

The Daily Show Effect:
Humor, News, Knowledge and Viewers
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ABSTRACT

What happens when the “news” is presented in an amusing format? *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* is the result of the merging of several entertainment programming trends, notably the news satire format and the talk show format. *The Daily Show*'s unique formatting raises these questions for examination: What exactly is the political content of the program and who is the audience absorbing this content? Who consumes *The Daily Show* and what specifically are they consuming? For decades now, the youngest segment of the American public has been losing interest in the traditional sources of news. While their disinterest in traditional news has grown, they have shown themselves willing to consume news information from different sources. One of the most interesting new sources of news is the late-night comedy TV show. Because these programs have the potential to become important sources of news, it is important to see whether they are agenda setting for their audiences.

Using two media consumption surveys, this project first constructs a political profile of the audience and then, through a statistical analysis of the guest list of the program, determines whether the audience's political viewpoint is correlated with the majority of the show's political guests. I found that *The Daily Show* audience is younger, liberal, and leans toward the Democratic party. But the guest list of the program betrays no favoritism to Democrats or Republicans or liberals or conservatives. While a review of the guest list over time leads to the conclusion that the program is increasing its numbers of political guests, the host and executive producer Jon Stewart is not stacking the program with guests of one political type.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“A lot of television viewers—more, quite frankly, than I am comfortable with—get their news from [...] *The Daily Show*.” — *Ted Koppel to Jon Stewart, Nightline July 28, 2004*

For decades now, the youngest segment of the American public has been losing interest in the news. Surveys of media usage for people ages 18 to 29 show they consume traditional news media—newspapers and network news programs—at much lower rates than either their parents or grandparents (Pew Research Center 2000, Pew Research Center 2004). This has led to concerns voiced by political scholars and politicians alike as to where this segment of society is getting their news and where they will get their news when they are older. The youngest generation’s general disinterest in political news from an early age lends itself to the belief that this is the cause for decreasing levels of voting across generations because, as the youngest age, they do not gain an interest in news or politics (Patterson 2002). This disinterest creates patterns of non-traditional news followers who do not watch the nightly news and do not read newspapers. To many, this is a cause for concern. A view of democracy, dating back to the Progressive era, cites that the cornerstone of American democracy presupposes that there is an informed citizenry. Even our country’s founding forefathers waxed eloquent about the role of newspapers, i.e. news, in their society. An uninformed citizen is one who cannot guide the actions of their government. In any case those who do not follow the news regularly are far less likely to vote (Patterson 2002).

When this country was founded there existed only one news format: print, specifically in the form of newspapers and pamphlets. As technology developed and evolved so have news media forums changed, grown, and expanded. Broadcasting, beginning with radio frequencies, then later network television and cable television, all became forums for news. However, as the news media have expanded they have also fractured into thousands of different audiences. Whereas a generation ago Americans’ primary sources of news were limited to the daily

newspaper and the local and national evening news broadcasts on one of the three networks, today there is a plethora of news source choices. The burgeoning “new media” has been best defined by Richard Davis and Diana Owen as, “mass communication forms with primarily nonpolitical origins that have acquired political roles” (Davis and Owen 1998, 7).

Among these new forms is the late-night talk show. The late-night talk show generally has both comedic and interview components to it. In 2004, The Pew Research Center for People and the Press released a survey containing a widely reported fact that 21% of people ages 18 to 29 reported they regularly learned some news about political candidates or the 2004 presidential campaign from “comedy TV shows” and 13% reported the same of “late-night TV shows” (Pew Research Center 2004). This survey finding produced a flurry of hand-wringing from news pundits, as if the survey respondents said they were getting all of their daily news from the backs of cereal boxes. Some even misunderstood the survey findings, assuming they meant that respondents were *primarily* or *solely* getting their news from late-night comics. Pew’s survey question only asked if the respondent ever learned anything from that type of program, and, if so, how often they learned something. “Do you ever learn anything” is a far cry from “where do you get all your news?”

What is surprising about the Pew survey results however, is how unsurprising they should be to those who pay attention to those comedy TV shows and to news programs in their current incarnations. Originally, talk shows were mostly devoid of political content and, although hosts from Jack Paar to Johnny Carson were not averse to making jokes about politicians, the nature of the content was not overtly politicized. Few researchers prior to the 1990s studied whether audiences claimed they “learned” news from the jokes of late-night comedians. The turning point for talk shows is usually cited as beginning with the 1992 presidential election when Bill Clinton appeared on the *Arsenio Hall Show* while still a candidate. Clinton was the first serious candidate to make a campaign appearance on an entertainment TV show. Since 1992, presidential

candidates have frequently made appearances on TV shows that are not traditional forums for political discussion, shows as diverse as *Oprah*, *Dr. Phil*, *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*, *Late Night with David Letterman* and *Saturday Night Live*. Communications researcher Jeffrey Jones, in *Entertaining Politics*, argues that since the late 1990s there has been a growth of new political entertainment programming that has expanded the boundaries of political discourse beyond a time where politicians would appear occasionally on a popular entertainment program. Jones cites the creations of programs such as *Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher*, *Dennis Miller Live* and *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* as creating a new hybrid of political and entertainment programming. Unlike some cultural critics who wish to divide political discourse into serious and frivolous categories (Postman 1986), Jones views this development as an expansion of the political realm but one which allows other voices beyond the so-called experts to engage in political talk in a language that is common to average Americans. “Comedian-hosts with a different license to speak offer political critiques beyond the scope of what news and pundit political talk have previously imagined” (Jones 2005, 14).

Of the three shows Jones examined in his 2005 study, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* is a particularly interesting example. While the skit comedy of *Saturday Night Live (SNL)* has come under increasing interest for its effects on the public’s perceptions of candidates, the program airs late at night on a weekend and is limited to 40 episodes a year, with only a small portion of the weekly program strictly dedicated to political and/or current event humor.

By contrast, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*—which by 2005 has seen six and a half seasons with host Jon Stewart and is in its ninth year of programming overall—produces between 158–161 half-hour, original episodes a year. These shows are broadcast four times a week on the cable network Comedy Central with original episodes showing at 11:00 p.m. Monday through Thursday with multiple rebroadcasts throughout the following day. These rebroadcasts provide viewers who do not stay up late watching TV the ability to watch the

original program while it is still timely. While *SNL*, *The Tonight Show*, and *The Late Show* devote only a small portion of their programs to topical humor, nearly all of the content of *The Daily Show* centers around current events, including, as this study will research, the guest interviews.

The format of *The Daily Show* is the result of the merging of several entertainment programming trends, notably the news satire format and the talk show format. Some commentators, and even *The Daily Show*'s original creators, have called it a news *parody* rather than a news *satire* program while cast members have referred to it as both. News parody would be better described as creating false events to highlight the absurdities of real events, which is not a joke tactic often used by *The Daily Show*. However, parsing the difference between parody and satire is notoriously difficult. A literary debate trying to differentiate between the two types of humor has existed for some time. In his footnotes, Jones (2005, 225) dispatches with the distinction this way: "Entering the debates over literary forms of comedic presentation seems unproductive here, as scholars have devoted entire tracts to these debates, often beginning and ending their search in frustration." Heedful of Jones' advice, I will therefore define the humor produced by *The Daily Show* as satire, which is, according to *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*, "irony, sarcasm, or caustic wit used to attack or expose folly, vice, or stupidity."

News satire, specifically broadcast news satire, has existed in many different programs as either the basis for an entire program, as in HBO's *Not Necessarily the News*, Canada's *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*, or in small segments on regular comedy programs such as *SNL*'s "Weekend Update" — a part of the show which has been a staple since its inception. The broadcast news satire mimics the conventions of a traditional nightly news broadcast with the image of an "anchor" sitting at the desk reading the news with a graphic over and behind his left shoulder. Of course the anchor is not a reporter or an anchorperson, but a comedian who may be

describing real or fake events in a satirical manner so as to invoke the original “true” version in the minds of the audience. Meanwhile the talk show format, which has also been a staple of television programming, contains the usual elements of a couch, a host and an interviewee. Depending on the format of the show, interviews can be serious, silly or even absurdist as in MTV’s *The Tom Green Show*. *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*¹ represents a hybrid of the news satire and the talk show format, with half to two-thirds of the program devoted to news satire and half to one-third devoted to the interview segments with guests.

