bathroom and can’t pay their bills? Raise your hand.” Boos and jeers follow and Santelli turns back to the camera, “President Obama, are you listening?”

The segment then cuts back to Stewart who parodies Santelli’s moral indignation. “Ya, man, Wall Street is mad as hell and they are not going to take it anymore. Unless by “it” you mean 2 trillion dollars in their own bail out money. That they will take.”⁸¹ Stewart then reveals that up until the previous Friday, Santelli was scheduled to come on The Daily Show but “bailed out” at the last minute. Mocking Santelli’s earlier performance, Stewart then turns to his audience full of mock indignation, adopts his angry/outraged voice and says, arms lifted in the air, “Hey, how many people would like to have seen Santelli come on this program?” The audience begins clapping and cheering, and then Stewart turns back to the camera, shaking his pen, says, “Santelli, are you listening?” The audience responds with whistles, claps and laughter, enjoying the parody, appreciating Stewart’s mockery and ridicule. Stewart turns inward, faking the

⁸¹ The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, “CNBC Financial Advice,” The Daily Show with Jon Stewart video, 8:29, 4 March 2009, <http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/wed-march-4-2009/cnbc-financial-advice>.

restraint of an imminent orgasm, and says, “I have to say, I find cheap populism oddly arousing.”

Stewart becomes serious again, and provides the lead-in to the next bit of the segment by explaining Santelli’s position, clearly setting-up the next series of hypocritical statements. “But see, Rick Santelli is angry that these loser homeowners are going to get bailed out. He believes in personal responsibility. He believes in not rewarding “the losers” for missing all the warning signs. I mean, for God’s sake, the guy works at CNBC. They’re best of the best. [Repeating the show’s tagline] ‘The only business network that has the information and experience that we need.’” The segment then cuts to an overview of CNBC’s advertising promo telling viewers that, “Knowledge is power and only one business network that has the information and experience you need.”

Stewart then adopts an angry and condescending voice, saying, “To all you dumbass homeowners out there who let your optimism and bad judgment blind you into accepting money that was offered to you from banks, educate yourself!” The clip then proceeds with an overview of the type of information and advice offered by CNBC through its various programs such as *Mad Money*, *Fast Money*, *Squawk on the Street*, and *Power Lunch*. These clips show how the network assured viewers that specific companies were fine and that their crises were manageable, only to be followed by black screen that indicates the final and opposite outcome: *Mad Money*, March 11, 2008, clip of host Jim Cramer saying, “Bear Sterns is fine [...] Bear Sterns is not in trouble”; [Black Screen] “Bear Sterns went under six days later.”⁸²

Power Lunch, June 5, 2008, clip of host saying that Lehman Brothers is no Bear Sterns, and that they can’t be compared; [Black screen] “Lehman Brothers went under three months later.”

⁸² The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, “CNBC Financial Advice.”

Squawk on the Street, April 17, 2008, clip of host saying, “Will Merrill need to raise capital? [...] No need to raise additional capital; [Black screen] “Five months later Merrill Lynch ran out of capital. It is now owned by Bank of America.”

October 7, 2007, Jim Cramer says, “Bank of America is the cheapest and the best [...] I think Bank of America is going to [trade] \$60 in a heartbeat; [Black screen] “As of today, Bank of trades under \$4.00.”

After another clip about AIG’s fiscal solvency and a black screen detailing the billions they received in federal bailout money, the clip reverts back to Stewart who says, “It’s not rocket science, homeowners. It is apparently alchemy [...] You just had to know how to listen.” The segment then turns to a series of clip featuring Jim Cramer and other hosts providing financial and investment advice (“Buy, buy, buy”, and “The worst of the sub-prime business is over”), interspersed with a black screen that features the date and the ever-shrinking Dow Jones Industrial Average that corresponds to the date of each broadcast. The clip then cuts to Stewart who remarks that if he had followed CNBC’s advice, he’d “have a million dollars today, provided [he] started with \$100 million.”

