

**CANDIDATES' USE OF HUMOR IN INTERVIEWS ACROSS TALK-SHOW
SUB GENRES IN THE 2016 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION**

by

Johanna M. Lukk

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Communication

Spring 2016

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to my advisor, family, and friends.

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ABSTRACT

The increased fragmentation of media outlets over the past several decades has made it difficult for political candidates to reach less politically-engaged citizens (Prior, 2007). With evolving journalistic norms that focus increasingly on the journalist and the medium over the substance of political campaigns, presidential candidates seek less filtered ways to communicate with voters (Clayman 2002; Hallin, 1992). Literature also points to the rise of personalization in political reporting, including less focus on parties and more demand for unscripted candidate talk and access to previously private aspects of politicians' lives. (Rahat & Sheafer 2007; Van Aelst, Sheaffer, & Stanyer, 2012). To address these changes and challenges, candidates have sought out unconventional methods of audience outreach, including appearances on entertainment-oriented talk shows (Parkin 2014). Importantly, the sub-genres of entertainment talk shows (daytime, late-night, and satire) vary both in goals and audience characteristics, and as a result, in both content and emphasis. Hence, we should expect the nature of these candidate interviews and candidates' strategic use of certain rhetorical devices to vary across these sub-genres as well.

In this project we explore candidates' use of humor, a rhetorical device that candidates use to increase their favorability and appear more personal or authentic (Stewart 2011). We look specifically at self-deprecating humor, other-deprecating humor, and the delicate relationship between humor use and candidate / audience gender. By first studying the audiences and goals of these unique talk show subgenres, and the

documented functions, uses, and effects of humor in various contexts, we offer hypotheses regarding how the candidates' use of humor ought to vary across these programs.

The project includes a detailed content analysis and accompanying textual analysis of all candidate interviews across four genres of programming during the primary campaign from December 1, 2015 through March 1, 2016. Programs examined include three more traditional news-oriented broadcasts (*NBC Nightly News*, *The O'Reilly Factor*, *Rachel Maddow*), daytime talk shows (*Ellen*, *The View*, *The Talk*), late-night comedy shows (*The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*, *The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon*, *Jimmy Kimmel Live*), and political satire shows (*The Daily Show with Trevor Noah*, *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*, and *The Nightly Show with Larry Wilmore*). The coding scheme captures self and other- deprecating humor, as well as all references to policy (both foreign and domestic), the sex of the interviewee and interviewer, and the candidates' political parties. Results are contextualized in terms of humor theory, the relationship between gender and both humor use and appreciation, and the role of personalization in contemporary political life. By examining candidates' uses of humor across talk shows during the 2016 presidential primaries, we can witness not only how candidates conceptualize humor as a strategic device, but how the fragmented media landscape facilitates distinct appeals to distinct audiences.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The Evolving Campaign Media Landscape

In a fragmented media environment in which politically disinterested citizens can tune out from political life altogether, political candidates struggle to reach all of their political constituents (Prior 2007). With so many media options to choose from, people who are disengaged from politics can tune out altogether, opting for entertainment programming over news. When candidates do appear on traditional news programs, they are often subjected to ‘traditional’ journalistic political interview practices, during which they undergo rapid-fire questioning, and having to defend their opinions, policy choices, and actions to the American people (Clayman 2002). The increased personalization of news has made the journalists personal interpretation paramount in framing of campaign stories (Hallin 1990). This increased importance of the journalist’s perspective has led to a reduction in the amount of time media outlets dedicate to original, unedited quotes by politicians and candidates. The result of this time cut is a news environment in which candidates struggle to have unfiltered access to the voting public.

This mediated landscape has given presidential candidates cause to look to other venues to present an unfiltered presentation of themselves to the people, instead of a snapshot representation of their views (Hallin 1990). One of the solutions candidates have adopted is to appear on daytime, primetime, and late night talk shows. These programs set a tone of ‘regular’ people discussing political topics in ways that are accessible to a usually politically unengaged portion of the American public (Baym 2009).

Talk shows like late-night comedy programs or daytime talk shows are often a supportive environment for politicians where they can expect few difficult or hard-hitting questions (Baum 2005). Entertainment talk shows offer platforms that are driven by the goal of entertaining rather than informing. This entertainment goal then shapes the ways in which candidate interviews are conducted on such programming. For example, in the day time talk genre, Oprah Winfrey presents her talk show as a program with the goals of uplifting, enlightening, encouraging, and entertaining through television to transform people’s lives (Baum & Jamison 2011). Research by Baum found that when interviewing politicians and candidates, shows like Oprah’s program rarely mention political parties or other partisan themes; nor does Oprah mention substantive policy issues or compare the issue positions of major candidates. And yet many candidates have frequented Oprah’s show over the years, as it presents an opportunity to connect with usually inaccessible segment (Baum 2003).

Overall, the entertainment talk show genre is a broad one that encompasses several sub-genres, each with its own appeal and niche audience. Such audiences

vary in age, gender, and political interest. With those distinctions come notable differences in the nature of the candidate interviews and conversations we might expect to see on such shows. This project will examine ways to understand the differences in the kinds of interviews we see on daytime talk, traditional news interviews, late-night comedy, and political satire programming, specifically in terms of the candidates' strategic uses of humor across these different shows. I will explore how, when political candidates are interviewed across these talk show sub-genres, the audiences and nature of the conversations change, and with those changes, the use of humor varies as well. I will explore how the interviews vary in terms of the types of humor used, types (and extent of) policy/ political content, and how we might think about gender (of both the audience and the candidate) in the context of such interviews.

Looking Back

The tradition of the presidential candidate appearance on entertainment programming can be traced back over 50 years ago. During the 1960 presidential election both candidates Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy appeared on *The Tonight Show Starring Jack Paar*. These debuts marked the beginning of entertainment talk show strategy (Parkin 2014). As candidate interviews on entertainment programming became more common, the practice extended across talk-show subgenres to include daytime talk and late-night comedy. Bill Clinton's interview on *The Arsenio Hall Show* in 1992 was the first real groundbreaking moment in this emergent trend. During a relaxed and candid interview, Clinton exposed and promoted himself as an average

everyday person, while directly speaking to young, difficult-to-reach voters about key issues in ways they could easily understand. For candidates, the talk show interview became a new frontier to gain access to previously elusive audiences.

While the entertainment talk show interview may be useful for candidates, the practice it is not without its critics. Critics claimed Clinton was taking advantage of an ‘easy interview represented on a soft news venue. President George H. W. Bush’s press secretary Torie Clarke described Clinton as a “Sad John Belushi wannabe,” continuing with the quote, “I don’t think most Americans want to see their president wearing a goofy tie and sunglasses and blowing on a saxophone, and then talking about smoking pot with a late-night TV host” (Waterman 1999). During the span of President Obama’s term, generalized criticisms of the Presidents’ frequent talk-show appearances have emerged. A piece in the *Washington Times* argued that President Obama, having engaged in more talk-show appearances than another sitting president, is taking advantage of Air Force One and taxpayer dollars to make two and three day trips for these appearances. The piece argues for “a rational conversation on the merits and affordability of the chief executive’s journeys.” (Boyer 2013). Even liberal political satire host, Jon Stewart, criticized President Obama’s appearance on talk shows, questioning his decision to appear on daytime talk show *The View* during 2012, instead of meeting one-on-one with world leaders at the United Nations Meeting in New York.

New Political Television: Content and Themes

These ‘new political television’ programs offer novel ways of talking about politics using a combination of information and entertainment-based appeals (Jones, 2009). The producers of these programs present political and current events content in a way that mimics the presentation of fiction or entertainment (Jones & Baym 2010). They emphasize accessible themes that are framed around ideals such as heroism, tragedy, and fame. Baum (2003) found that the hosts of entertainment-oriented talk shows rarely made mention of political parties and policy issues.

Most importantly, these programs were not created with politics in mind. A publicist for *The Tonight Show* stated, “Of course ratings are top priority...If people get anything out of it, that’s fine, but that’s not why we are doing this. We’re not ‘Hardball’ (quoted in Baum, 2011 page 273). This kind of attitude toward political content on the part of show producers strengthens the motives for candidates to seek out these venues. In addition, the producers of these programs have found that focusing on the personal qualities of candidates over their issue positions or policy platforms is widely received and more engaging for their audiences (Baum 2003).

The increasing prevalence of the candidate interview on entertainment talk shows suggests that this is a phenomenon worth exploring from a scholarly perspective. Data show that the number of interviews and frequencies of candidate repeat appearances have increased from 20 in 2000, to 27 in 2004, 101 appearances in 2008, and 48 (the drop attributable to Obama’s incumbent status)2012 (Parkin 2014). Interestingly, research indicates that both parties use this tactic equally. Democrats

made 50 trips to network late-night, 25 trips to cable late-night, and 28 trips to daytime talk shows. Almost equally, Republicans appeared 27 times on network late-night, 23 times on cable late-night, and 21 times on daytime programs. President Obama was the most prolific talk show campaigner overall with 31 interviews between 1992 and 2012 over his two presidential runs (Parkin 2014).

The rapid increase of appearances on these type of programs has been linked to multiple underlying causes, one of these being the advancements in media innovations and novel forms of political candidate information available to the American public. Another reason cited for these candidate campaign changes goes back to changes of the structure of the political parties as a whole (Garzia 2011). The overall span of politics has moved from a party-centric focus to an individual politician focus (Dalton, McAllister & Wattenberg 2000). This shift puts more emphasis on politicians as individual people, rather than as representatives of their parties. This following section will explore the theory of political personalization in regard to how the shift in the conceptualization of politics is affecting candidates' self-presentation and campaign decisions.

Personalization of Politics

Over the past half-century, the coverage of politics has changed from the traditional party-oriented coverage to a rise in 'candidate centered politics', sometimes called the personalization of politics. This personalization has grown to become one of the key changes in how political campaigns have come to be conducted (Swanson &

Mancini 1996). In terms of the media, Rahat and Sheafer (2007) define personalization as the ‘change in the presentation of politics in the media, as expressed in a heightened focus on individual politicians and a diminished focus on parties’ organizations and institutions’. (page 67) The causes for this shift have been attributed to first, the advancement and expansion of the media environment within which political coverage exists (Mazzoleni 2000). And secondly, the increasing disconnect between voters and the parties themselves (Dalton et al. 2000; Garzia 2011). Citizens’ perceptions of politics today are less based on ideology and party, and more on evaluations of individual politicians. A study done by Max Kaase (1994) found that often times when respondents were asked to discuss positive or negative points of political parties, individuals frame their responses in terms of individual politicians rather than the parties as a whole. Such findings suggest that, increasingly, the public is voting for individuals rather than party representatives.