What is interesting about *The Daily Show* is that it mimics the conventions of a “real” evening news broadcast, both in the opening title credits and the standard anchor-and-desk-with-graphic, so well that perhaps there isn’t any real difference between what Stewart does and what “real” anchors do. French Philosopher Jean Baudrillard, in essay “Simulacra and Simulations,” (1988) theorizes that we live in a world of simulation, where one cannot tell the difference between the real and simulated. Jon Stewart fakes the news so well that it might as well be real. One question to pose in aping the conventions of the evening news program, is whether some of the respectability in those conventions is transferred to the program? While Jon Stewart repeatedly refers to his program as a “fake news” show he does not actually create false events to highlight the absurdities of real events, but instead uses real events and images in most of his jokes. The satirical newspaper *The Onion* is perhaps a better example of creating false news stories out of whole cloth. The *modus operandi* of *The Daily Show*’s humor is to use real news footage, often obtained from cable news networks, incorporated with the show’s writers’ interpretive spin on the event. These observations (jokes) may also be sharp and biting, as good political satire should be.

¹ The Daily Show’s original host was Craig Kilborn. Entertainment press coverage of the program has noted there were distinct stylistic differences between Jon Stewart’s, who took over the program in 1999, and Kilborn’s envisioning of the program. This paper will examine some of those differences but from this point all references to *The Daily Show* will refer to the period during which Jon Stewart is host unless otherwise noted.

The similarities between *The Daily Show's* so-called fake news and actual news programs are difficult to ignore. The difference between what is shown on the evening news programs and what is presented on *The Daily Show* often seems only different in tone and style, not of substance. Researcher Diana Mutz of the University of Pennsylvania performed an interesting experiment. Mutz showed one clip of *The Daily Show* to two different groups, telling one they were about to see a clip from a *comedy show* and the other they were about to see a clip from a *news program*. She removed certain cues, such as audience laughter, which would have betrayed the nature of the program. She asked whether the same information, presented in the same form, would have less influence if presented as comedy opposed to news. Her conclusions were that it would not; the impact on the audience was nearly identical (Mutz 2004). This was only a small study however and its conclusions need to be tested further but it is suggestive of the power of the comedy in conveying information, particularly in a format that closely resembles a news program.

Certainly there are cues on both news and comedy programs that the viewer is watching a serious program or a funny one. But the interpretation of the viewer's reaction to the content, in light of those cues, is an excellent topic for research as entertainment, media and news delivery are indelibly intertwined.

What happens when the "news" is presented in an amusing format? *The Daily Show's* unique formatting raises these questions for examination: What exactly is the political content of the program and who is the audience absorbing this content? Who consumes *The Daily Show* and what specifically are they consuming? Are viewers of *The Daily Show* learning from the program or are they seeking amusement and alternative interpretations of news text that a satirist can provide? Sociologist researchers Elihu Katz and Jay Blumler (1974) advanced the theory of uses and gratifications, which furthers the idea that audiences are not just passive viewers of media. Audiences seek out certain texts (be it comedy, drama, news, etc.) for their own purposes. Rather

than the media acting upon them, audiences are active participants, taking from texts what they want and discarding viewpoints that are otherwise undesirable. If the program is unbound by conventional news conventions of “fairness” and “balance” to all viewpoints—which is an epistemology in and of itself in the news business—what slant would Stewart bring to his vision of the program?

This project will research all of these questions through various content analyses, public surveys, and statistical analysis. I will examine the political profile of *The Daily Show*'s audience as well as the ideological and partisan slant of the program's guest list. I chose to study the guest list of the program because an examination of the guest appearances on entertaining talk shows is one that is long overdue. Most media studies about entertainment talk shows have up until now mainly focused on presidential or candidate appearances. *The Daily Show* has been regularly booking guests from the world of politics well outside of the few appearances by presidential candidates. If the show was attempting to agenda set, as the term is used to apply to the news media (McCombs and Shaw 1972), the guest list would be one method of accomplishing this goal.

H₁: The audience of *The Daily Show* politically leans more towards the Democrats than towards the Republicans.

H₂: The audience of *The Daily Show* is politically more liberal in the aggregate than the aggregated American population.

H₃: The guest list of *The Daily Show* favors Democrats over Republicans.

H₄: The guest list of *The Daily Show* favors guests with left-of-center views over guests with right-of-center views.

H₅: There is a correlation between the political and ideological views of the audience of *The Daily Show* and the majority of the political guests of the program.

Ted Koppel's line to Jon Stewart while on *Nightline* is an example of the nervousness felt by older media personalities towards Stewart's rise in stature, not just as a celebrity, but as a

potential rival in the news business. Perhaps it was not shocking when Les Moonves, the co-chief executive of Viacom, which owns both CBS and Comedy Central, publicly speculated in January 2005 about Jon Stewart taking over outgoing CBS *News* anchor Dan Rather's job, even on a part-time basis. Although Moonves eventually backed off from the speculation, the fact that this was even considered within the bounds of normalcy to have a comedian move into Rather's position speaks volumes about the position of authority Stewart might hold. Had Moonves mentioned any other talk show host or comedian, such as David Letterman who is also a CBS employee, would the reaction have been the same? That David Letterman is not an anchorman might seem obvious to Moonves, but whether Stewart is or is not an anchorman seems a bit unclear. Stewart has said that he is not bound by the conventions of the news room. But he also strenuously denies that his audience is "getting" their news from him, assuming that the jokes on his show require pre-knowledge of events to understand them. While this project will not demonstrate a causal effect between watching *The Daily Show* and increased knowledge of news and politics, it will examine whether there is a correlation between those two variables.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Why study one entertainment television show, especially one in which its host regularly advises his viewers not to take it seriously? Furthermore, why study entertainment television at all for political messages? We study entertainment TV, as well as the news, in part because early in the twentieth century mass media technologies were considered powerful with almost frightening abilities of persuasion. The radio and television were thought to have direct and immediate impact on their audiences, with messages shot directly to the brain like a hypodermic needle (Lasswell 1927). This theory (the “hypodermic needle theory”) espoused the idea that audiences were passive receptors, swallowing any media message given to them. This was thought to be specifically true for young people, who were the first subjects thought at risk for such direct influence by media messages. Some of the first studies of media effects, the Payne Fund studies, were studies conducted between 1929 and 1932, and eight volumes published between 1933 and 1935. These were studies commissioned to examine whether there was a direct impact on how movies affected children’s sleep, attitudes, and conduct and whether there was a link between movie attendance and delinquent behavior (Mintz 1997). While the studies’ methodology was considered crude, they were the first attempts to ground cultural criticism of media in a social scientific methodology. This new technology, motion pictures, was feared to have a negative impact on youths and the Payne Fund studies seemed to confirm to many at the time this notion of the educational properties of entertainment.

However this first theory of media reception was thought to be a simplistic explanation of media effects. Work by other researchers showed that there are other factors in play as to how media messages are received, particularly when it came to issues of politics (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet 1944; Katz & Lazarsfeld 1955). Interpersonal relationships impacted how political messages were received, as well as the political knowledge and interest of the recipient. A strange unknown voice telling the audience to “Vote Jones” was not particularly successful at

convincing the receiver to “Vote Jones” in and of itself. Instead, “opinion-leaders” — those whom the receiver held in high regard — delivering the same message might have more impact. “Opinion-leaders” has turned out to be a very flexible category. The person might be a trusted friend, or a local church leader, or possibly a TV personality. The defining characteristic, however, is whether the opinion-leader is trusted by the recipient. This theory, called two-step flow, was first devised by Lazarsfeld in relation to vote choice but has been applied to other areas of persuasion.

Traditionally, comedians have long denied that their jokes or words have any impact on their audience’s political viewpoints, essentially denying that they are opinion-leaders. Jay Leno, host of *The Tonight Show* asserts, “You don’t change everybody’s mind. You just reinforce what people already believe” (Levin 2000). For his part, Jon Stewart often denies any impact his show may have on either the presidential race or on votes, stating time and again that his program is “fake news.”

I don’t think it’s possible [for young people to get much of their news from *The Daily Show*]. We’re on Channel 45—in New York! Literally on the remote-control journey you could absorb more news than you would get from our show...Our politics are fueled by comedy. We’re not a power base in any way. Our show is so reactionary, it’s hard to imagine us stimulating the debate (Peyser 2003).

The more powers of influence the popular press (Sella 2000) wishes to confer to comedians the more strenuously comedians deny any links between their program’s and their audience’s viewpoints (Davis and Owen 1998).