The segment then turns to a series of interviews conducted by CNBC hosts with various CEO’s at the heart of the financial breakdown. In each instance, the clips show how the network’s reporters do not question or challenge the assurances from the CEO’s regarding the financial situation of their respective companies. The reporters are shown asking such hard-hitting journalistic questions like “Is it fun to be a billionaire” to one of the interviewees. The entire segment is highly satirical, revealing the absurd reporting from a so-called serious network, and especially in the last series of clips with CEO’s, how the media is in collusion with business interests. Given the poor advice and information offered by the network, Stewart reasons that

it is unfair for the network's correspondents/financial experts to ridicule their viewers for believing and following their advice.

This scathing satirical segment prompted Jim Cramer, financial correspondent on CNBC and who was featured in many of the clips from *Mad Money*, to accept Stewart's invitation to appear as a guest on the show in order to explain and defend the broadcasts. The March 12th, 2009 showdown between Stewart and Cramer drew considerable media attention; this specific episode drew some 2.3 million viewers, more than the average *Daily Show* episode.⁸³ It was during the interview portion of the show where Stewart engaged Cramer in a discussion on the issues, completely without humor and satire. Stewart criticized CNBC analysts, including Cramer, of being "in bed" with the financial institutions, of not reporting the backroom deals they knew were happening, of not asking tough questions to CEOs and for taking their word at face value. During the face-off, Cramer appeared contrite and said, "Absolutely, there's shenanigans, and we should call them out. Everyone should. I should do a better job at it." In this interview, Stewart acts as "everyman's surrogate" by expressing the anger, frustration and helplessness that so many people felt. Towards the end of the interview, Cramer and Stewart agree that CNBC, and Cramer himself, will go back to reporting on the fundamentals of the markets, and Stewart can return to making "fart jokes and funny faces."⁸⁴

In this interview, Stewart is not satirical but extremely serious. He forces an apology and a promise of improved performance from Cramer and CNBC. This is as close to a corrective as it is realistic to achieve, and from that perspective, Stewart's satire can be seen as effective.

Whether or not Stewart's on-air humiliation of CNBC led to any permanent changes in how the

⁸³ *Press TV*, "Gibbs Enjoyed Stewart-Cramer Showdown," March 14, 2009. <http://edition.presstv.ir/detail/88587.html>.

⁸⁴ The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, "Jim Cramer Pt 3," The Daily Show with Jon Stewart video, 2:19, March 12, 2009. <http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/thu-march-12-2009/jim-cramer-pt--3>.

network reports and offers financial news and advice is hard to say. This speaks to one of the issues in determining if a corrective has been achieved, as discussed earlier. When a change is short-lived, does it really amount to a corrective? To determine if this exchange caused long-term and permanent changes, a more extensive analysis of CNBC and their financial reporting would need to be undertaken.

3.2 STEWART VS CNN'S CROSSFIRE

A permanent change occurred, however, after Jon Stewart's now famous appearance on CNN's political talk show *Crossfire* in 2004. Using his comedic approach to politics, Stewart lambasted the hosts, Tucker Carlson and Paul Begala, for not upholding their journalistic duty to inform and model civil political discourse, but instead engaging in divisive and disingenuous discussions. After being on the show for a few minutes, Stewart said, "I made a special effort to come on the show today, because I have privately mentioned this show [...] as being bad [...] it's not so much that it's bad, as it's hurting America."⁸⁵ Later in the discussion, Stewart makes his point, "The interesting thing I have is, you have a responsibility to the public discourse, and you fail miserably."⁸⁶ Shortly after this exchange, the then CNN president Jonathan Klein canceled the show, saying, "I agree wholeheartedly with Jon Stewart's overall premise."⁸⁷ In this exchange, Stewart is at all times serious and intent on having a reasoned discussion—he is not the satirical comedian, much to the disappointment of the hosts, "I thought you were going to be funny. Come on, be funny!"⁸⁸ The fact that there was a real effect to Stewart's nonironic critique suggests that there is a limit to the effectiveness of satire when it embraces the

⁸⁵ CNN Crossfire Transcripts, "Jon Stewart's America," October 15, 2004.

<http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0410/15/cf.01.html>

⁸⁶ CNN Crossfire Transcripts, 2004.