A related extension of personalization is the way in which voters have come to think about individual political actors. Today’s citizens evaluate presidential candidates with the same criteria they use to evaluate their friends and peers (Sullivan et al 1990). Because of this, candidates now are heavily invested in the image that they present to the public (Newman, 1999). Candidates have to be sure that their actions, statements, and public appearances will display personality traits that will appeal and resonate with their target voters.

These two aspects of personalization – the separation of the individual political actor from considerations of the party, and the increased focus on the private life of

public officials – are referred to as individualization and privatization, respectively (Aeleast, Sheaffer, Stanyer, 2012). The concept of privatization captures a seemingly incongruous demand upon politicians, to simultaneously be familiar to the public as both public figures and private citizens.

One example of contemporary personalization in the realm of talk show interviews comes to us from an interview with 2012 GOP candidate Mitt Romney and his wife Ann presented on the morning talk show program *Live with Kelly and Michael* (September 12, 2012). In it, Romney appears, not as a representative of the Republican Party, per se, but as a husband and father, describing the night he met his wife Ann at a party at a friend's house. Mitt Romney was a senior in high school and Ann Romney was a sophomore.

“She caught my eye I went up to her and found she'd come with someone else. And I said to the guy she came with, you know, I live closer to Ann than you do. Can I give her a ride home for you? And he said sure.”

STRAHAN: He fell for that?

MITT ROMNEY: Yeah, he fell for that. So, we've been going steady ever since then.”

RIPA: Do you have time for date nights?

MITT ROMNEY: Date nights. Hardly. It was nice to be in New York together last night. That's rare, but we typically get Sunday morning. We're able to go to church together.

The hardest part of the campaign, the hardest part is that we're apart more. We've been together since we were kids, really.

Such appearances offer candidates a way to connect with citizens, not as politicians, but as human beings with interests and concerns that mirror their own,

hence serving the goals of the trend of personalization in campaigning. This is increasingly important as research shows personality is important to citizens as a factor in determining candidate preference (Jones & Hudson 1996). Candidate appearances on talk show programs allow for candidates to show a personal, private side of themselves, while appearing genuine and separate from their political party as a whole. In addition, the talk show format gives the candidate an opportunity to deliver direct, lengthy, unfiltered messages to an audience.

One specific rhetorical device that we see used by political candidates across their varied media appearances is humor. Humor can be used strategically by individuals in public and private settings in ways that can reduce tension, foster connection, and promote understanding.

Humor and Politics

In general, humor serves as a rhetorical device that varies in form, function, and spirit. Overall, humor is a way to decode social situations, allowing individuals verbal/nonverbal cues to social norms that are sometimes otherwise invisible. Nonpolitical voters respond well to the transparency humor creates when political candidates appear on nontraditional venues like daytime talk shows and late-night comedy programs (Robinson, Smith-Lovin, 2001). The contention of this project is that the kind of humor employed by political candidates across various sub-genres of entertainment talk show is likely a function of both the target audience and the producers' desired atmosphere for the program. To explore this proposition, it is

useful to first understand a few of the forms of humor candidates might employ in these entertainment forums.

Humor can be used by politicians to make themselves more relatable and personable to their audience, or to make their opponents and critics seem less appealing, credible or effective (Stewart 2011). For example, at the past 2015 White House Correspondents Dinner President Obama made the following joke regarding Senator Ted Cruz (R-Texas) comparing himself to Galileo for denying the existence of man-made climate change: “Galileo believed the Earth revolves around the sun. Ted Cruz believes the Earth revolves around Ted Cruz.” (date source) This joke allowed the President to join in shared laughter with those in the audience who found the joke funny, while discrediting Senator Cruz in a nonaggressive way. The us vs. them dynamic in this joke illustrates how other-deprecating humor can be used by political figures.

During the same dinner President Obama also utilized self-deprecating humor with the following joke: “Michele Bachmann actually predicted that I would bring about the biblical end of days. Now, that’s a legacy. That’s big. I mean, Lincoln, Washington, they didn’t do that.” Again, the President is using humor to create a connection with the audience giving the appearance of being personable and relatable. Unlike the first example, with this use of self-deprecation the President is sacrificing his own social standing, making him appear humble and more genuine to his audience

who are for the most part, of a lower social standing, given that they are not president of the United States (Weisfield 1993).

Self-Deprecating Humor

Politicians can use humor to make themselves more accessible to the public, and signal to their audience a level of social and general intelligence (Greengross & Miller 2008). This is done primarily with self and other-deprecating humor. These types of humor allow for the candidate to both define themselves through humor, and make their opponents appear to be less qualified/acceptable (Sloane 2001). Many times the use of humor by a candidate can serve as a defining moment, and become one of the more publicly associated traits attributed to that candidate (Clayman & Maynard 1995).

Self-deprecating humor allows the speaker to present and acknowledge personal flaws and mistakes by addressing them in a playful way. Self-deprecating humor is often self-invoked and invites the audience to laugh at the faults or short-comings of the speaker. This exchange results in the audience establishing an equal relationship identification with the speaker (Meyer 2000). Through these exchanges, speakers often become more accessible on a personal dimension with their audience, leading to increases in overall likability (Stewart 2011). Bippus (2007) found that self-deprecating humor was preferred by both Republicans and Democrats alike, regardless of party affiliation of the speaker. Lastly, the use of self-deprecating humor has been

seen as being more appropriate and useful in audience evaluation than other deprecating humor, due to the sometimes hostile/aggressive perceptions associated with other-deprecation (Gardner, 1994).

Despite its usefulness, various factors are often weighed before a candidate engages self-deprecation. Sometimes when an individual makes a self-deprecating comment it can be seen as ‘costly social signaling’ (Kidd et al 2009). This means that individuals lose some of their social status through the act of criticizing themselves, and pointing out their potential flaws to their audience. In most cases individuals who use self-deprecation in a humorous context already have a high enough social standing that they can afford to reduce it. Through self-deprecating humor, elites are able to decrease their status and ideally ‘equalize’ themselves in the eyes of their viewers (Weisfield 1993). The personal human qualities that are highlighted with self-deprecation just add to the ‘personalization of candidates’, strengthening their appeal and connection with their audiences. This can be seen above with the self-deprecating joke the President made at the correspondents’ dinner. By making fun of himself the President presented himself as a person who makes mistakes rather than a political figure. This alteration in perspective gives the audience the opportunity to like the President and connect with him as a ‘regular’ person.

Other-Deprecating Humor

In contrast to self-deprecating humor is other-deprecating humor. Other deprecating humor serves as a differentiator between the speaker and the target of the

joke (Meyer 2000). The humor in these comments target an opposing individual, group, or idea, and attempt to reduce support for that entity through public ridicule (Lorenz 1963). In the 2008 primaries, other-deprecation was the most frequently occurring type of humor, with the direction of the speakers' humor focused on competitors, or a general 'out-group' such as the opposing party. Two-thirds of all laughter elicited from comments during these primaries resulted from these other deprecating interactions (Stewart 2012). When laughter that is evoked through the use of other-deprecating, it humor signals a bond between the speaker and the audience, and differentiates them from the target of the joke, creating an 'us Vs. them' scenario (Stewart 2012).

A theory to mention that corresponds well with self and other-deprecation is the theory of superiority. Superiority theory is the concept of individuals laughing at others due to a sense of triumph, or feelings of superiority that the individual has over another party (Meyer 2000). In addition to the general association of laughing at others, superiority humor is associated with self-derision as well. Some have argued that the use of superiority humor can control individual parties. The speaker allows others to laugh at them, while actually creating a higher status through self-deprecation (Lynch 2002). Rapp (1951) argued that superiority humor originated in hostility, but that this hostility has morphed to gentler criticisms that are more socially acceptable in modern day social situations. Feinberg (1978) reinforced this idea by stating that superiority theory allows the individual to present aggressive tendencies outwardly in a way that can be perceived as nonviolent and socially acceptable. Other

researchers have presented the idea that superiority humor helps to avoid the presentation of aggression altogether (Gruner 1978). As seen above with the other-deprecating joke the President made at the expense of Sen. Cruz, the use of other-deprecating humor allows political figures to criticize others without seeming overly aggressive or outright hostile. Obamas comment was subtle enough that it created a loss of face for Sen. Cruz, while making the President appear superior and creating a bond between him and the audience who found the joke to be funny.

Unexpected, humanizing, and entertaining, humor serves politicians well as they attempt to make stronger bonds with the American public. In addition to the role played by self- and other-deprecating humor, when looking at how candidates use humor in an election context, it is also important to consider the role of gender in both humor use and humor appreciation. This is particularly important in the context of an election in which one of the major candidates running for President is a women (Hillary Clinton).

The Relationship between Sex and Humor

In general, the use of humor and the subsequent appreciation of that humor is dependent on the context of social roles, status, and culture (Crawford 1995). Humor can serve various different social functions including the construction and perpetuation of gender roles (Crawford 2003). The sex of the speaker has been found to affect how humor use is accepted and interpreted. A study done by Bryant in 1980 found that when male teachers used humor it was positively related to appeal,

delivery, and teaching effectiveness. In contrast, the only type of humor from women teachers that was associated with enhanced appeal to students was hostile humor. Some non-hostile humor uses actually lead to a decrease in appeal or credibility with the students. This decrease lead to lower evaluation scores for the women professors on teaching competence, delivery, and overall teaching effectiveness. The study concluded that humor use made male teachers overall more appealing to students, gave them the perception to be superior in delivering lessons, and they were viewed as generally superior teachers (Gorham & Christophel 1990).

Additional research has found that men and women will use humor to meet different social goals. With regard to context, self-reports find that women will use self-deprecating humor when in groups of other women, but not in groups of mixed sex. To contrast this, men self-reported the opposite, being unlikely to use self-directed humor among male friends, but willing to self-deprecate when the group was mixed sex (Crawford 2003). This ties back to the idea of humor creating and maintaining the construction of gender expectations. Martin et al. (2003) found that that men were more open to the use of aggressive and self-defeating humor than women. For the study previously mentioned, aggressive humor was classified as humor using sarcasm, teasing, ridicule, derision, “put-down”, or disparagement humor, and could otherwise be classified as other-deprecating humor (Zillmann, 1983).