Probably without knowing it, these comedy hosts are espousing their own “minimal effects theory” of media. After the hypodermic needle theory of media effects were thought to be incorrect, or at least inelegant, communications scholars revised theories, arguing that mass media actually had only minimal effects (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944) or limited effects (Klapper 1960) on receivers’ choices of voting. Even though attitudes towards media have continued to swing between those points — total, none, or some—the effect of

entertainment media, especially their effects on attitudes beyond simple vote choice during elections, is not well documented because tracing such direct effects is notoriously difficult to support. Nevertheless, as the electronic mass media, and particularly as television, have developed, the relationship between audience and receiver has been reinterpreted. Other theories attempted to move away from the idea that audiences were passive receptors of media messages and theorize different mechanisms for the effects of viewing media.

The uses and gratifications theory, proposed by Elihu Katz and Jay Blumler (1974), suggests that people consciously select their television viewing choices based on what use they are looking for. They may desire a diversion or seek escapism, or they may watch a program specifically to be informed (surveillance). When an individual chooses a program to watch, whether it's a drama such as *Law & Order*, or a news program such as *60 Minutes*, they are actively selecting what they want from each program. If they receive what they expect from a program—are gratified by it—they will continue to tune in and develop a habit of watching. It is in this way that the choices are shaping the individual rather than the media. This is not to say that a program has a rigid definition of what its “use” should be. While one individual might watch *Law & Order* as escapism or for diversion, another individual, perhaps one looking to see examples of “the law” in action, might view the program for guidance and information about court room behavior. What is important about uses and gratification theory is that the audience brings themselves to their interpretation of the text.

Other media theories suggest that media texts, regardless of why they are chosen, can effect the audience's perception of issues. This is particularly true of news media which individuals might choose specifically because they are looking for information as to what is important to know. Agenda setting theory suggests that journalists, in selecting and highlighting certain stories, determine what issues are important. By selecting some topics over others, those selected topics then become important to the public (McCombs and Shaw 1972). In the famous

words of McCombs and Shaw, “the mass media may not be successful in telling us what to think, but they are stunningly successful in telling us what to think about” (McCombs and Shaw 1972, 176).

Other researchers have delved into how agenda settings mechanisms might work. Shanto Iyengar and Donald Kinder ran experiments on participants by having them watch news programs that had been tampered with. They showed subjects news stories that had not been recently aired mixed in with news that had been broadcast the night before. From the experiments, Iyengar and Kinder concluded that “television news shapes the American public’s political priorities” (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987, 33). News stories “prime” audiences into thinking more about those topics.

The audience’s characteristics are important; the agenda–setting effects are most immediately apparent on people directly affected by the problem covered; but political partisans, interested and active in politics, are less willing than politically indifferent viewers to accept television news’ agenda. (Paletz, 2002, 158)

“Priming” posits that when viewers are shown issues they give more weight to that issue.

Priming has the most effect:

When the news frames a problem as if it were the president’s business, when viewers are prepared to regard the problem as important, and when they see the problem as entangled in the duties and obligation of the presidency. (Iyengar and Kinder 1987, 97)

In addition to priming, the “framing” of issues becomes an important aspect of agenda setting. Iyengar says that how issues are presented in the news also effects how the public considers the issues. He suggests that television news frames issues in two ways: episodic and thematic. In episodic framing, events are not placed in any context. In thematic framing, events are placed in the context of “collective outcomes, public policy debates or historical trends” (Iyengar 1991, 18). Of the two, Iyengar says that episodic framing is far more common, and has the impact of encouraging viewers to blame problems on individuals. This, in Iyengar’s thinking, diverts blame from governments and institutions and weakens political accountability.

Beyond Traditional News

If at one time “news” was defined by those stories selected by the daily newspaper and the evening news (both local and national) broadcasts, this strict definition has been shifting for some time. New technologies and new formats have become additional sources of information. These so-called “new media” are fundamentally different from their “old” media brethren. But what is “new media?” Researchers Richard Davis and Diana Owen say:

New media are mass communications forms with primarily nonpolitical origins that have acquired political roles. These roles need not be largely political in nature; in some instances they are only tangentially so. What distinguishes these communication forms from more traditional ones, such as newspapers and nightly television news, is the degree to which they offer political discussion opportunities that attract public officials, candidates, citizens, and even members of the mainstream press corps. (Davis and Owen 1998, 7)

Just as news has a flexible definition, so to does the news forum. New media forums have included old technologies such as radio and television, but also new technologies including the internet.

What defines “new media” isn’t necessarily the technology but the spread of the news format into a forum that, traditionally, had not been considered a news format. Throughout the 1990s, talk radio grew increasingly prominent, several news cable networks were launched, and the internet became a new technology for distributing, sending, and receiving news information. However, in addition to the wholesale creation of modern news programming, politics began to cross the divide from serious programming to lighter fare.

Certainly this development occurred in baby steps. While President Nixon appeared on television’s *Rowan & Martin’s Laugh-In* on September 16, 1968, his first appearance only lasted 4 seconds, just enough time to deliver one signature line (Kolbert 2004). Jimmy Carter gave an interview to *Playboy Magazine* which appeared in their November 1976 issue. Vice President Dan Quayle appeared on the CBS sitcom *Major Dad* in November 1990 as himself with a few speaking lines. Over time, politicians found new media forums in which to appear. Davis and Owen theorize that politicians moved to appear in new media forums because the traditional media became far

more critical a forum. In addition, the traditional media were increasingly shortening the sound bites and quotes from politicians while inserting their own voice and interpretation of events for that of the politicians (Farnsworth and Lichter 2002). In response, politicians sought to find “friendlier” forums in which to present their viewpoints, or themselves, in a better light.

While Nixon was not presenting a viewpoint on *Laugh-In*, his appearance on the comedy program was an attempt to soften his image. The presidential election of 1992 is often cited as the watershed moment when politics began to cross over into new media formats on a more permanent and substantial basis. Bill Clinton not only appeared on *The Arsenio Hall Show* as a primary candidate but on MTV’s *Choose or Lose* program during the general election. In the 2000 election, George W. Bush and Al Gore appeared in numerous entertainment television show formats, including *The Late Show*, *Oprah*, and on *Saturday Night Live* in a joint appearance. Each successive presidential election has shown candidates appearing in more TV shows and more diverse types of programming. The purpose of these visits to non-traditional media was two-fold; one goal would have been to soften their character traits in the formatting of a non-critical program, the other was to gain exposure to a group of potential voters who are less likely to seek out candidate appearances and political information from other sources (Pew Research Center 2000). Dannagal Goldthwaite, who studied priming effects of candidate appearances on late-night comedy programs during the 2000 election, writes that “late-night comedy is not simply an alternative source of political information. Rather, it is a form of political information that requires participation of the receiver to construct its meaning” (Goldthwaite 2002). Goldthwaite quotes humor theorist Arthur Koestler that the audience of a joke “must bridge [the] logical gap by inserting the missing links” (Goldthwaite 2002). In order to “get” a joke, the central idea of the candidate or the political idea must be boiled down to a “simplified, often exaggerated” point (Goldthwaite 2002). When repeated and overemphasized, these simplifications can be unfair to the politicians. Even the political comics understand this point.

Daily Show correspondent Stephen Colbert discussed this aspect with comedian Drew Carey on a comedy panel about political humor.

CAREY: When comics define – when somebody makes fun of you, even personally – if somebody ever makes fun of you, they’re pointing out a truth that maybe whether you want to acknowledge that truth or not, when they point to you and say, “hey, your hair is blah,” you know, they know – let everybody else know and they’re telling you, and that’s why everybody laughs. Because nobody will laugh at something if it’s not true.

COLBERT: Two plus two equals four...hilarious. Two plus two equals five...not funny. [laughter]

CAREY: You can’t define – you can’t define a candidate more than what – sounds like they’re making up stuff about a candidate and it’s sticking to him and they can’t do anything about it.... They’re just pointing out something true about the guy.

COLBERT: Yeah, but it can also be...it can also be something of absolutely no substance or importance whatsoever.²

Most empirical research studies regarding media effects have tended to be centered on the impact of advertising, campaign advertising, or news programming on its audience. Studies of the effects of political satire on public opinion have been relatively rare up until this point, although a growing body of research has been gathering since the 2000 election. Goldthwaite (2002) found a limited effect of exposure to late-night comedy as the effects were tempered by how politically knowledgeable the person was. The more politically-knowledgeable, the less impact political jokes on late-night had in effecting the recipient’s view of the candidate.