⁸⁷ Bill Carter, "CNN Will Cancel Crossfire and Cut Ties to Commentator," *New York Times*, January 6, 2005,

<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/06/business/media/06crossfire.html>

⁸⁸ CNN Crossfire Transcripts, 2004.

comedic mode. However, it was his reputation as a satirist/comedian that got him an invitation to appear on the show and afforded him enough importance to be taken seriously. This instance demonstrates the far-reaching effects of Stewart's brand of satire, proving that it is possible for satire to have a long-term effect on society by changing it for the better.

Perhaps more important than eliciting an apology from Cramer, and even the cancelling of *Crossfire*, is that four nights a week Stewart's viewers gain knowledge about politics and receive a prime lesson in rhetorical criticism. The effect this will have on viewers, and how it will impact their future decisions, is a more complicated yet ultimately more fruitful analysis. Even though it is rewarding to see immediate and permanent results, the long term impact of changing attitudes and opinions of the general public is perhaps more productive in promoting greater participation in the democratic process. To rephrase Griffin, "ideas have power, and that in the long run they can move mountains and topple tyrannies."⁸⁹ The next analysis will look at just this: how TDS is "moving mountains and toppling tyrannies" by helping to increase the democratic participation of a traditionally inactive demographic, the 18-30 year olds.

3.3 STEWART VS YOUNG VIEWERS AND VOTERS

The effects of *The Daily Show* are far more wide-ranging than a singular episode or event. There is a growing body of empirical data, from private researchers to organizations, examining the impact of the show on its audience. The National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES) reported in September 2004, shortly after both the Republican and Democratic national presidential

⁸⁹ Griffin, 158.

conventions, that *The Daily Show* drew in more viewers in the 18-34 year old range than cable news channels such as Fox, MSNBC, CNBC and CNN.⁹⁰

The median age for the show, though, is slightly higher than this age range, and continues to attract older viewers; nevertheless, compared to other late night shows, and even the to *The O'Reilly Factor*, the median age for TDS viewers is younger. In May 2009, the median age of TDS viewers was 41.4 years. For the sake of comparison, the average age for both the *Late Night Show with David Letterman* and the *Tonight Show* (when Jay Leno was hosting) hover around 54/55 years of age in the same time period⁹¹ and for the *The O'Reilly Factor* is it around 63.⁹²

Between May 2010 and May 2011, *The Daily Show* grew by 19 per cent in total number of viewers, with double-digit ratings growth across all key demographics. This included people 18-49 (up +21 per cent), people 18-34 (+22 per cent), people 18-24 (+21 per cent), males 18-34 (+18 per cent) and males 18-24 (+21 per cent). *The Daily Show's* 1.34 million viewers ages 18-49 in May 2011 led all late night talk shows in that demographic. With a 2011 year-to-date average of 1.25 million viewers in that key age range, *The Daily Show* trails only *The Tonight Show* with Jay Leno (1.27 million) for that calendar year.⁹³ Despite the audience for *The Daily Show* growing larger and older with each passing year, these figures bear out the show's popularity, especially among young males. Statistics from Comedy Central report that their target audience

⁹⁰ National Annenberg Election Survey, "Daily Show Viewers Knowledgeable About Presidential Campaign," (Washington, DC: Annenberg Policy Center), September 21, 2004.

⁹¹ Dorothy Pomerantz, "The Graying of Comedy Central," *Forbes*, June 12, 2009,

<http://www.forbes.com/2009/06/12/stewart-colbert-television-ratings-business-media-stewart.html>

⁹² PRNewswire, "Bill O'Reilly Calls Viewers of 'The Daily Show With Jon Stewart' A Bunch of 'Stoned Slackers' and 'Dopey Kids' During Interview With Jon Stewart on 'The O'Reilly Factor,'" September 30, 2004,

<http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/bill-oreilly-calls-viewers-of-the-daily-show-with-jon-stewart-a-bunch-of-stoned-slackers-and-dopey-kids-during-interview-with-jon-stewart-on-the-oreilly-factor-74012397.html>.