While humor is a useful tool for candidates to serve different rhetorical goals, the use of humor will likely vary across these talk show sub-genres that vary in terms

of audience and spirit. The sub-genres on which such candidate interviews appear are varied in terms of their goals and audiences. In order to make educated hypotheses about the use of humor across candidate interviews, it is important to first understand these goals and audiences ranging from the traditional news program, to daytime talk shows, late-night talk shows, and political satire programming.

Talk Show Sub Genres

Primetime news programs are generally the home of the traditional political interview. These interviews focus on policies, issues, as well as horse-race and strategy questions. Many primetime news interviews rely on traditional cues that their viewers associate with credibility and newsworthiness (Baym 2007). These interviews are often the home of ‘gotcha journalism’ (Jones 2009), essentially trying to catch a guest in a discrepancy between what they are saying during the current interview, and previous statements they have made. This type of interview can be exemplified with programs such as The O’Reilly Factor (on Fox news), CBS Evening News, and 60 minutes (On CBS).

According to the 2006 news consumption survey, women were more likely to regularly watch traditional nightly network news (31%) than men (25%). Women are also more likely to consume network TV news programs including Dateline and 60 minutes (25% women vs. 21% men) (Pew Research Center). Generation age gaps can predict news consumption habits as well. Baby boomers are 60% likely to consume local television for political news. The Millennial generation rely more on Facebook

for political news (61%), with only 37% saying they tune in to local news for political content. Lastly, Generation X polls with 51% indicating they consume political news from Facebook, and 46% indicating they consume news from local television (Pew Research Center 2015).

The function of presidential candidate interviews on traditional news programs includes disseminating concrete statements of official policy, holding officials accountable for decisions and actions they have made, and making this public debate available to citizens (Claymann & Heritage 2002). Cable news channels such as CNN, Fox, and MSNBC, all offer a mix of current events and political news. The interviews in on these programs provide direct, somewhat scripted encounters between the candidate and journalists. The conversations on these programs also allow for dialogue with the candidate regarding their position on policy issues and details about their ongoing campaign, without as much focus on their personal characteristics (Parkin 2014).

Traditional hard news formats lead in viewership within the talk show circuit, so despite the more traditional and structured interview format, it is an easy way for a candidate to reach a large, politically active audience. On an average night in May 2002, 9.4 million viewers tuned into *NBC Nightly News*, compared to 1.3 million tuning into *Larry King Live* (Prior 2003). In the past few years, President Obama has made appearances on these types of programs to address his audience directly on current policy issues. Within the prime time programs themselves, the news appeals and entertainment appeal vary from program to program.

For example, President Obama appeared on Fox news in February of 2014 for a live interview with Bill O'Reilly. The interview was an equal mix of politics and entertainment, with a range of topics from the current struggles in Egypt:

O'REILLY: The Muslim Brotherhood, a great concern to a lot of people. Are they a threat to the USA?

OBAMA: I think that the Muslim Brotherhood is one faction in Egypt. They don't have majority support in Egypt. They are –

O'REILLY: Are they a threat?

OBAMA: But they are well-organized and there are strains of their ideology that are anti-U.S. There's no doubt about it. But here's the thing that we have to understand, there are a whole bunch of secular folks in Egypt, there are a whole bunch of educators and civil society in Egypt that wants to come to the fore as well. And it's important for us not the say that our only two options are either the Muslim Brotherhood or a suppressed Egyptian people.

To the Super Bowl the following weekend:

O'REILLY: Now, will you actually watch the game?

OBAMA: Absolutely.

O'REILLY: Because I know there's a party here. J. Lo is going to be here, which is why I have to get out of here because I'll frighten her if she comes in.

OBAMA: You're invited there.

O'REILLY: No, I know I'm not.

OBAMA: You have to take off the tie.

O'REILLY: I don't want the ruin the party for you guys (Fox News 2014).

The exchanges in the interview above provide an opportunity for the president to voice his opinion on current policy concerns, and give the viewers an opportunity to hear him respond to criticisms and questions about his recent political actions. Despite the more traditional news-oriented venue, Obama came across as relatable to the average American through the discussion of both football and policy. This point also illustrates the rise in personalization and image presentation of candidates – even in the context of a more traditional news-oriented program.

In contrast, some of the other nightly news interviews are entirely serious in nature, with a much more prominent focus on policy and on political content. In the following interview, *CBS Evening News* anchor Katie Couric questions President Obama in detail about his health care bill and its movement through congress. In this example, we see very little light-hearted banter, as the interview largely stays on the topic of public policy, keeping in with the expectations of the traditional news interview genre.

KATIE COURIC: Mr. President, I know you met with House Democrats earlier this afternoon who were opposed to the House bill on health care, because of concerns about the deficit, taxing the wealthy, controlling long term spending. In fact, 40 House Democrats opposed the bill as it's currently written. Did you make any progress?

PRESIDENT OBAMA: We did. And they acknowledged that we made progress. You know, my working principle has been, number one, let's make sure that this package provides more choices to the American people, gives them more security, if they've got a preexisting condition, or they lose their job, or they're changing jobs. It's got to be deficit neutral. It can't add to our deficits. And it's got to bring long term costs down. And I think, rightly, a number of these so called Blue Dog Democrats – more conservative Democrats – were concerned that not enough had been done on reducing costs.

It's the same concern that I shared. And we talked today with Henry Waxman, the chairman of the committee that was relevant. And I think that we're moving in the direction where, at the end of the day, by the time we have a bill on the floor, we will be able to say, unequivocally, that this is going to bend to the cost curve so that health care inflation is reduced. That's going to be good for American families. That's going to reduce their costs and make the system work better for everybody.

KATIECOURIC: But it's not going to add to the deficit?

*PRESIDENT OBAMA: It will not add to the deficit. I will not sign a bill that adds to the deficit. Period.
(CBS News ,2009).*

The examples illustrate the primacy of policy and issues within the context of traditional news formats. The O'Reilly interview indicates there is still room for some entertainment on these more traditional news formats, but the overall tone of both the O'Reilly interview and the Couric interview hold a primary focus on policy and issues.

In general, the goals of the traditional news interview stand in stark contrast to the more entertainment-oriented genres described below. The follow sections will detail the different audiences, program goals, and overall atmosphere that candidates encounter when appearing on different entertainment-oriented talk show platforms. The first platform, with arguably the most polarized and typically politically unengaged in terms of its audience, is daytime talk (Parkin 2014).

Daytime talk show programs, including those such as *Oprah*, *Ellen*, and *The View*, are entertainment-oriented with an overall humorous and easy-going

atmosphere. These programs are also goal-oriented for each different episode. Most episodes will feature a guest that engages with the host in a question-response sequence. This sequence might then offer the audience information concerning current social, political, and moral issues as they relate to the goal of the episode (Ilie 2001). Hosts of daytime television touch on a variety of topics ranging from serious content to personal/character content. This range of information appeals to the audiences of these programs and is substantive enough that viewers are often able to shape their views about the issues and political figures presented (Villalobos 2012).

“Personality driven political entertainment appearances on TV talk shows afford the candidates their best opportunity to communicate with a substantial niche of the electorate” (Baum 2003, 213). Yet still, within the programs there are a range of variables that affect the candidates’ ability to reach their audience. One of these factors is the host of the program itself. In 2000, 14% of the public said support from Oprah Winfrey for a presidential candidate would influence them positively and 11% said it would influence them negatively (Pew Research Center).

The content breakdown of daytime talk shows varies from program to program. The Oprah show content can be broken down into 72% personal content, 15% policy content, and 14% campaign content. As a comparison, The View can be broken down into 37% personal content, 44% policy content, and 19% campaign content (Parkin 2014). One of the more balanced daytime talk programs in terms of content covered is The Ellen Show consisting of 44% of the program focused on personal content, 31% on policy concerns, and 25% on campaign strategy. In general, daytime programs tend

to contain 17% campaign content, 33% policy content, and 50% personal content (Parkin 2014).

According to Fairclough, daytime talk serves as an extension of a casual interaction; the nature of information exchange allows the viewers of these programs to feel actively included in the content being discussed (Fairclough 1995a). The back and forth between host and guest on these programs tends to mimic the patterns and tone of casual conversation, rather than that of a formal interview. This laid-back style of interview creates a low-key environment for the audience and for the guest of the program (Ilie 2001). The topics discussed vary from the discussion of personal conflicts regarding a single individual, to larger conflicts regarding groups such as society as a whole or a political party as a whole.

When presidential candidates appear on daytime talk shows they emphasize their own personal qualities over their ideas on actual policy or reform (Baum 2003). Candidates are allowed more of an opportunity to control their appearance and how they present themselves to the audiences of daytime due to the nature of the interviews. One example of such strategic use of daytime talk is President Obama's 2010 appearance on *The View*, which had roughly 6.5 million viewers (Nielsen). The appearance featured several personal anecdotes, including a story about Obama's recent family vacation to Maine, and the typical struggles and triumphs of raising two preteen daughters. During the interview Obama was also able to touch on the current issues concerning the American people including the restart of the economy, stabilizing the financial system, creating jobs, the oil spill, etc. This brief interlude of

political information was condensed and simplified, but allowed the President an opportunity to present political information within an entertainment program, exposing the usually apolitical viewers of the program to some political topics (Baum 2003).

Interviews on daytime talk programs have also been described as feeling like a ‘social call with longtime friends’. The candidate is given an opportunity to showcase their humor, empathy, and personality including family values (Parkin 2014). In 2007, then Senator Obama appeared on *Ellen*, walking in casually to music, playfully beating up a punching bag, and dancing side-by-side with Ellen. Ellen and the young Senator then hugged, and proceeded to sit down for a very informal exchange. During this interview Obama spoke directly to a caller/viewer of the show, and addressed their question regarding how he maintains his family life while serving as a U.S. Senator, and running for president. In addition, Obama also took a moment to reminisce about how he met his wife Michelle, again illustrating the personal nature of these daytime talk exchanges and the focus on family. It is clear that political candidates have discovered that appearing on the daytime talk show circuit is an accessible way to reach a largely women audience consisting of viewers who may be politically uninformed and inattentive, but who, despite their political disinterest, still vote (YouTube).