Researchers David Niven, S. Robert Lichter and Daniel Amundson examined five years of jokes told on four network late-night comedy talk shows—Leno, Letterman, Conan O’Brien and Bill Maher—between 1996 and 2000. They found that “late night humor is heavily centered on the president and top presidential contenders...and that the humor is generally devoid of issue content” (Niven, Lichter and Amundson 2003, 118). In addition, several other findings by Niven, Lichter and Amundson are important to note for this study. The researchers found that candidate

² U.S. Comedy Arts Festival. Panel “Who’s Funnier—The Left or The Right?” March 6, 2004. From transcript.

appearances on the programs did not affect the number or tone of jokes told before or after the candidate appearances but strangely they make no comment as to the jokes told during the candidate appearances (Niven, Lichter and Amundson 2003, 129). Whether jokes told during candidate appearances were equally critical, these appearances still likely served an important purpose for the candidates, a forum in which to present their views to a segment of the voters.

We ... see the reality that presidential candidates were afforded more time to speak in their own words on late night talk shows than on an average month's worth of evening news coverage during the 2000 campaign season (Niven, Lichter and Amundson 2003, 130-131).

On these four network programs, Niven et al, found that for the most part political humor was very narrowly focused, with scant attention paid to either the legislative or judicial branches of the federal government and hardly any mentions of state or local governments at all. Furthermore what jokes there were about politicians seemed to follow a kind of "template of antipolitician humor that [comedians] can draw upon whenever a political figure gains their attention" (Niven, Lichter and Amundson 2003, 127). A comedy writer for David Letterman almost confirms this theory when talking about George W. Bush becoming better known as a person while campaigning in 2000.

It's been fascinating to watch the character of Bush develop. Eventually he started making these gaffes—and we realized, he's the dumb guy. There's no better cliché than the Dumb Guy. We can plug that into *any* formula (Sella 2000).

Nearly all of content analyses of the political humor of late-night comedians involved studying the jokes on network television. While this is surely because network television, as opposed to cable television, has a much larger audience and therefore greater potential for media influence on elections, whether these findings can be applied to cable TV shows is uncertain. Cable TV audiences are traditionally only a fraction of the size of networks'. Indeed the *Daily Show's* average audience is 1.1 million³ a night during the

³ All Your TV, "Best Night Ever for The Daily Show," October 1, 2004. <http://allyourtv.com/latestratings/index.php?p=41> (accessed April 25, 2005).

ninth season⁴ while Jay Leno and David Letterman roughly draw between 4-6 million a night. Because cable TV often caters to niche audiences, the political humor on the *Daily Show* could be categorically different than political jokes studied previously. After examining *The Daily Show's* history and content in Chapters 3 and 4, Chapter 5 will examine prior content analyses of the jokes of the program.

In the next chapter I will examine the political viewpoint of the writers and performers on *The Daily Show*, as well as trace the history of the program to discover how such a genre-bending show came to be.

⁴ During certain special events, *The Daily Show's* has reported ratings that come much closer to approximating the numbers of network television. For example, the single largest reported audience for a *Daily Show* episode was September 30, 2004 when *The Daily Show* ran a live program after the first presidential debate. The episode drew 2.4 million viewers.

Chapter 3: History and Politics of The Daily Show

Before this research delves too deeply into the actual content of *The Daily Show*, we should look into the history of the program as well as how the show's producers, writers, and comedic performers view the role of political comedy. A brief look into the formation and history of *The Daily Show* reveals that the program took time to evolve into the incarnation presented in the ninth season.

The first question to pose is how and why Comedy Central became a network that was open to the types of topical satire that *The Daily Show* presents? In his examination of political comedy programs, *Entertaining Politics*, researcher Jeffrey Jones writes that that basic cable network Comedy Central embraced political humor as a way of producing new but cheap programming for the fledgling network. In the early 1990s two comedy networks were launched in short succession. In November 1989, Time Warner, through its subsidiary HBO, launched The Comedy Channel. Then in April 1990, Viacom created the HA! TV Comedy Network (Jones 2005, 64). But by January 1991 the two networks had merged to create the newly dubbed "Comedy Central." Jones quotes the executive producer of *Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher*, Scott Carter.

There was the sort of spilling out of, well, 'what's the new channel going to be,' and it took a couple of years for a sense of vision to develop...There was that effort...of moving to 'how do we react to what's going on so this doesn't seem to be twenty-four hours [sic] of reruns of *The Phil Silvers Show* or *Mary Tyler Moore* or something? You can get that anywhere. How is this different? (Jones 2005, 65)

New programming was needed, but it had to be cost-effective. The traditional situational comedies would be too expensive and risky for the new comedy network to produce so programming was made to find "the comical within the everyday" (Jones 2005, 65). One of the first attempts at this type of topical comedy was when the network had comedians offer commentary during President George H. W. Bush's 1992 State of the Union address (Jones, 65). Rather than the traditional commentary offered by straight-laced pundits and news media talking

heads, this commentary was funny, if not absurd. It was a success, which the channel followed by offering four nights of coverage of the Democratic and Republican conventions hosted by Al Franken. Offering two hours a night of comedic and satiric views of the conventions' goings-on, dubbed "Indecision '92 — a moniker *The Daily Show* would later use for its 2000 and 2004 election coverage — Jones noted that this coverage was actually double the time given to the conventions by the network news divisions (65).

The success of 1992 political comedy programming helped pave the way for the creation of a new type of talk show. By early 1993, Comedy Central announced plans for a show called *Politically Incorrect*, initially described as "a weekly McLaughlin Report-type show hosted by comedian Bill Maher" (Brown 1993, quoted in Jones 2005, 66). *Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher* began July 25, 1993. It was a new type of programming combining a late-night comedy show and political talk show to make a hybrid program. Four guests, with different people every week, would talk about the day's and week's events with host Bill Maher presiding. The topics would range from pop culture to politics, usually spurred by events in the news. The guests came from a wide cross-section of celebrity and public life. Actors, comedians, and musicians would mingle with politicians, authors, public interest spokespersons, heads of think tanks, and pundits. Carter, the executive producer of *P.I.* was interviewed by Jones.

"We're always living in this world in between the variety shows like what Jay [Leno] and Dave [Letterman] do, and then the information shows like *Capital Gang* or *The McLaughlin Group*. We're somewhere in between the two, but we have to come down more on the side of entertainment than of information" (Jones 2005, 68).

By talking about news and politics, but with celebrities standing in for the "average person," the discussions on *P.I.* were intended to bring to the airwaves the kind of public discourse about politics that people actually heard in real life as opposed to the rarified air of pundit discourse seen on news programs. Despite the fame of the guests, the show is a more accurate reflection of how people really talk about politics. "Politics is not segregated from the concerns, interests, and

pleasures of everyday life, or from the way people discuss political and social issues” (Jones 2005, 68).

The program was popular, indeed popular enough to be snatched up by the networks. ABC bought the program in January 1996, with the announcement that *P.I.* would begin airing on the network in January 1997.

The one-year lead-time allowed ABC to attempt to gain clearance from the program form their affiliates as the local stations finished up existing contracts for syndicated programming. It also gave Comedy Central time to respond to losing its signature program. Comedy Central CEO Doug Herzog’s response was to “get a replacement program in the pipeline and schedule it to follow *Politically Incorrect* so that Maher’s audience would be exposed to it as early and often as possible before the marquee show moved on” (Barnhart 1996, quoted in Jones 2005, 73–74).

Enter *The Daily Show*.

The First Host

In July 1996 *The Daily Show* premiered on Comedy Central. It was created by Madeleine Smithberg and Lizz Winstead as a fake news parody program. The program’s first host was Craig Kilborn, who had originally been a TV personality at ESPN’s *SportsCenter*. The tall, blond Kilborn looked the part of an attractive anchor but his relationship with the show’s writers and creators quickly soured over an interview he gave to *Esquire* magazine for a January 1998 issue. Kilborn is quoted in the magazine as saying: “There are a lot of bitches on the staff, and, hey, they’re emotional people. You can print that! You know how women are — they overreact. It’s not really a big deal. And to be honest, Lizz does find me very attractive. If I wanted her to blow me, she would” (Bargmann 1998).