⁹³ Mail Online, "The Force that is Jon Stewart: Daily Show's Ratings Now Higher Than Most of Fox News," *The Daily Mail*, June 6, 2011, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1394561/The-force-Jon-Stewart-Daily-Shows-ratings-higher-FOX-News.html>

for their shows, TDS included, is the 18-34 demographic, and that their audience skews 65% male, where the median age is 29.⁹⁴

Increase in Daily Show Viewers between May 2010 and May 2011		
	People	Males
18-49	+21	n/a
18-34	+22	+18
18-24	+21	+21

Another interesting observation is that, according to a study by the Pew Research Center, in the 2004, 2006 and 2008 general elections, young voters have consistently increased in voter participation. Compared to overall voter turnout, approximately 22 million Americans under the age of 30 voted in the 2008 election. This was two million more voters than in the 2004 presidential election, an increase in two percentage points.⁹⁵ Compared to 2000, there was an increase of 11 percentage points.⁹⁶ Although more young people are becoming politically active, the distribution is skewed to the Democratic Party. In the 2008 election, young people gave the Democratic Party a majority of their votes. “This pattern of votes, along with other evidence about the political leanings of young voters, suggests that a significant generational shift in political allegiance is occurring.”⁹⁷

Significantly, among the 18-29 year olds, a 19 point gap separates those with Democratic affiliation (45%) and Republican affiliation (26%). The disparity in political identification became tangible in the 2008 election: 66% of those under the age of 30 voted for Barack Obama, while John McCain received 31%. This made “the disparity between young voters and other age

⁹⁴ Bill Carter, “Young Men.”
⁹⁵ The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, “The Youth Vote in 2008,” August 1, 2009, http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/FS_youth_Voting_2008_updated_6.22.pdf.
⁹⁶ Ibid.
⁹⁷ Pew Research Center, “Young Voters in the 2008 Election.” November 12, 2008, <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1031/young-voters-in-the-2008-election>.

groups larger than in any presidential election since exit polling began in 1972.”⁹⁸ “Older” voters, those over 30 years old, were divided roughly evenly between the two candidates.⁹⁹

The impact of greater political participation among young people was evident beyond the voting booths. Young people also many enthusiastic campaign volunteers, and “far more young people than older people reported attending a campaign even while nearly one-in-ten donated money to a presidential campaign.”¹⁰⁰ Though there are many reasons for this increased political participation (Obama’s expansive ‘Get out the Vote’ campaign targeted at young voters, greater ethnic and racial diversity among this demographic), it is worthwhile to examine what motivates young people to get involved in politics, and exposure to political comedy shows is a tenable hypothesis.

The same young people that watch *The Daily Show* rely less on mainstream political news sources such as network news, newspapers and magazines.¹⁰¹ This is perhaps worrying for some as “prior research suggests that exposure to traditional news sources (e.g. newspapers and network news) may be related to political participation.”¹⁰² It appears that younger Americans (age range 18-29) tend to get at least some of their news from late night comedy shows (54%) compared to Americans over the age of 45 (15%).¹⁰³ The assumption that political comedy is detrimental to the democratic ideal of an informed electorate is misleading, according to a study done by Xenos and Becker.¹⁰⁴ They found that exposure to political comedy facilitates subsequent learning from hard news. This corresponds to a study done by

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Pew Research Center, “Online News Audiences larger, more diverse.” June 4, 2004. <http://www.people-press.org/files/legacy-pdf/215.pdf>

¹⁰² Cao and Brewer, 92

¹⁰³ Baumgartner, Jody and Jonathan S Morris, “The Daily Show Effect: Candidate Evaluations, Efficacy and American Youth,” *American Politics Research*. 34, nr. 3 (2006), 344.

¹⁰⁴ Michael Xenos and Amy Becker, “Moments of Zen: Effects of the Daily Show on Information Seeking and Political Learning,” *Political Communication*, 26, nr.3 (2009).

Young and Tisinger that found Daily Show viewers tune into the show not as a complete replacement to hard news, but more as a supplement. Indeed, it has been found that prior knowledge and awareness of topical issues is necessary in order to understand and appreciate the jokes on TDS, an argument made by several academics and underscored in a study done by the Project for Excellence in Journalism, “Journalism, Satire or just Laughs?” in 2008.¹⁰⁵

These studies may explain why reports have shown that viewers of *The Daily Show* viewers have “higher campaign knowledge than national news viewers and newspaper readers” even when various factors such as education, age, and party affiliation are taken into consideration.¹⁰⁶ Although greater knowledge does not automatically translate into greater political participation, it is not insignificant in itself: fundamental to a functioning democracy is an informed electorate.