The next year, Obama did a follow-up interview with *Ellen*, reconnecting with this usually unreachable audience, and giving a more personal look into campaign life.

In a rare moment, President Obama addressed his smoking habit, his struggle to quit smoking, and the role played by his wife in getting him to quit.

ELLEN: ...Hello, and the next question is: any new dance moves since I've been with you last?

BARACK: I just want to say that we were kind of in a slump until I was dancing on the show –my poll numbers skyrocketed after that. Everybody saw me bust a move on Ellen –that's all it took.

ELLEN: Alright, here's the big question: Have you been able to not smoke when there's so much pressure and so much stress –to try to do such a –it's such a horrible, hard habit to break, and I know 'cause I've struggled with it myself. Have you been able to stop?

BARACK: I've been able to do it. I've been chewing on this Nicorette, which tastes like you're chewing on ground pepper –but it does help. And this was a deal-breaker for Michelle. I had been sneaking three cigarettes, four cigarettes a day for awhile, and she said if you're going to do this you've got to stop –precisely because the stress was going increase, and it'll just get worse. So that's an example of my wife making me a better man once again.

Compared to late-night comedy and network news programs, daytime talk shows employ primarily women hosts, have women in positions of creative control, and address issues central to women and to minorities (Villalobos 2012). Addressing struggles and vulnerabilities in this context is not only acceptable, but encouraged as a way to connect with the women viewership (78% of the daytime talk audience). The results of this are seen through a constant address of issues women face, and the topics of the programs relating directly to the audience. These direct appeals have been found to increase effective political engagement, efficacy, and overall conversation (Villalobos 2012).

As mentioned earlier, sex and humor research has shown that women enjoy hostile humor when men are the targets. Self-deprecating humor puts the speaker as target, so if the speaker is male, a women audience member would be likely to enjoy the humor use. In addition, self-deprecation makes the speaker more accessible and increases their likability (Stewart 2013). Self-deprecation has also been found as the preferred style of humor to be used by Republicans and Democrats, regardless of the speakers' party affiliation. The overall well-received response from audience members to self-deprecation, combined with the primarily women audience leads to the indication that the daytime talk audiences will be responsive to self-deprecating humor.

Programs classified as network late-night comedy present political humor in the context of monologues, headlines, and segments from other shows. Examples of the late-night comedy genre include, *The Late Show* on CBS, *The Tonight Show* on NBC, and *Jimmy Kimmel! Live!* On ABC. These programs serve as a way for presidential candidates to gain exposure to a more diverse audience than daytime talk (Feldman & Young 2008). The hosts of programs like *The Tonight Show* and *The Late Show*, portray themselves as the 'average' citizen. This portrayal allows the programs to present easy to understand interviews with high-profile guests. This image is further supported by the hosts delivering pre-scripted questions slowly with frequent pauses, as though they are being thought of in the moment. In addition, the vernacular the

hosts use in asking the questions is also simplified and easier to understand in comparison to questions of the same content on primetime talk (Baym 2013).

The innovation and unpredictability found in these late-night comedy programs appeal to a wider range of viewers than that of other ‘traditional’ news programs (Schaefer, Avery 1993). For example, Letterman’s personal style as a host combines a lack of seriousness with unrelenting sarcasm. This image presentation provides a sharp contrast between Letterman’s hosting style and the more traditional network news anchors who are often characterized as being artificially polite. As a whole, the tone of late-night comedy resonates as more genuine with audiences (Schaefer, Avery 1993). The following excerpts come from an interview conducted by Jay Leno, host of *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*, and President Barack Obama from 2013:

MR. OBAMA: It is good to see you and — (applause.) Thank you. Let me just say, I think Kevin looks good in a suit. (Laughter.)

MR. LENO. Thank you, sir.

MR. OBAMA: He looks a little like Secret Service. (Laughter.)

MR. LENO: He does, doesn't he? Yes. And you're the only guy who can get him to wear it. (Laughter.)
Now, you know, it's funny, because the last time you were here, you walked in, you had your jacket on your finger and you had the two guys with you.

MR. OBAMA: Right.

MR. LENO: And that was it. Big change?

MR. OBAMA: You know, I was mentioning earlier, we landed yesterday and then — this is an example of life in the bubble. We

landed at the fairground down in Costa Mesa. And I see the fairground where I think we're having this town hall and I said, well, why don't we walk over there? Secret Service says, no, sir, it's 750 yards. (Laughter.)

The interview progressed with a causal, informal manner that presents the idea that this is simply an interaction between two acquaintances 'catching up' on each other's lives. There is not a heavy or serious political focus, but rather a mention of politics within the context of other topics.

MR. OBAMA: Well, look, we are going through a difficult time. I welcome the challenge. You know, I ran for President because I thought we needed big changes. I do think in Washington it's a little bit like "American Idol," except everybody is Simon Cowell. (Laughter.)

MR. LENO: Wow. Wow. That's rough. (Applause.)

...
MR. LENO: Now, Treasury Secretary Geithner, he seems to be taking a little bit of heat here. How is he holding up with this? He seems like a smart guy –

MR. OBAMA: He is a smart guy and he's a calm and steady guy. I don't think people fully appreciate the plate that was handed him. This guy has not just a banking crisis; he's got the worst recession since the Great Depression, he's got an auto industry on – that has been on the verge of collapse. We've got to figure out how to coordinate with other countries internationally. He's got to deal with me; he's got to deal with Congress. And he's doing it with grace and good humor. And he understands that he's on the hot seat, but I actually think that he is taking the right steps, and we're going to have our economy back on the move.

MR. LENO: Now, see, I love that it's all his problem. (Laughter.)

MR. OBAMA: No, no, no –

MR. LENO: -- I mean, when he came in you probably said, hey, this is not a problem. Now, it's, hey, you got this, you got that, hey, good luck. (Laughter.)

This exchange between Leno and the president illustrates the relaxed nature of late-night programs even when the content is political in nature. President Obama is being presented with the opportunity to justify and present his recent political undertakings in language and a context that is easily understood by the American public.

To further exemplify the style of interview conducted on late-night comedy is the following interview of Former President Bill Clinton from 2002, appearing on the *The Late Show with David Letterman*. Although Clinton was not currently in or running for office, the following exchange further illustrates how late-night comedy interacts with political content, and former/current politicians when they appear on these programs:

LETTERMAN: You get a chance to play the saxophone much any more?

CLINTON: I do, I set up a music room in my house up in Chappaqua –

LETTERMAN: Is that right?

CLINTON: I gotta practice a few more months.

LETTERMAN: Tell me about what your day was today. What did you do? What were you thinking, what did you feel?

LETTERMAN: Is it – now I'm going to ask you some questions here and I'm sure the answers will be more things I don't understand.

(Bill and the audience chuckle)

But is it possible – do we have any fighting chance to win the war on terrorism without peace in the Middle East? And if the answer is no then we have no hope whatsoever, is that right? Is that—

*CLINTON: No, that's wrong.
(Audience Laughs) Let me say, unless there is –unless and until there is at least a viable peace process in the Middle East, there will be more terrorism there than there otherwise would be. If there were a peace in the Middle East, it would remove a lot of the rationale for some of the people who finance groups like Bin Laden. His major objective and objection to us frankly, was that we left our – we abandoned Afghanistan where he had fought, and then after the Gulf War we left bases and troops and equipment in the Middle East because in the first Gulf War it took us four and a half months to move in there, and in case we were ever called back we didn't want to have to take all that time to pre-position, so it's not true that all terrorism is routed in that, the biggest terrorist problem in our neighborhood is in Colombia...*

The overall tone of the interview is informal, causal, and without tension. The political topics discussed are not mentioned in a serious manner but rather presented by Leno with the quote “Now I’m going to ask you some questions here and I’m sure the answers will be more things I don’t understand.” That quote alone shows how the host of the program has set the political tone to be conversational and explanatory. There is no indication given that Leno will attempt to scrutinize Clinton’s views and opinions on the following matter, he just wants to hear them.

Previous research has found that the majority of the jokes made during late-night comedy tend to focus on the executive branch of government, and emphasize politicians’ personal failings, as opposed to policies or issues (Young 2004). A recent content analysis found that 70% of interviews between 1992 and 2012 on late-night interviews contained at least 50% political material (Parkin 2014).

The audience of late-night comedy is the most diverse of talk show programs in terms of sex, age, and political party affiliation (Parkin 2014). This wide audience range combined with the expected use of humor on late-night comedy provides several advantages to presidential candidates appearing on these programs. One of the social functions humor serves is as an indicator of an individuals' personal qualities. Intelligence, personality, and social values can be inferred through humorous performances because of the relative inability to 'fake' being funny (Stewart 2012). Pre-existing candidate evaluations have been found to be a strong moderator when viewers are evaluating candidates' usage of humor. The more positively or negatively an individual perceives a candidate in terms of likability, intelligence, honesty, compassion, and electability, the better that candidate's 'humorous comments, playfulness, and overall funny demeanor will be received (Stewart 2012). Humor also has the social function to create and strengthen bonds in groups of people. This use of humor is especially effective on late-night comedy programs due to the wide audience range. When candidates make jokes that resonate with their audience, the physical function of laughter signals a sense of group mentality or group-attack toward the opposing idea that the candidate is making the remark toward (Panksepp, 1998). Hence, late-night comedy programs provide candidates a suitable platform to strategically use humor to appear human and to develop social bonds with the audience.

The increasing fragmentation of media , has fueled a proliferation of a sub-genres that encompass media, information, and entertainment in one (Baym 2003). One such genre is the political satire program, programming akin to *The Daily Show* (with Jon Stewart or Trevor Noah) or *The Colbert Report*, *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* (on HBO), and *The Larry Wilmore Show* on Comedy Central. Previous research has found that watching political satire programming is associated with higher levels of political knowledge, higher political participation, as well as increased levels of interpersonal discussion involving politics. (Cao & Brewer, 2008; Young and Tisinger, 2006; Esralew and Young, 2011; Young & Hoffman, 2012).