In the fallout from the interview, Winstead quit and Kilborn was suspended a week without pay (Electronic Media 1997). It clearly signaled the end of Kilborn’s future with the program. By May 1998, CBS announced that Kilborn would be taking over *The Late, Late Show* from Tom Snyder, which was surprising because Kilborn still had a year left on his contract with

Comedy Central. However, before his contract was finished, Jon Stewart became the host of *The Daily Show*, taking over in January 1999.

Jon Stewart

Jonathan Stewart Leibowitz was born November 28, 1962 and raised in the fashionable suburb of Lawrenceville, New Jersey. A *Rolling Stone* magazine article says that Stewart was “the only Jewish kid in his middle–class suburb” and experienced a childhood thought to be less than idyllic (Colpinto 2004).

They will find what is unique about you and destroy you for it, [Stewart] says cheerfully. So if you’re Jewish and most people aren’t, ‘OK, let’s go with that.’ But it just as easily could have been because I was short (Colpinto 2004).

Stewart’s father left his family when Stewart was 10 years old. Whatever the circumstances of his parents’ divorce, Stewart hinted to an interviewer that, jokes aside, he dropped his father’s surname for personal reasons and is not in contact with his father nor does he speak about him publicly (Colpinto 2004). He was raised by his mother, an education consultant, whom he credits as having always been “passionate about education and current events” (Colpinto 2004).

He attended the College of William and Mary in Virginia and majored in psychology, earning a Bachelor of Arts in 1984. Two years later he moved to New York City where he started his career as a comedian, working his way through various stand up nights at comedy clubs. It was in this period Stewart began using “Stewart” as his last name. Comedian Janeane Garofalo, a friend and contemporary of Stewart’s, recalled that his routines at the time weren’t particularly political: “He didn’t hit politics especially hard” (Colpinto 2004). Stewart agreed.

Back then his stuff hinged on what he calls “the holy trinity of comedy: sex, religion and death. When the first Gulf War broke out in 1991, Stewart was less likely to attack the politicians and the media than to make wry, Seinfeldian observations about the three–day ground war. “They were afraid this was going to be another Vietnam ...[]and it turned out it wasn’t even another Woodstock” (Colpinto 2004).

Stewart's first role on television was coincidentally on Comedy Central when he hosted a program called *Short Attention Span Theater* in 1989. From there his career progressed by little dribs and drabs, often working on short-lived cable programming where he served as a host/comedian. In 1993 he hosted a short-lived talk show on MTV called *The Jon Stewart Show*, which *Daily Show* Producer Madeleine Smithberg also worked on. Then, in 1998, in a bizarre case of fiction imitating life, Stewart starred as himself on the *Larry Sanders Show* (a TV show about a fictional talk show, with Garry Shandling as the lead/host) in a plot line about replacing host Garry Shandling which generated some media reports that Stewart *was* being considered as a replacement for Shandling before the show ultimately ended.

From Kilborn to Stewart

In many ways Jon Stewart was the natural choice to replace Craig Kilborn as host of *The Daily Show*. Of course, there was his relationship to the show's creator, Smithberg, but Stewart had also been twice considered for network talk shows before; first in 1993 when he was a finalist for NBC's *Late Night* (which ultimately went to Conan O'Brien) and then in 1999 for the show that Kilborn moved to, *The Late, Late Show* (Fretts 2003).

After Kilborn secured Tom Snyder's show on CBS, Comedy Central spent a considerable amount of energy wooing Stewart to the network. At the time, Stewart was considered quite a catch for the channel which after losing Kilborn had only one hit show, *SouthPark*. The network was happy to tout its new, and then untested, star. According to Elieen Katz, who was vice president of programming for Comedy Central in 1999, "To us, Jon's the second coming" (Jacobs 1999).

Stewart's deal with Comedy Central was considered very generous. In addition to getting his name in the show's title (becoming *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*), he was given time to act in several movies, an "astronomical-for-cable salary—about \$1.5 million a year," and

creative control, becoming executive producer of the program (Jacobs 1999). While the salary and name change certainly were important aspects of the deal, Stewart's creative freedom, both as the executive producer and working on a show on a smaller cable network, likely had a lot to do with how the program developed over time.

Stewart has said in several interviews that his first year with the program was rocky in regards to production. As a magazine writer put it, Stewart had "inherit[ed] an entire production team and writing staff schooled in the fine art of making jokes about supermodels" (Colapinto 2004). A crucial hire to the development of the program was Ben Karlin, former editor of the fake newsweekly *The Onion*. Fellow *Onion* writer David Javerbaum soon joined the staff as head writer, with Karlin becoming executive producer (Goldstein 2004). The satirical *Onion*, with fake headlines and fake stories that poke fun at real newspaper journalism, had much in common with how the future *Daily Show* would feel.

[Karlin] like Stewart, had zero interest in writing jokes about Pee-wee Herman's mug shots. "The main thing, for me, is seeing hypocrisy, Karlin says. "People who know better saying things that you know they don't believe." ... "Ben was huge," Stewart says. "That was, for me, the beginning of it starting to take shape. When you feel alone, all it takes is one other person to go, 'I think that's right.'" (Colapinto 2004).

Stewart's vision of the program would turn out to be quite different from Kilborn's as well as from the original creators. Winstead, in an October 3, 1999 article in *The New York Times*, said of Stewart's turn as host, "He's made the show his own. It's definitely veered from the show I helped to create, but it's funny. And I certainly don't mind having my name at the end of a show hosted by Jon Stewart" (Keepnews 1999). As the big star, Stewart had a bit more freedom than perhaps his predecessor did. In an intriguing interview with Winstead and Smithberg in 1997 by the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, Winstead said that Comedy Central's CEO, Doug Herzog, told them not to rail too much on entertainers because the network was trying to "attract" more celebrities (whether to the show or to the network is unclear). "I get that. These are people they want on their network. If I make that concession and be a little softer on that,

then they give me more leeway on stuff that's really edgy for the people that deserve it," Winstead said (Justin 1997). This could explain the program's comedy philosophy, if one can describe it as such, in terms of its jokes' targets.

While many of the elements of the current version of *The Daily Show* were there from the beginning—headlines, “moment of zen,” the celebrity interview—many were not, or were adjusted based on Stewart's vision of comedy. By the ninth season, Stephen Colbert is the only castmember (or “correspondent” as the show calls its performers) who has been with the show since the Kilborn era. During Kilborn's tenure, Colbert noted that correspondent pieces were focused more on laughing at people's ignorance during street interviews for believing in absurdities like Bigfoot, an angle he noted with distaste in an interview for *Entertainment Weekly*. “I never enjoyed that aspect of the show. I have no desire to club the equivalent of baby seals,” Colbert said (Fretts 2003).

Mocking stupidity, whether from celebrities or average citizens, seems to have been a theme of the Kilborn version of *The Daily Show*. As a *New York Times* writer put it:

In the world inhabited and delineated by “The Daily Show,” everyone is an idiot. There's no denying that the show is smart and often funny, but in an annoyingly self-conscious way that constantly sets out to reaffirm its own moral and intellectual superiority. It has about it the glib, tinny ring of a college lampoon in which the sophomore writer's cleverness is deployed in service of nothing grander than impressing the writer's freshman friends. Bereft of an ideological or artistic center, the show is precocious but empty. (MacGregor 1998)

This lack of an ideological center was yet another aspect of the show to change under Stewart's tenure.

Political Comedy According to Jon Stewart's *The Daily Show*

If Kilborn's show lacked an ideology— for comedy if not also for politics—there is much evidence that Stewart's show is directed by a vision of how comedy, as well as politics and news, should operate. Stewart, and by extension his staff, is not afraid to use his show to tell others how to do their jobs. Executive Producer Karlin says his targets are “hypocrisy,” while

Stewart says “the point of view of this show is we’re passionately opposed to bullshit” which he rhetorically asks the interviewer whether “that [is a] liberal or conservative [viewpoint]” (Colapinto 2004). And yet the comedy on the show can appear to be strongly supportive of progressive politics with its familiar support for more peace, less war, more aid to the poor, more public services, and also a strong streak of critiquing the politics of George W. Bush. Karlin says this seemingly left-of-center attitude is just a natural extension of the act of comedy itself. “You almost have to be left-of-center to be a comedy writer ... I’ve never met anybody who wasn’t. I mean, go back to the jester. Obviously, in this society, the conservative political mind-set is king” (Sella 2000). But is Karlin’s description of comedy writing translating into automatic support for Democrats? In a 1998 *Newsweek* article, a few months before taking the helm of *The Daily Show*, a short piece quotes Stewart on the Monica Lewinsky affair.