Cao and Brewer argue in their research that there is a positive association between exposure to political comedy shows and greater political participation in at least two arenas: attending a campaign event and joining an organization.¹⁰⁷ These results were not as significant and positive as a study done by Moy et al which found evidence of positive relationships between exposure to late-night talk shows and evaluation of presidential candidates. The appearance of presidential candidates positively correlates to a more positive evaluation of that candidate, especially for the lesser-known candidate.¹⁰⁸ They concluded their study stressing the need for more research on the effects of soft news on younger voters, given the disproportionate degree in which such media is consumed by this segment of the population. Despite reporting less significant correlations, Cao and Brewer conclude by dismissing the widely held criticism that

¹⁰⁵ Pew Research Center, “Journalism, Satire of Just Laughs?”

¹⁰⁶ National Annenberg Election Survey, 1.

¹⁰⁷ Cao and Brewer, 96.

¹⁰⁸ Patricia Moy, Michael A Xenoz, and Verena K Hess, “The Priming Effects of Late-Night Comedy,” *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 12, nr.2 (2005).

political comedy shows discourage political participation because exposure to such shows foster internal efficacy, induce concern and created shared experiences among viewers as well as making politics more enjoyable.

Similarly, findings by Baumgartner and Morris reveal that exposure to *The Daily Show* increased the confidence of viewers in their own ability to understand political issues. “Frequent viewers of *The Daily Show* registered higher levels of internal efficacy.”¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, internal political efficacy can stimulate political participation in both conventional and unconventional aspects, according to various studies as cited by Cao and Brewer.¹¹⁰ These studies would seem to contradict the conclusion drawn by Baumgartner and Morris that despite reporting increased internal efficacy, viewers of the TDS are more prone to take a negative view of the political system which in turn undermines political participation. It should be noted, however, that this conclusion was reached even though the experiment did not directly examine the effect of exposure to the show on participation. Other studies have concluded that negative information does not discourage participation, but rather motivates viewers by triggering anxiety about the political situation and future outcomes.¹¹¹ Finally, Cao and Brewer note that exposure to political comedy shows fosters political participation by creating an imagined community among the viewers. They cite Mutz in noting that the use of mass media “can induce perceptions of collective experience or collective opinion”¹¹² and that such shared experiences can lead to collective action among the public.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹Baumgartner and Morris, 359.

¹¹⁰ Cao and Brewer cite a study done by Finkel and Muller (1998), Shingles (1981) and Pollock (1983) to support the contention that internal political efficacy fosters greater participation in political activities.

¹¹¹ Cao and Brewer again cite studies by Martin, 2004 and Ansolabehere, Iyengar, Simon and Valentino, 1994 on page 91 of their own study.

¹¹² Diana C Mutz, *Impersonal Influence: How Perceptions of Mass Collectives Affect Political Attitudes*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 22.

¹¹³ Cao and Brewer, 91.

More young people are engaged with public affairs, though as Jones and Baym note, it is not through the “language and media of their parents.”¹¹⁴ “Indeed, Baby Boomers were a generation whose language was idealism, often to the point of naivete.” Satire and irony, on the other hand, has become the “language through which young people are able to play both defense and offense, to attack the political world [...] in a way that disguises their [...] desire for truth.”¹¹⁵ Chanon Cook, the top Research Executive for Comedy Central, believes that for their target demographic, the so-called Millennials, “irony has replaced absurdity,” underscoring the research that ironic humor is key to reaching this group.¹¹⁶

Katherine Miller, who wrote *Communication Theories: Perspectives, Processes and Contexts*, discusses how media viewing habits may later contribute to potential behavioral effects.¹¹⁷ She notes that according to the communications theory of uses and gratifications, audiences choose their media sources based on the notions of selectivity, attention and involvement, and TDS and its satirical humor satisfies three key needs for this particular demographic. In regards to selectivity, individuals choose to watch a program because they are looking to fulfill a specific gratification such as the need for entertainment or to seek information.¹¹⁸ They pay closer attention to the program because of their desire to fulfill this need, and finally, they become more involved as they develop “self-perceived personal relationships or connections with the characters or individuals they see.”¹¹⁹ This research underscores the importance of humor to the 18-30 demographic because it explains the gratifications or enjoyment that they receive

¹¹⁴ Jones and Baym, “Dialogue”, 288.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Carter, “Humor”.