The way in which the American public is receiving and interpreting political information has changed radically over the last twenty years. Programs such as *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* use satire to present political information to their audiences in a way that allows the viewers to form their own conclusions. The use of satire and parody provides a sharp contrast to the ‘traditional’ news presentation of this information which facilitates the re-evaluation of how the accurately facts are being reported (Hoffman & Young, 2011). These programs highlight inconsistencies in political rhetoric and use satire to draw attention to the dysfunction of the ‘norms’ governing typical news media. The programs represent this contrast with clips or references to traditional news outlets from earlier in the day or week. Something important to draw attention to with these programs is use of the incongruence theory regarding humor. When an individual watches a satire program, the only way that they will understand that it is in fact a satire is if they have a political news standard to

compare it to. Because of this, many individuals watching these programs also consume more traditional news sources. These news sources present politics in a way that is picked apart and mocked on satire programs, creating an inconsistency for the viewer as they get the joke that the satire is bringing attention to.

This shift in style of political conversation can be attributed to the changing practices of journalism as a whole. The survival of any type of infotainment program in the media environment that exists today, requires such program to place a heavier emphasis on what consumers 'want' over what citizens 'need' (Baym 2009). The rise of infotainment alone has already forced out more traditional ideals of journalism. News outlets attempting to stay in the game of informing the public have had to lower their journalistic standards in hopes of competing with the more recent standards of news. This new hybrid of the traditional journalist and the infotainment journalist is those of the likes of John Stewart, John Oliver, and Stephen Colbert. These news sources take news from various other news outlets, while the hosts themselves present themselves as the common citizen, discussing politics in casual, often humorous, and above all accessible terms (Baym 2009). This informal presentation allows for audiences of a wide range of political knowledge and interest to tune in and take away their own conclusions by simply interpreting the information put before them. These programs provide benefits in a variety of ways specific to the candidates' goals, and the overall goals of political satire programming (Lau, Redlawsk 2001). President Obama sat down for an interview with Stephen Colbert, host of *The Colbert Report*, and staged a take over of the program this past December, 2014:

OBAMA- "You've been taking a lot of shots at my job, I've decided to take a shot at yours,"
Obama took over for Colbert on "The Word," a segment where Colbert says a line or two before a witty word or phrases flashes to the right.

OBAMA- "How hard can this be? I am just going to say whatever you were about to say."

Obama launched into a monologue about Obamacare, congressional Republicans and his last two years in office.

OBAMA- "Nation. As you know, I, Stephen Colbert, have never cared for our President. That guy is so arrogant. I bet he talks about himself in the third person."

After talking about Obamacare, the President asked, "How do you stop something that more and more people are starting to like?"

Next to Obama flashed "Move it to CBS," a nod to the fact that in two weeks Colbert will be stepping down from his Comedy Central show to take over for David Letterman at the "The Late Show" on CBS.

The President went on to detail how Republicans could stop Obamacare.

"They could pass a bill repealing Obamacare. But the President still has the veto and if I know that guy, he is willing to use it," Obama said. "And let's face it, even if Republicans somehow did repeal it, they would have to replace it with their own health care plan. Once they touch it, they own it, and then if anything goes wrong, suddenly everybody will be complaining about Mitch McConnell-care."

"Walk It Off.gov" then flashed next to the President.

Near the close of the segment, Obama joked, noting that last year's Obamacare rollout was "a little bumpy."

OBAMA- "I think that is where Disney got the idea for Frozen,"

OBAMA- "We will be right back with the leader of the free world, Barack Obama."

Following a break, Obama and Colbert sat down for a more traditional interview where the President defended his decision to issue an executive action on immigration

reform and the recent positive jobs report. The first portion of the interview regarding the ‘takeover’ highlights the comedic nature of the program, and the satirical elements that are being used to discuss politics. This type of programming allows for candidates to personalize themselves to their audience and potential voters. Shown above President Obama steps completely out of his role as ‘President of the United States’, and pretends to be the host of a political satire program that is known for criticisms of his own actions as President. The presentation overall is also self-deprecating, tying back in to the idea that if the individual has a high enough status to be able to make fun of themselves (which he does as president), then self-deprecation can prove to be self-serving and make the individual more relatable to their audience. The second portion of the interview highlights the higher level of policy content that is present during these political satire programs.

To further illustrate the nature of political satire is the following interview from Senator John McCain appearing on *The Daily Show* during his presidential campaign in the 2008 election:

STEWART: All right. There we are. Do you know that right now is not the pre-season: these games count.

McCAIN: These games count.

STEWART: What do you want to start with, the “Bomb Iran” song or the walk through the market in Baghdad? What do you want to start with?

McCAIN: Let’s see: which one have I seen most on your show? I think maybe shopping in Baghdad. I had something really picked out for you. (Did you really?) Yes, it’s a little I.E.D. to put on your desk.

Hey, welcome back. We're here with Senator John McCain. Here's what we're going to do: you and me, mano a mano; I'm just going to walk through the talking points, and you tell me why they're right. "If we don't fight and defeat Al Qaeda in Iraq, they will follow us home." Now, my position is —

McCain: Why don't you read what Zarqawi says and what Bin Laden says? Go online, go on the Internet—they'll tell you that. I'm not saying it, they say it. Then I can refer you to their statements.

Stewart: They've also said, "Our strategy is to trap America in a war that will bleed them of treasure and lives." That's also their statement, so you can go both ways on that. But my point is, the idea that Al Qaeda —

McCain: I know one way to go, and that is Al Qaeda has declared their dedication to the destruction of everything that we stand for and believe in. I know that for a fact.

Stewart: Whether we're in Iraq or not.

McCain: You know that for a fact?

Stewart: I know it for a fact.

McCain: Good. That's the first time we've agreed on this whole program. [audience applause] Thank you!

This interview highlights the playful banter that can come about from these programs, while continuing discussion about policy. The substantial focus on policy and political content is one of the key components that differentiates political satire programming from traditional late-night comedy programs such as Letterman or Leno. Satire programs utilize the audiences' prior knowledge of politics (which makes sense given the high political knowledge of their viewership), and then add humor to create an accessible environment in which different segments of the population can obtain

information on current policy issues, political agendas, and upcoming elections. As such, it is perhaps unsurprising that research suggests that the consumption of political satire programs, specifically *The Daily Show*, can cause an increase in viewer's internal political efficacy, or confidence in their own ability to understand politics (Baumgartner & Morris 2006). Political efficacy is defined as the belief in one's own competency, and the feeling that political and social change is possible. This definition can be broken down into two dimensions, internal and external efficacy. Internal political efficacy is the individuals' perceptions of his or her capability to understand and be involved in a democracy. External political efficacy focuses on one's personal beliefs about the governments competence to be responsive and effective (Hoffman & Thomson, 2009).

Hypotheses

Based on the literature regarding the strategic use and functions of humor, the differential appreciation of humor across men and women audiences, and the distinct audiences and goals of the various talk-show subgenres discussed herein, I propose the following hypotheses regarding the content of candidate interviews on talk show programming:

HYP1: Self-deprecating humor will be the most frequently used type of humor by candidates across all talk show sub-genres.

HYP2: Candidates' use of humor will be more prevalent on late-night comedy programs than on any other talk show sub-genre.

HYP3: Candidates' use of humor will be least prevalent on traditional news interview programs than on any other talk show sub-genre.

HYP4: References to foreign and domestic policy will be most frequent in traditional news interviews than in any of the entertainment-oriented talk show programs.

HYP5: References to domestic or foreign policy will be more frequent on political satire programs than on daytime talk shows or late-night comedy shows.

Because only one of the presidential candidates who participated in interviews during the period of observation here was a women, drawing quantitative evidence about the relationships between candidate sex and humor use is problematic, however, it is fair to pose several research questions regarding the relationship between sex and humor use to be able to begin to explore these relationships.

RQ1: How do male and women candidates vary in their use of humor in a campaign interview setting?

RQ2: Will women candidates be less likely to use self-deprecating humor than their male counterparts?

RQ3: How do male candidates vary their use of humor across various talk show sub-genres?

Table 1. Talk show sub-genres, selected exemplars, and hypothesized content expectations

Content	<u>Traditional</u>	<u>Daytime:</u>	<u>Late Night:</u>	<u>Satire:</u>
	<u>News:</u>	<i>Ellen</i>	<i>Colbert</i>	<i>The Daily Show</i>
	<i>Network News</i>	<i>The View</i>	<i>Fallon</i>	<i>The Nightly</i>
	<i>Bill O'Reilly</i>	<i>The Talk</i>	<i>Kimmel</i>	<i>Show</i>
	<i>Rachel Maddow</i>			<i>Last Week</i>
				<i>Tonight</i>
Policy / Issues	Highest	Lowest	Lowest	High
Overall Humor	Lowest	High	Highest	High
Self-deprecating humor	Low	Highest for High	High	Medium
Other-deprecating humor	High	Medium	Highest	Medium

Chapter 2

METHODS

The programs were obtained through two different collection methods including standard television DVR and online resources from the cable providers. The sample of shows coded range from December 1st to March 1st. The coding scheme first captured the date that the program originally aired. The show itself was coded as the title of the program. The length of the program was coded as the time slot the program takes up, 30 or 60 minutes. The candidate sex was coded as man or women. The candidate party affiliation was coded as Democrat or Republican. The candidate name was coded as the candidates stated name. The candidate issue mentions were coded for the total number overall, and the specific issues themselves.

Coding Policy and Issue Mentions

Issue mentions were broken down into sub sections of foreign policy, education, environment, health, and economy.

Coding Humor

The uses of humor were separated into two different sections: self and other-deprecating humor. The specific inclusion and exclusion regarding what classifies as self- deprecating and other- deprecating humor is defined as follows.

Self-deprecating humor. Self-deprecating humor included any time the speaker

made a joke in which the target of the joke was him or herself, any decisions he/she had made, or anything regarding him or her in a personal nature. When a candidate made multiple self-deprecating comments in succession, each of the comments was coded as individual instances of self-deprecation. When a candidate made a joke that targeted themselves as well as another individual, that was coded separately as one instance of self-deprecation and one instance of other-deprecation.

Other-deprecating humor. Other-deprecating humor was coded when the speaker made a joke in which the target of the joke was anyone other than him/herself. It could be an individual, group, or institution. If a candidate's joke targeted more than one party or individual within a single joke, each individual target of the joke was coded as a separate instance of other-deprecation.