I have a lot of hostility ... [for] the news media. I have more trouble with the commentary on Clinton’s affair than Clinton’s affair. The self-righteousness is embarrassing. (*Newsweek* 1998)

Of course defense of Clinton in 1998 can seem like a de facto defense of Democrats. Saying one is opposed to “hypocrisy” or “bullshit” is very subjective. Selecting one politician’s words as “bullshit” and another’s as honest can appear as if the show is playing favorites or endorsing a position. It is an important distinction, however, that the show does not often weigh in on policy issues. It rarely uses a joke that claims one policy or legislation is better than another. *The Daily Show* instead operates in a world where it wants both sides to play fair. The show despises those who use misleading rhetoric in policy debates, and then targets the rhetoric more often than the idea behind it. When it comes to specific policy debates, *The Daily Show* does not weigh in on differences between specific policies. An exception seems to be in the arena of gay marriage, where all jokes support a policy position that gay marriage should be legal or somehow recognized by the state. Even in these instances however, the show does not advocate for a *specific* course of action. The pro-gay rights jokes instead merely target those that advocate

otherwise and their rhetoric. I can theorize that this is because, to the writers of *The Daily Show*, almost any rhetoric not supportive of rights for gays is hypocrisy or bullshit and therefore ripe for satire.

Instead, the ideological stance of the show might be seen as jokes that favor policies that are generally supportive of groups that might be called the unpowerful, which, of course, would include gay men and women. Stewart describes his vision of comedy in an interview with Ken Auletta.

Comedy ... in some respects I feel is like music. It's a rhythm and it's a rhythm you feel inherently. But like music, if you don't know how to control it...it can be powerful to people to be able to verbally abuse [others]. And when you're younger and you don't realize that it's powerful or that you're using it in the wrong way it can get your ass kicked. Because it's obnoxious and learning to control that and learning how to temper it and learning how to, as they say 'afflict the powerful' rather than someone with a club foot is an important lesson and one that needed to be learned.⁵

This need to direct jokes to “afflict the powerful” rather than at someone “with a club foot” lies at the core of *The Daily Show's* comedy. During an NPR interview, Stewart used the analogy of David versus Goliath. “If you're a comedian, you know, there's a lot of Goliath jokes out there, but you know, the David stuff never really went over very well.”⁶ This type of thinking can translate into an editorial slants for progressive politics which supports an idea that society is responsible for helping everyone including and especially the less fortunate. In the *Daily Show's* jokes, rich people are targets, poor people are not. More specifically, what is done by the rich and powerful to the poor and disenfranchised. Rather than create a tepid “let's laugh at everyone” attitude, *The Daily Show* creates targets of powerful people who behave badly (as they define it) and hits them again and again. The show is not episodic as defined by Iyengar and Kinder (1989), rather it is thematic. When television news reports events without placing those events in context—what Baym (2004) calls the “now this” version of the news—Iyengar says

⁵ *American Perspectives*. C-SPAN. From speech for Newhouse School on October 14, 2004.

⁶ *Fresh Air*. National Public Radio. September 30, 2004.

that this is episodic. Episodic coverage treats each news event as its own separate occurrence, completely free of historical context with which understand it. The counterpoise to episodic coverage is “thematic,” which places political issues and events in some general context. “Episodic framing depicts concrete events that illustrate issues, while thematic framing presents collective or general evidence” (Iyengar 1991, 14). Iyengar found that subjects shown episodic reports were less likely to consider society responsible for the event, and subjects shown thematic reports were less likely to consider individuals responsible. *The Daily Show* jokes are more often than not thematic because the program must first explain the news event before it can critique it. Stephen Colbert remarked once on how much “easier” his job would be if he could just explain the event without having to then make a joke about it as well.⁷ In addition to placing news in context, *The Daily Show* often returns again and again to issues discussed the night or even weeks or months before. For example, one returning joke theme of the eighth and ninth seasons was Stewart’s attacks on columnist Robert Novak for revealing the identity of a CIA spy for possibly partisan purposes. Stewart, whenever he would make a new Novak criticism, would remind his audience of Novak’s prior actions while calling him a “douche bag of liberty,” a term he used more than a few times during the seasons.

What is different about these joke targets, aside from placing them in a context different from other late-night comedians, is who the show targets and how *The Daily Show* defines “afflicting the powerful.” It’s important to remember that each comedian defines who the “powerful” is differently. At the 2004 U.S. Comedy Festival, a panel discussion asked, “Who’s funnier: the left or the right?” During the discussion, Colbert and actor/comedian Drew Carey had this exchange.

COLBERT: I think the Right is more mockable, because they’re higher status. And you know, it’s always more fun to attack the guy on top. And right now the Republicans control the legislature, the executive and the judicial branch, so there’s hardly another game in town. The only reason anyone’s attacking the

⁷ *Al Franken Show*. Feb. 28, 2005 broadcast.

Democrats is because they're sticking their neck out for the campaign. If there wasn't a political campaign, you wouldn't hear about the Democrats from comedians probably at all. Because – well, they're not pumping themselves up.

CAREY: I can't get – I'm feeling so tired. [laughter] Whoever is puffed up, the Democrats are puffed – a lot of Democrats and liberals are really like self-righteous and we're here to save you, and they have that vibe going, that's easy to make fun of them because you can knock them down real easy. And so many Republicans are like, oh we know it's moral and you don't, and we're going to protect you and your family – you can knock them down real easy because they're so fuckin' pompous.

COLBERT: But isn't comedy mostly about like attacking, you know, the status quo?

CAREY: Yeah.

COLBERT: Isn't comedy basically how the liberalities [sic] do it?

CAREY: I know. But you always want to attack people that are higher than you, *or think they're higher than you.*⁸ (emphasis added)

In this exchange, comedian Drew Carey clearly thinks that pomposity, a belief in superiority of your cause, is part and parcel of both ideological sides and is, therefore, equally available for mocking. Colbert argues he would use comedy only to attack those in political power, which in 2004 he views as only being the Republicans. Colbert even goes further when he gives his description of journalism, which if one applies Colbert's thinking to *The Daily Show*, further enhances the popular belief that *The Daily Show* is a "liberal" show by design. Colbert, when interviewed by Al Franken, commented that:

...reporting itself, the idea of journalism itself, which is in itself a liberal event because it investigates power at its best and that kind of iconoclast status quo attacking it's a liberal virtue it's not a conservative virtue.⁹

It is this selection of targets as *The Daily Show* staff defines them and their willingness not to be "an equal opportunity skewer"¹⁰ that sets *The Daily Show* apart from other late-night comedy shows. As Stewart told *60 Minutes*' Steve Kroft, he doesn't have to play fair.

⁸ U.S. Comedy Arts Festival. Panel "Who's Funnier—The Left or The Right?" March 6, 2004. From transcript.

⁹ *Al Franken Show*. Feb. 28, 2005 broadcast.

¹⁰ *60 Minutes*. October 25, 2004.

We don't consider ourselves equal opportunity anything, because that's not—you know, that's the beauty of fake journalism. We don't have to— we travel in fake ethics.¹¹

As a guest on National Public Radio's *Fresh Air* program, Stephen Colbert said that Jon Stewart specifically asked him to have a political viewpoint and to allow that to carry into his comedy.

COLBERT: And then when I got to “The Daily Show,” they asked me to have a political opinion—or rather Jon did. When Craig was there, it wasn't so political. Jon asked me to have a political opinion, and it turned out that I had one, but I didn't realize quite how liberal I was until I was asked to make passionate comedic choices as opposed to necessarily successful comedic choices.

TERRY GROSS: Boy, I like the way you put that, passionate comedic choices.