¹¹⁷ Katherine Miller, *Communication Theories: Perspectives, Processes and Contexts*, (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2005, 2nd ed), 259.

¹¹⁸ Junghee Kim and Alan Rubin

¹¹⁹ Garr, 23.

from the show, which in turn explains why this group seeks out comedy programs as a source of political news and information.

Similarly, researchers Arvind Diddi and Robert LaRose found that college students gravitate towards news sources that satisfy basic needs such as the need for information, entertainment, social interaction and escapism.¹²⁰ They found that even with the presence of multiple news sources, America's youth are turning to comedy show as a source of information and entertainment. They further explain that if consumers find that news can be obtained from non-traditional media sources, like *The Daily Show*, they will fall into a habit of repeatedly utilizing those sources as they age. For example, mass communication from the internet is one of the most habit-forming activities among "news junkies." As a consequence, young viewers who learn to obtain news early on from internet sources are increasingly unlikely to turn to traditional news sources. The latest study from the Pew Research Center underscores this research: only about a third (34%) of those younger than 30 say they watched TV news the previous day; in 2006, nearly half of young people (49%) said they watched TV news the prior day. Among older age groups, the figures have not changed significantly over this period.¹²¹

Given the continual increase among young voters in the previous three elections, most notably in 2008 and their preference for the Democratic ticket, and that their preferred source of news information is political comedy shows, it is reasonable to conclude that Stewart's satire on TDS is generating impact on the political scene.

¹²⁰ Arvind Diddi and Robert LaRose, "Getting Hooked on News: Uses and Gratifications and the Formation of News Habits among College Students in and Internet Environment," *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*. 50, nr. 2 (2006).

¹²¹ Pew Research Center, "In Changing News Landscape, Even Television News is Vulnerable: Trends in News Consumption: 1991-2012," Washington, DC, September 27, 2012. <http://www.people-press.org/2012/09/27/in-changing-news-landscape-even-television-is-vulnerable/>.

CONCLUSION

To summarize, Jeffrey Jones argues that *The Daily Show* represents a new approach to public affairs that blends postmodernism and high-modernism—it is neo-modern. In one sense, the show is quintessentially postmodern in its style and form. It is marked by “border crossing hybridity”¹²² where the distinctions between traditionally separate categories, such as fact and opinion, public service and private profit, information and entertainment, are completely obscured. The aesthetics of the show rely on heavily constructed images of the news genre, and the parodying of this is part of the irony and humor of the show. In this regard, the satire on TDS is “degenerative”: the act of fiction-making on the part of politicians and news networks alike are exposed as disingenuous and absurd.

In other respects, Stewart’s satire is more traditional and “generative”. Underlying the post-modern form, argues Jones, is a modernist agenda: a firm belief in truth, accountability, the interrogation of political power, and reason in public discourse. In this sense, Stewart’s fake news comedy is “neo-modern”: it retains the traditional mission of journalism of informing the citizenry and holding the powerful accountable. Stewart rejects the postmodern belief that there is not a difference between reality and the appearances of reality. He clearly believes in finding truth and of seeing the world as it is, and attempts to expose false constructions of reality. In his political interviews, he seeks to build unity and to find common ground through dialogue. The satire of TDS is thus generative as its main purpose is to “construct consensus”¹²³ in the “hopes of a return to order and grace.”¹²⁴

¹²² Jones and Baym, “Dialogue”, 281.

¹²³ Weisenburger, 1.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 14.