Examples. To provide examples of self-deprecating humor and other-deprecating humor is the following from an interview with Governor Rick Perry on *The Late Show* with David Letterman. This interview followed a disastrous moment for Perry during a primary debate where he forgot the five agencies of government, initially only being able to list three, and then fumbling even with those. On Letterman Perry then proceeded to self-deprecate himself by presenting "The Top 10 Rick Perry Excuses" for forgetting the Department of Energy. Some examples from this list Perry recited include "Actually there were three reasons I messed up last night. One was the nerves, two was the headache and three was, and three, uh, uh. Oops", and "I had a five-hour energy drink six hours before the debate." (Dewberry & Fox 2012)

An example of other-deprecating humor comes from October 16th of the 2012 election during a debate between Mitt Romney and President Obama:

ROMNEY: Mr. President, have you looked at your pension? Have you looked at your pension?

OBAMA: I've got to say...

ROMNEY: Mr. President, have you looked at your pension?

OBAMA: You know; I – I don't look at my pension. It's not as big as yours so it doesn't take as long (ABC News)

An additional example of other-deprecating humor comes from the October 22nd debate of the 2012 election. Gov. Romney's discussion regarding al Qaeda and other terrorist groups prompted the following response from President Obama:

OBAMA: "Gov. Romney, I'm glad that you recognize that al Qaeda is a threat, because a few months ago when you were asked what's the biggest geopolitical threat facing America, you said Russia."

OBAMA: "The 1980s are now calling to ask for their foreign policy back because the Cold War's been over for 20 years," (ABC News)

Reliability Analysis

This study presents the results of a content analysis of the current 2016 presidential candidates and their appearances on various news and talk show programs. The sample of data used for the study was collected from December 1, 2015

to March 1, 2016. A coding instrument was created and implemented by two independent coders to establish reliability. The principal investigator and a second graduate student coder engaged in independent coding of a subsample of twenty of the 34 programs from the dataset. Krippendorff's Alpha of .70 or above was attained for all main constructs of interest, including: total instances of humor, self-deprecating humor, other-deprecating humor, and references to policies and issues. From this information it was concluded that there was strong inter-coder reliability and the content analysis could proceed.

Chapter 3

RESULTS

As illustrated in Table 2, candidates had varied numbers of appearances across the various sub-genres. Overall, Traditional News programs saw the most candidate interviews compared to the more entertainment-oriented shows. Trump, Sanders, and Clinton had the most appearances on the programs coded here, compared to Rubio, Cruz, Carson and others.

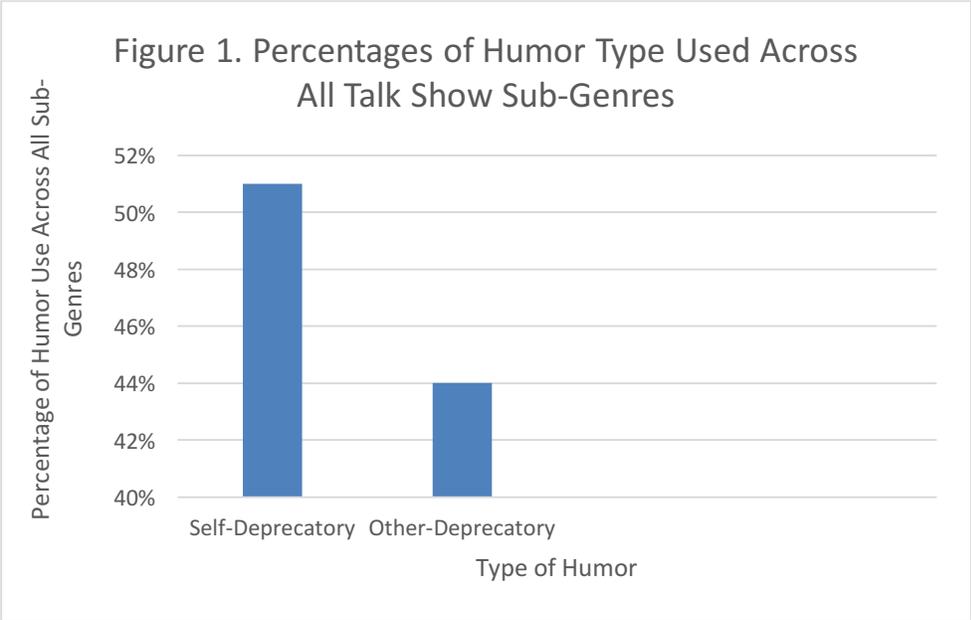
Table 2. Frequency of Appearances by Candidates within Talk Show Sub-Genre

Candidate	Traditional News	Daytime Talk	Political Satire	Late-Night Comedy	Total Interviews
Hillary Clinton	4	1	0	1	6
Bernie Sanders	3	1	1	2	7
Donald Trump	7	0	0	2	8
Marco Rubio	1	0	1	1	3
Ted Cruz	1	0	0	0	1
Ben Carson	2	0	0	0	2

Rand Paul	1	0	1	1	3
Mike Huckabee	0	1	0	0	1
Chris Christie	1	0	0	0	2
Total Interviews Per Sub Genre	22	3	2	7	34

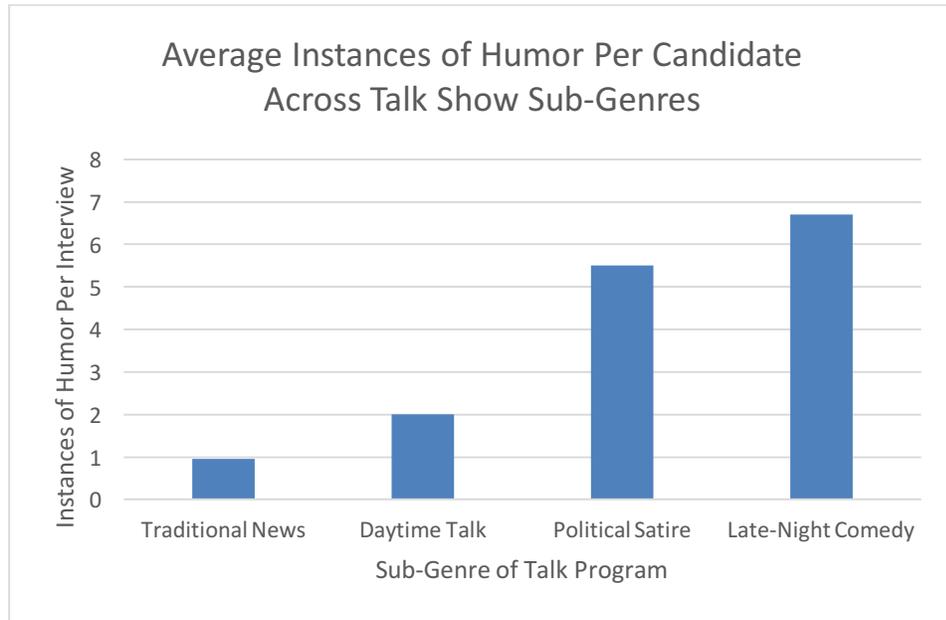
Hypothesis one posited that self-deprecating humor would be the most frequently kind of humor used across the programs

Figure 1: Percentage of Type of Humor Used Across All Talk Show Sub-Genres



This hypothesis was confirmed in the data [See Figure 1]. Self-deprecating humor comprised 51%, or 44 out of 86 of the total instances of humor across programs. Other-deprecating humor comprised 44%, or 38 out of 86 of total instances.

Figure 2: Average Instances of Humor Per Candidate Across Talk Show Sub-Genres



Hypotheses 2 and 3, concerning the frequency of candidate humor on late-night comedy interviews and on traditional news interviews, were both confirmed [See Figure 2]. With Late-night comedy programs having a total of 47 instances of humor and a total of seven candidate appearances, they had 6.71 instances of humor per candidate appearance. This is compared to .95 instances of humor per candidate appearance for Traditional News, 2 instances of humor per candidate appearance for daytime talk programs, and 5.5 instances of humor per candidate appearances for political satire programs.

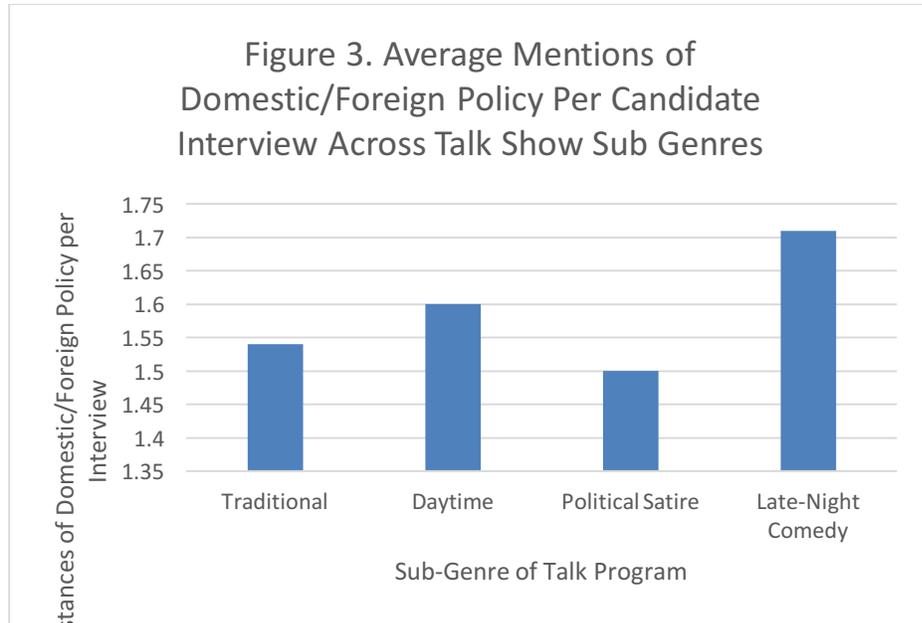
Turning now to the hypotheses 4 and 5 concerning references to foreign and domestic policy, the data do not support either hypothesis regarding the predicting prevalence of policy mentions across talk-show subgenres [see Figure 3]. We had

anticipated that references to foreign and domestic policy would be most frequent in traditional news interviews compared to the other talk show genres. With 7 candidate appearances and 12 domestic/foreign policy mentions, late-night comedy programs had the most total policy mentions per candidate appearance with 1.71 mentions per candidate appearance. Traditional news had 1.54 mentions per candidate appearance, daytime talk had 1.6 mentions per candidate appearance, and political satire had 1.5 mentions per candidate appearance.