COLBERT: Well, yeah. I mean, Jon has asked us to be political and to share his interest in doing political comedy that actually has some thought behind it, and as a result, if you don't do something that you feel passionately about, if you're not talking in a passionate way about it, you're gonna sound just as false as a politician who's doing a stump speech that is to please his audience and doesn't reflect a dearly held political idea. And more than anything else, we don't want to sound predictable and we don't want to sound—or I don't want to sound like I don't believe what I'm saying.¹²

Colbert's insistence that he has to mean what his jokes say is what sets the satirist apart from the humorist. *Doonesbury* cartoonist Garry Trudeau expressed it this way:

I think that the whole idea of it being an equal opportunity satirist is kind of a contradiction of terms. That sort of person is more accurately described as a humorist. And that's generally what happens on the late night shows, is that – as you say, they play to one part of the audience, then they play to another, and there's never a sense on the part of someone like Leno that there's ever anything at stake. This is all in good fun, if you don't like the joke, we'll move on to the next one. I think most good satire comes from a point of view, and most of the guys working in late night don't actually have a point of view. Which is fine, that's what they do, they're entertainers. But if you're shooting a little bit higher, if you're actually trying to illuminate through satire in some way, as pretentious as that probably sounds, it helps if you have a strong point of view. So that as you mow down everything, there's something left standing.¹³

Colbert has contrasted his experience with *The Daily Show* with his time spent in Chicago's Second City “an improvisational theater that ostensibly does social and political satire.”¹⁴ While

¹¹ IBID.

¹² *Fresh Air*. National Public Radio. January 24, 2005.

¹³ U.S. Comedy Arts Festival. Panel “Who's Funnier—The Left or The Right?” March 6, 2004. From transcript.

¹⁴ *Fresh Air*. National Public Radio. January 24, 2005.

at Second City, Colbert said that he specifically tried not to write political jokes because he found most political jokes to be “false humor.”

[Political jokes were] stuff that just told the audience what they thought already about a political situation. I mean, the example is people making Ted Kennedy drinking jokes, which didn't seem to be informative or satirical. They just seemed mean-spirited and just told the audience what they thought already. And that kind of stuff turned me off.¹⁵

Colbert, however, continues his analysis and takes the “fake ethics” position even further.

TERRY GROSS: You know one of the things that's so interesting about “The Daily Show” and about your reports on it is that, you know, the sensibility of the show is so about, like, being comfortable with the fact that people have sex with each other, and that there's homosexuality in the world and that ... there's religion and there's also secularism, and the sensibility is so different, just so inherently different than the sensibility of the Christian right or of most of the people in the Bush administration, that just the sensibility-wise you're, like, kind of automatically coming from a completely different place, and it's a place that the most left-wing pundit couldn't necessarily come from because as late-night comics you can do things about sex that, you know, a pundit on CNN is not gonna do, not gonna say.

COLBERT: Well, he has to stand by what he says, and we don't. I can retreat from any statement I've ever made on “The Daily Show” without anyone impugning my credibility because I've never claimed any. But a pundit has to back up what he says with statistics and some study from the Pew Research Center on the effect of homosexual parents on adopted children. I don't. And so I can say anything because I'm not asking you to believe that I mean it. I'm just hoping that you'll laugh at what I say. It doesn't mean I don't mean it, but I'm not expecting to change your mind.

Here now we have the nexus. Colbert is backtracking a bit, saying that he's not “asking you to believe he means it,” yet defines good political humor as jokes that sounds sincere and have a point of view. The crux of his credibility—indeed of the credibility of Stewart and the other correspondents— is that he, unlike an authority figure, does not have to stand by what he says. The “fake ethics” of political satire go hand-in-hand with the need to sound credible, but not actually *be* credible.

Researcher Jeffrey Jones, in comparing and contrasting the different styles of three prominent political comedian/commentators, refers to Jon Stewart as “the Court Jester” (Jones 2005, 107).

¹⁵ *Fresh Air*. National Public Radio. September 30, 2004.

“Through his privileged position as fake news anchor on a fake news show, Stewart gets to play the fool by using the words of those in power against them, revealing “truth” by a simple reformulation of their statements. Stewart, then, becomes the court jester, cleverly positioned on the public stage to question what the rulers have just said through his “harmless” reassessment of what they (and their stenographers to power) have configured reality to be. (Jones 2005, 113)

How do Stewart and *The Daily Show* manage to garner so much respect and avoid being ghettoized as “left/liberal/democrat?” In part, much of it may have to do with Stewart’s own personality.

In contrast to Kilborn’s frat boy persona, which was intended to be pompous in order to mock pomposity in the news media itself (until Kilborn’s act seemed less like an act and more like his actual persona), Jon Stewart projects a much friendlier vision of how a comedian can mock the news genre without succumbing to its worst traits. In the popular press, Stewart is called “the wisecracking everyman” (Peysner 2004), with an “immensely likable personality” (Colapinto 2004) who is “nice and respectful” to guests (Salamon 2000). *ABC World News Tonight* anchor Peter Jennings is quoted saying about Stewart: “There’s nothing mean about him. And in a society where there’s so much mean talk, someone who punctures the balloons with grace and elegance and humor is a blessing” (Fretts 2003).

While a likable personality is central to one’s success as a talk show host, more daring is the show political viewpoint. Entertainment shows have traditionally been stripped of *overt* political leanings, particularly leanings that seem to give favoritism to one political party over another. There have certainly been exceptions in the past decade, most notably *The West Wing*. But in the world of talk shows, non-politicization of the entertainment talk show host has been the rule since Jack Paar’s day in the 1950s. Traditionally, all late-night comedians have espoused a non-political stance with regard to their comedy or their own personal politics, meanwhile claiming to make fun of all sides. This comedic neutrality, which is mostly associated with network television rather than cable, ensures that their jokes at the president’s expense are not viewed through the lens of partisan support for the other side. In a *New York Times* article, “The

Stiff Guy vs. The Dumb Guy,” talk show host Conan O’Brien articulates what many if not most network talk show hosts strive for. “Johnny Carson is the model for all talk-show hosts ... You never knew his politics. He’s a very intelligent man, but you just didn’t know. And I think that’s the job” (Sella 2000). The article goes on to quote all of the big late-night network talk show hosts at the time including Jay Leno and David Letterman.

Leno has no party affiliation. Well, at first he denies having one, when pressed he says he doesn’t advertise it....”I don’t give away my position, because it taints the issue. It’s like you go to a party and girls say about you, ‘That guy’s gay’ Well, you’ve lost half the crowd already.” (Sella 2000)

In the article, David Letterman also denies having a political side. “No, no — we’re right down the middle, my friend. Either side, we just don’t care” (Sella 2000).

All statements to the contrary notwithstanding, whatever Stewart’s politics are, his sharp, critical satire can only exist because his audience—on his best night—is still a fraction of Leno, Letterman, Jimmy Kimmel’s or any of the network talk shows. With Al Franken, Stewart elaborated this difference clearly.

FRANKEN: Here’s what I think. Your show is different from Leno, and Letterman and Conan.

STEWART: Well, the fuel of our show is not celebrity. That’s the main difference.

FRANKEN: And that you get to assume a certain amount of political literacy, news literacy from your audience.

STEWART: We can go beyond the one time “President Clinton has a voracious sexual appetite,” “President Bush eats soap,” that kind of thing. We have the luxury of not having as broad an audience as they do. And I don’t fault them for that.

Having only a million people watch his show a week, Stewart is free to be far more critical than his late-night competitors. But likely even more crucial to Stewart’s freedom is his show’s placement on cable channel rather than broadcast network. With network television’s need for broader audiences than cable, it is likely that Stewart’s creative freedom to speak only to his knowledgeable, niche audience would not survive a move to a network. Yet strangely for

The Daily Show, its public face, its hipness, is far out of proportion to its actual audience. As a *Newsweek* writer put it in an article for the magazine's end of the year issue, featuring Stewart on the cover, "[Stewart's] twice missed getting a late-night chair on a network, and yet you're not seeing Jimmy Kimmel on the cover of *Newsweek*" (Peyser 2004).

There is no question that *The Daily Show* is oppositional to President George W. Bush. However if all late-night comedians are oppositional to the president, why is *The Daily Show* singled out as being more critical? Perhaps because viewers instinctively recognize Stewart's jokes as more hard-hitting than Leno's or Letterman's. *The Daily Show* defends its highly critical stance on Republicans, conservatives and President Bush as "being opposed to bullshit." But even a casual viewer will notice that it rarely critiques the language used by the other side—beyond rhetoric used by John Kerry, John Edwards, and other Democrats running for the presidency in 2004. Stewart and Colbert's defense of this selected targeting of rhetoric is that, the liberals/Democrats aren't in power so why kick them when they are already down? In their view its not 'afflicting the powerful' to make fun of groups who do not control the debate, and therefore there could be considered a liberal or progressive slant to their jokes. Other comedians, such as Drew Carrey, clearly don't agree with the *Daily Show's* position of primarily attacking Republicans because they are the group in power. According to Carrey, there is plenty of outrageous rhetoric on both sides. A future content analysis of *The Daily Show* jokes would be better able to empirically examine the ratio of jokes at the expense of the left verses jokes at the expense of the right.