What Jon Stewart does on his show that sets him apart from other late-night comedians as well as traditional network news is his deconstruction of the day's events. In each of his opening monologues, Stewart provides a lesson to his viewers in rhetorical criticism, using rhetoric of inquiry and provocation to stimulate viewers "to be skeptical of what passes for 'communication' in our current discursive landscape."¹²⁵ He does this by relying heavily on the tools of juxtaposition and paradox to expose hypocrisies and contradictions. In this way, Stewart continues in a long tradition of satirists as detailed by Griffin.

Included in Griffin's framework of satire are the notions of display and play, the idea that satire should be entertaining, witty and funny. Though these are the elements that first attract young viewers to TDS, Bakhtin stresses the deeper philosophical role of humor. Laughter is empowering; it is a means of public rebuke and serves to rebalance the power between the laughed-at-object and the audience. Jones writes, "As Bakhtin suggests, by comically playing with the political, one can gain a greater sense of ownership over it and, in turn, feel more empowered to engage it."¹²⁶ This explains why viewers of political comedy shows such as TDS report greater levels of internal political efficacy, the belief in one's own competence to understand and participate effectively in politics, which can in turn stimulate political participation in both conventional and unconventional aspects.

On a more practical level, studies have shown that young viewers, men in particular, find humor as being important to their self-identity. Researchers have also found that young viewers seek out shows that satisfy their needs for information, entertainment, social interaction and escapism. This type of research explains why young people seek out political comedy shows over traditional news networks as it focuses on the enjoyment that they receive

¹²⁵ Jones and Baym, "Dialogue", 287.

¹²⁶ Jones, "Satire TV", 11.

from such shows. Data from the 2012 Pew Research Center report underscores the continual shift of young viewers away from traditional news outlets, including TV news, towards other venues, most notably the internet (digital news) as well as alternative news sources such as *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*. “The Colbert Report and The Daily Show have the youngest audiences of the 24 news sources tested: 43% of Colbert’s regular audience is younger than 30, as is 39% of the Daily Show’s regular viewers. Just 23% of the public is 18-to-29.”¹²⁷ This demographic group plays a key role in supporting the emergence of a new type of television programming: satire TV. The show’s blending of hard and soft news, politics and comedy, information and entertainment, represents a new kind of powerful journalism that will no doubt continue in popularity.

In conclusion, the satire of TDS is a force for social change despite Stewart’s personal beliefs on this particular topic. This was first seen in the now famous showdown between Jim Cramer of CNBC and Stewart, where Cramer agreed to do a better job reporting financial news as a result of public humiliation through Stewart’s satire on TDS. In addition, the cancellation of CNN’s *Crossfire* program was at least partially a result of Stewart’s appearance on the show, as mentioned by the then President of CNN Jonathan Klein. Most importantly, however, the increasing weight of evidence from research on how and what viewers learn from political comedy shows, or soft news sources, argue convincingly for satire’s social force.

Stewart and *The Daily Show* help to “connect everyday culture to the public sphere—making important political matters immediate, relevant and engaging.”¹²⁸ In this way, politics becomes more interesting and accessible for the younger generation. Similar to Jones, Teten argues that *The Daily Show* represents a new form of news where “viewers learn and become engaged in

¹²⁷ Pew Research Center, “Changing TV Landscapes.”

¹²⁸ Teten, 80.

politics through satire.”¹²⁹ Cao and Brewer found that viewing late night comedy was positively correlated with two types of political engagement: attending a campaign event and joining an organization. This study seems to contradict popular notions that obtaining news and information through satirical shows only leads to greater disengagement from the political scene. Researchers Tisinger and Young found that young people who report learning from late night comedy are also significantly more likely to also report learning from other news programs.¹³⁰ This would indicate that the format in which the news is delivered on late-night comedy shows such as TDS, which is rooted in humor, parody, satire and irony, stimulates the political thought process of its viewers. In the long term, there are many indications that this can have tangible political consequences by helping to create an informed and active electorate, which will hopefully produce positive social change in American culture and society.

¹²⁹ Teten, 80.

¹³⁰ Young, Dannagal G. and Russell M. Tisinger. (2006). “Dispelling Late-Night Myths: News Consumption Among Late-Night Comedy Viewers and the Predictors of Exposure to Various Late Night Shows.” *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 11, no. 3:128.

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