Following that, the data also did not support hypothesis 5 [See Figure 5], which posited that references to domestic or foreign policy would be more frequent on political satire programs than on daytime talk show program or late-night talk show programs. Both late-night comedy programs and daytime talk programs had more domestic/foreign policy mentions per candidate appearance than political satire programming.

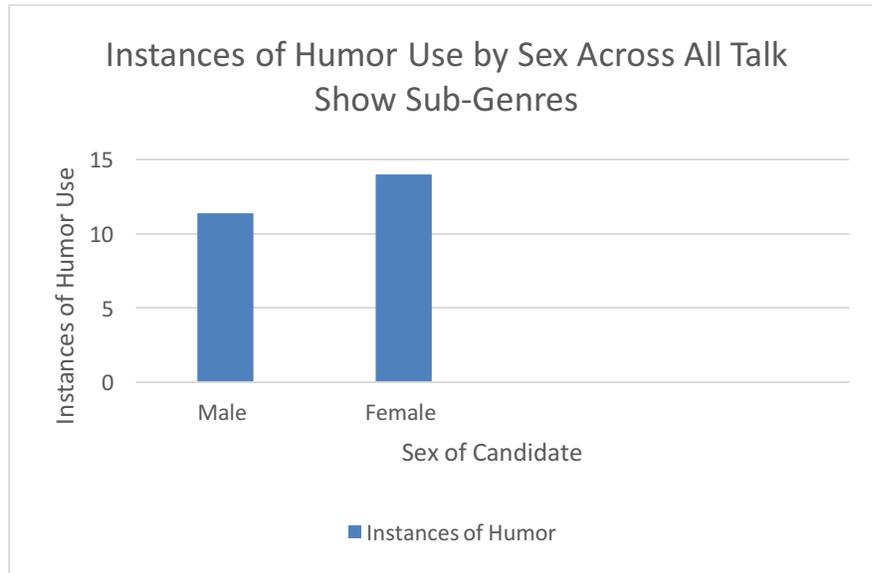
Figure 3: Average Mention of Domestic/Foreign Policy Per Candidate Interview

Across Talk Show Sub-Genres



RQ1 concerned the use of humor as a function of candidate sex. With eight male candidates, their uses of humor across all talk show sub-genres was added and then averaged to find the mean for male candidate humor use overall. This number was then compared to the overall humor use across all talk show sub-genres of Hillary Clinton, the only women candidate to appear. Results [see Figure 4] indicate the men candidates used 11.375 instances of humor on average, compared to 14 instances of humor on average by the one women candidate.

Figure 4: Instances of Humor Use by Sex Across All Talk Show Sub-Genres

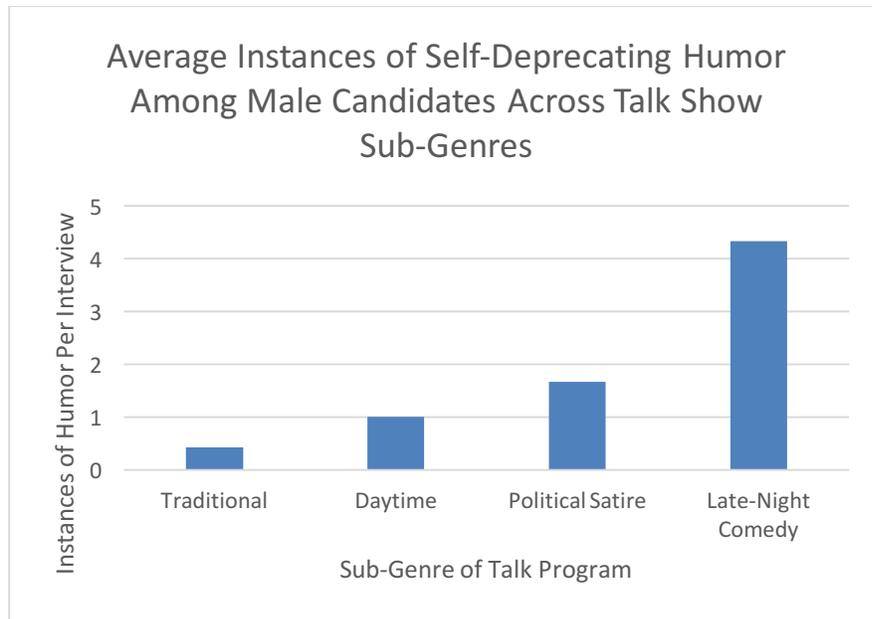


RQ2 concerned the use of self-deprecating humor as a function of candidate sex. It would be logical that women candidates would feel the need to compensate for the fact that they are in a primarily man dominated field, and one of the ways they would achieve this would be through an intentional *lack* of self-deprecation. However, the only women candidate for the purposes of this study, Hillary Clinton, came into the election with a strong political history of serving as a first lady, a senator, and secretary of state. Many of Clinton's critics tend to point out that Hillary lacked traditional feminine qualities and has failed to secure as large a portion of the women vote as expected. During her interviews and talk-show appearances Clinton used twice as much self-deprecating humor, as other-deprecating humor. Despite literature which

would suggest quite the opposite, in this particular case it would seem Hillary's personalization required that she humble herself to appear softer and more caring in the eyes of her potential voters, and potentially dissuade some of the criticisms that she is harsh or lacks empathy.

RQ3 concerned the use of different forms of humor among men candidates across talk-show subgenres. Here we find that man candidates showed an average of 1 instance of self-deprecating humor per daytime talk interview compared to 4.33 instances of self-deprecating humor in late-night, 1.67 instances in satire, and .42 instances in traditional news respectively [see Figure 5].

Figure 5: Average Instances of Self-Deprecating Humor Per Male Candidate Across Talk Show Sub-Genres



One broad observation across these findings, is that these candidates seem to use a variety of humor types across all talk show sub genres. The style of humor used may be tailored to the candidate’s specific personality. For example, Bernie Sanders used self-deprecation more than other kinds of humor, whereas Donald Trump used other-deprecation more than any other kinds of humor. These two candidates have vastly different platforms, and are also in different parties, however they also have completely different temperaments and personal audience appeals. While Donald Trump has often stated that he is “the only one” who can “Make America Great Again,” and makes frequent references to his intellect and business acumen, it would seem incongruous for him to poke fun at himself. It would also undermine his

authority and image as an aggressive and indomitable leader. Sanders, on the other hand, is still seen by some as a political independent. His demeanor is very much for the people and not always party specific. Sanders has also stated explicitly on several occasions he will not run attack campaigns or personally attack his opposing candidates. This presentation aids to Sanders use of self-deprecating humor, as it aligns with his presentation of himself as an everyday American who is attempting to correct current injustices within the political and economic systems and take a stand for those who cannot implement these changes themselves. Again it seems, more so than candidate party or sex, and more so than talk show sub-genre and audience, in this election a candidate's personal system of beliefs, self-presentation, and demeanor seemed to dictate the type of humor a candidate will use across all programs.

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION

This study offers an in-depth examination of the use of humor and extent of policy discussions in candidate interviews across various sub-genres of political talk shows. While scholars have explored general patterns in daytime talk and late-night talk show content, less attention has been paid to the kind of conversations that happen with political candidates when they appear on these different kinds of programs. When this study was initially conceived, we could not have imagined how relevant it would be in the context of the 2016 presidential election. This election cycle has been unlike anything political communication scholars have ever seen – in terms of candidate conduct, the competitive races on *both* sides, and the nature of the political conversation.

This examination has resulted in several noteworthy findings. First is the frequent appearances of candidates across late-night comedy programs and their extensive use of humor within those interviews. Traditional news programs certainly dominated candidate appearances with 22 candidate interviews, compared to 3 candidate appearances on daytime talk, 2 candidate appearances on political satire programming and 7 candidate appearances on late-night comedy

However, within those seven candidate appearances, late-night comedy dominated in regards to candidate use of humor with 47 instances of humor total for an average of 6.71 instances of humor per candidate appearance [See Figure 2]. This is compared to .95 instances of humor per candidate appearance for traditional news, 2

instances of humor per candidate appearance for daytime talk programs, and 5.5 instances of humor per candidate appearances for political satire programs. Late-night comedy also had more humor specifically regarding self-deprecation among male candidates. Male candidates showed an average of 1 instance of self-deprecating humor per daytime talk interview compared to 4.33 instances of self-deprecating humor in late-night, 1.67 instances in satire, and .42 instances in traditional news respectively.

While the extensive use of humor in the late-night comedy candidate interview was anticipated, what was not anticipated were the frequent mentions of foreign and domestic policy in the late-night comedy interview – exceeding even the policy mentions in traditional news interviews [see Figure 3]. When Rand Paul appeared on *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* on January 7th there were several jokes made at the expense of Rand Paul’s hair, boots, and even current standing in the polls. However, there was also dialogue referencing Paul’s views on the other candidates’ stances regarding warfare and foreign policy. In response to previous statements made by Donald Trump at a recent debate Paul stated, “In the last debate there was discussion of the nuclear triad which is missiles by land, by air, and by sea, but the thing is, he seemed to be unaware we even had that. Then, a week later Trump says of course we have a nuclear triad and our biggest problem is we’ve been unwilling to use it enough.” Paul followed this by talking about Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton’s views as well, “Interestingly it’s on both sides. Hillary Clinton wants a no fly zone as well. She’s ready to shoot down Russian planes as well. Hillary Clinton wanted to

topple Gaddafi in Libya. She wants regime change. Should it be America's role in the world to choose who the leaders are of the countries in the Middle East, and has it worked in the past?" said Paul. The interesting back and forth of humor mixed with serious policy conversation flowed seamlessly throughout Paul's entire interview. Just enough that the audience was not focused on 'serious' content for too long, thus maintaining the entertainment standard that is expected of the program.

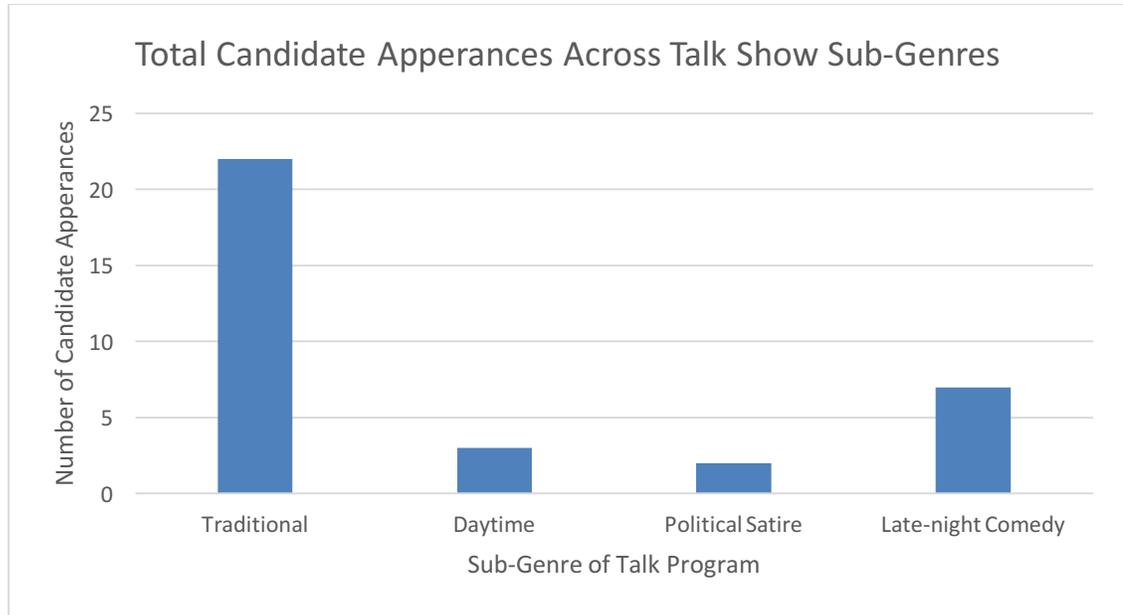
Another great example of the blending of policy and humor comes from an interview with Donald Trump from December 16th on *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* Kimmel addressed Trump directly about his statements earlier that week urging that we ought to have a temporary ban of all Muslims entering the United States. Kimmel – "Isn't it un-American and wrong to discriminate against people based on their religion?" asked Kimmel. Trump responded by saying, "We have people coming into our country that are looking to do tremendous harm. Look what happened in Paris. Look what happened last week in California. I want to find out what the problem is, and what is going on." Again this was a brief mention, just enough to get the audience's attention before the show reverted back to jokes more in-line with its typical entertainment goals.

The last example of late-night comedy coverage of policy comes again from *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*, this time with presidential candidate Bernie Sanders. Colbert started the segment by asking Sanders about recent poll results: "Why do you think the younglings like you?" Sanders embarked on a policy-heavy response, "By definition young people are idealistic. They look at world with so many

problems and they say why not? Why can't all people have health care, why can't we make public universities and colleges tuition free?" Colbert interjected saying "That sounds like class warfare" To which Sanders continued, "We have reached a point in American society where people are very unhappy with the status quo." Although this mention is not as detailed in terms of intent or policy specifics as the previous two, it is certainly focused on domestic policy and not personality. Colbert asked Sanders a broad question that Sanders could have made light of or taken in a more personal direction. Instead, he chose to answer with a policy-based response. These examples highlight that the political content of these programs, particularly late-night comedy, is a resulting combination of the personality and preferences of the host, and what the candidate is choosing to discuss and present to the audience.

The presence of substantial issue content, combined with the high frequency of humor suggests that these late-night programs might be reaching their wide audiences with substantial policy information. This presents an opportunity for scholars to look at the unique impact that these late-night candidate interviews may have on viewers' understanding of issues, and the extent to which such appearances fuel the so-called "Gateway effect" (Baum, 2003), leading viewers to seek additional information on these topics from other media sources.

Figure 6: Total Candidate Appearances Across Talk Show Sub-Genres



The overall number of candidate appearances on traditional news programs was much more frequent than expected [See Figure 6]. Despite the initial idea at the start of this study of candidates aiming to ‘work’ the talk-show circuit, it seems that many candidates were more comfortable using traditional news outlets to achieve the same ends. The high frequency of late-night comedy appearances and traditional news appearances begs the question of how ‘traditional’ are these new outlets that candidates are appearing on. Candidates had a total of 18 instances of humor on traditional news programs, averaging out to roughly 1.1 instance of humor per interview. Despite the fact that we conceptualized these programs as more traditional news programs, candidates certainly engaged in humorous conversation in these programs as well. These frequent appearances in conjunction with humor and banter

seem to be the new political news standard. It may be that these news programs are adapting to changing content demands from their viewers.

However, when looking at the broader picture it seems to all tie back to the concept of personalization. These programs have very different orientations and goals. Late-night comedy programs are generally focused on the candidate not just as a political instrument, but as a person. The content of late night in general tends to center around individuals' personality traits and personal lives. The mention of policy and political platforms are so integrated into these candidates' day-to-day activities that issues and policies are bound to come up in one way or another. In the past the label of entertainment has caused many to dismiss these programs as 'fluffy' or irrelevant in terms of substantive political information, yet in light of the higher number of policy mentions found in late-night comedy than traditional news this is an assumption that may need to be reassessed.

In turn, when looking at the content and political policy mentions of traditional news, this study found it fell short compared to late-night comedy interviews. The reasons for this are likely varied, however, from the observations throughout this content analysis it seems much of the coverage found on traditional news programs is focused on campaign strategy, focus on who is ahead and who is behind, and why a candidate is taking certain steps to reach certain groups and how they are going to "bring up their polling numbers". Television news treats politics as a game (Patterson, 2011). It's competitive nature focuses content on 'defeating' competitors. And in short this game is played solely to amuse the audience (Weaver 1972). The candidates are not there to be

interviewed about themselves personally as individuals. Instead, the interviewer seems to treat them as a cog in the machine of the wider political circus. Questions regarding other candidates, attack ads, and poll numbers are much more frequent than those asking for a candidate to comment on his or her own personal platforms and stances. Therein lies where these programs differ from the talk-show genre. Instead of treating these candidates in the personalized way as the entertainment-oriented shows do, the news programs are more likely to treat the candidates as products of the spectacle. For future research it would interesting to explore the changing norms for ‘traditional’ news in conjunction with what viewers are demanding in such a high energy, high stake, election year.

As mentioned earlier regarding the research question about types of humor use in relation to sub-genre, it would appear that the nature of the humor used by candidates is more a function of candidate personality and style than about talk show sub-genre. Take again for example Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton. Clinton was the only women candidate during the selected span of this study for this election cycle. However, many of the expected predictions regarding women candidates and humor use did not hold true with the results we found. Hillary Clinton did not avoid self-deprecating humor as expected but in fact used it the most. The reasons for this we believe lie in the context surrounding Clinton’s campaign. Clinton is a well-established political figure as she has already served as a first lady to President Bill Clinton for two terms, a Senator, and is currently the U.S. Secretary of State. In accordance with these positions of power Clinton has created an image of

determination and strength that she has continued to embody throughout her campaign. This image may also be responsible for a recent increase in “unfavorable” ratings in recent polling data. Data from April, 7th 2016 shows Clinton’s unfavorable rating at 55.2%, compared to October 2015 when Clinton was holding steady at 50% (Huffington Post 2016). Clinton may have chosen (or been advised to) use self-deprecating humor to soften her personal image to appeal to voters. In addition, Clinton’s campaign has been operating in the shadow of the email server scandal. Clinton used a personal email server during her time as Secretary of State to receive and respond to classified emails that could have leaked classified and potentially dangerous information to terrorist organizations if the server was to be hacked. Such scandals can sometimes be neutralized through successful use of self-deprecating humor. Indeed, Clinton appeared to be attempting to do just that. During one of the interviews coded during this study on January 15th, 2016, Clinton appeared on *The Tonight Show* with Jimmy Fallon, where she was mocked about the emails by Fallon who said, “Is there an email address we can reach you on?” Clinton laughed and shook his hand.

Chapter 5

LIMITATIONS/LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

One of the biggest limitations of this study is the lack of prior data. Many of the trends observed and conclusions drawn may be unique to this specific campaign at this time with these particular candidates. Without additional elections to serve as baselines or comparisons, it is difficult to know which findings illustrate broader trends and which are just anomalies, unique to this campaign and these candidates. However, this examination presents numerous research opportunities when looking to the future. In elections to come it will be interesting to see how candidates' use of humor and talk-show appearances fluctuate and change compared to the 2016 election. Additionally, it will be interesting to observe the uses of humor and media appearances and humor uses of whomever is next elected president.

The lack of diversity in the candidate pool is another limitation of this study.

Conclusions drawn about the role played by candidate sex when only one candidate is a woman are certainly not admissible. Again, in elections to come it will be interesting to observe changes or fluctuations in regards to the use of humor as a function of candidate sex. Finally, with only 34 total candidate interviews during this three-month period, we are limited in our ability to generalize to some broader phenomena.

However, this study certainly established a model and baseline upon which other scholars could build to determine trends and broader dynamics.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

This project has contributed in novel ways to the literature explored at the beginning of the study. The first and foremost contribution is the potential for future media effects studies to build upon the results of the content analysis of the interviews conducted during this time span. This study has provided the groundwork and specific quantitative evidence to help scholars understand how presidential candidates are approaching these talk show sub-genres and also how they are interacting with their hosts, and the image they are presenting to the audience.

The results of this study have the potential to open several new avenues of research, and provide opportunities to address new questions such as, ‘to what extent is a candidates’ use of humor a function of their individual personality traits, and is there a way to assess the personality of other leaders and public figures’? Within the sub genres specifically this study found that there were higher than expected mentions of policy and political content on programs like late-night comedy, and less mentions than expected on the interviews conducted within traditional news programs. Again, this provides the chance for future research to explore what exactly is being discussed on these traditional news programs, if not policy content, and if there is a correlation to this lack of content and the horse race style election coverage that has become so common in broadcast news.

Ultimately, this study leaves researchers with a roadmap to begin to assess what impact this content may have on the American public. Democratically, is the

personalization of political candidates and the mixing of substance and humor beneficial to voters, or does it just add to the current political spectacle? Following that, what does this study say overall about the informative nature of news; how much substantial and pertinent information are viewers obtaining and retaining when they watch candidate appearances on such programs? It is our hope that this analysis sets the stage for a series of evidence-based and theory-driven analyses about the influence of such content on individuals and American politics.

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