In the next chapter, I will examine the content of *The Daily Show* in a qualitative way, dissecting its different segments and parts. This chapter will explain the differences in tone each half of the program, the satire and the interview, contains. These differences contribute to the show's wild mood swings on some nights, going from hyper-critical to warm and fuzzy in the 3 minutes between commercial breaks.

Chapter 4: Content of The Daily Show

This chapter will examine in depth the format of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* using descriptions from the most recent season, the ninth, which ran from June 2004 to July 2005. In addition to discussing the formatting of the show—specifically how the show morphed to emphasize its placement as a news satire program—a history of the set changes is also discussed. These set changes indicate a shift from a set that more closely resembled a talk show set to one that more closely resembles that of a news show.

Like almost any long running program, *The Daily Show* has undergone considerable changes since its inception in 1996. Certain content has been with the show since the beginning; news headlines, guest interviews, and the “moment of zen,” but have shifted in either tone or style. Other elements, including cast members, sets, and segments, have changed entirely.

Because the show combines elements of different genres—the talk show genre, the national and local newscast, and even skit comedy—direct comparisons are not entirely useful. While certainly being an entertainment program, one which is originally broadcast at 11:00 p.m. almost nightly, naturally begs the closest comparison to other late-night entertainment programs such as *The Tonight Show* and *Late Night*. However, any direct match-up between the shows will miss the other genre elements *The Daily Show* incorporates. Some elements of the show, namely the interviews, mimic a news talk show such as ABC’s *Nightline* or certain cable news programming, rather than a traditional late-night talk show. Yet the show, by being located on Comedy Central and whose advertisements—among other indicators—clearly signal that this is not a show to be taken as seriously as an actual news program. The combination of serious talk with the inclusion of jokes makes the show difficult to classify by genre. Is it a news show that is entertaining or is it an entertaining show that is also news? This chapter will break the show down into by segment and discuss how each creates an entirely innovative type of entertaining

and/or serious commentary programming out of parts that do not necessarily conform to any one genre.

Title Sequence

The opening title sequence of the show in the ninth season starts with the day's date splashed on the screen while a mature male voice reads it aloud. The date is shown in front of a waving graphic of the American flag's stars-and-bars pattern. Opening trumpets and drums greet the moving logo graphic as it situates itself above a flag-draped globe. The announcer continues, "From Comedy Central's World News Headquarters in New York, this is the Daily Show with Jon Stewart." Once the male announcer completes his phrase, the tempo changes, the logo moves to the bottom left quarter of the screen, and the camera pans the studio audience. The camera then swoops forward, hurdling toward Jon Stewart who is seated at the anchor desk. The theme music, a song played by the band They Might Be Giants, has been sped up from its original tempo and played over the images. Eventually, the camera stops moving and Stewart begins speaking.

In many ways the opening title sequence of *The Daily Show* perfectly captures the serious and silly mix. The opening date and graphics are meant to invoke nightly national news broadcasts, which also start each broadcast with the date and sound cues to imply urgency and importance. *The Daily Show* announcer does not give away the "joke"—that this is not a serious show—until the tempo changes. The sped up theme song and the cheering audience quickly signal to the viewer that this is not some somber nightly newscast.

One detail to note: when the show is a rerun the date is cut from the title sequence, although everything else remains the same. The date is included in the first run of the episode, which includes repeated broadcasts the following day. However, on weeks when there are no new episodes, the original date of the broadcast is not included in the opening credits.

Some entertainment TV shows never change their opening title sequence for the entire life of the program. Others change it every season while some keep certain elements but make incremental changes yearly. *The Daily Show* falls in the latter category. The opening musical riff has been with the show since its inception but has been re-orchestrated over the years. During the early Kilborn seasons, the title sequence consisted of random, amusing video clips which never changed and were not featured in that episode. By the third season, when Stewart took over, the title sequence had already begun to evolve. The sequence opened with the date—this remains constant throughout the rest of the series—but it is Stewart who reads it. The disembodied voice of Stewart introduces brief previews of the night’s stories which include video clips. This technique of previewing the night’s stories is similar to how the national evening news broadcasts introduce their programs and the inference is likely deliberate, as well meant to prime the audience to watch the show. Once Stewart finishes previewing the clips, the authoritative male announcer voice says, “This is The Daily Show with Jon Stewart: The most important television program ever.” *The Daily Show* logo is splashed once while trumpets play before the opening musical score is heard and the studio is finally seen. Interestingly, in the third and fourth seasons, Stewart was shown walking to the anchor desk to begin the show, a stylistic touch common to talk shows but not to news programming.

The formatting of the opening credits remained the same in the third and fourth seasons, but by the fifth, alterations were seen. The mature male announcer’s voice, not Stewart’s, read the date. The graphics used behind the dateline were more dynamic and eye-catching. Stewart’s voice still introduced a preview of the night’s stories, but the brief clips were framed by a graphic element that incorporated the logo. The graphics appeared to have been “up-scaled,” as it were, from the previous season to seem more sophisticated to the viewers. The male announcer continued to use the phrase, “The most important television program ever,” but it was used over a more layered logo sequence incorporating additional moving images over a realistic-looking

globe. The changes in graphics implied more artistry while they also more closely resembled the sophisticated graphics of a news program.

The sixth season, particularly the episodes that pre-date September 11, 2001, showed continuing changes to the title sequence in tiny increments. A shot of the Earth rising from the moon's lunar surface was briefly shown before the date splash. In the sixth season, after the date splash, there were aerial shots of New York City at night, while the announcer said, "From Comedy Central's World News Headquarters in New York, this is the Daily Show with Jon Stewart: The most important television program ever." Here we see the phrase still used in the ninth season, "world news headquarters," combined with the statement used in earlier seasons. Later in the sixth season, the phrase was altered to read, "From Comedy Central's World News Headquarters in New York, the birthplace of news...." before leading into the rest of the statement. What is also important about the sixth season is that the previews of the night's stories were dropped entirely from the title sequence. On some level, this lost a news show-like element, but it shortened the title sequence by seconds and to some extent saved the jokes for the show. Undoubtedly, it also must have lightened the work load for the show's production staff as the title sequence would no longer need to be changed nightly.

The seventh season's opening remained similar to the sixth's with the only change being that the announcer's dropping of the statement, "the most important television program ever." Finally, the opening graphics of the eighth season, with the stars-and-bars element behind the date splash, matched those used in the title sequence of the ninth.

Set Changes

Like the opening title sequence, the sets of *The Daily Show* have also evolved over the show's history. Early sets in the Kilborn years appeared cheap, projecting no illusion that this was a news program—every inch seemed to scream low-budget cable programming. Camera

angles made the studio seem small, almost claustrophobic. Kilborn's desk resembled a podium—very short and narrow. The desk was tan and brown and the set décor was brown with blue undertones. Interview guests sat on stools and joined Kilborn at the desk.

This changed by the time Stewart joined in the third season. Set design is closely linked with program budgets and bigger budgets mean larger, better designed sets, and more sophisticated camera work. Once the show proved itself capable of grabbing ratings, the network was willing to increase the show's budget, which in turn enhanced the look of the show. Set choices reflected not just a budgeting decision, but an artistic one as well.

Two important elements changed throughout the course of the show; the anchor desk and the interview couch. First, the interview couch, a staple and defining sign of the talk show format, had to be added to the set. This occurred by the third season. Both daytime and late-night talk shows have couches for guests to sit on while being interviewed by the host. The couch remains a part of the set, even during the other segments of the show. *The Daily Show* couch went from slate gray to red velvet and finally back to slate gray in the seventh where it remains as such in the ninth season. The richer color of the red velvet was far more suggestive of “talk show” than “news program.” Its boldness calls attention to it even in sequences when it is not used, while in contrast, the slate gray was muted and vaguely suggestive of seriousness.

Meanwhile, the anchor desk was also altered considerably, providing visual cues more similar to news shows than to talk shows. In the third season, Kilborn's original miniscule desk was gone. The anchor desk became far longer and began to resemble what it approximates in the ninth season. The desk is a rich, dark brown wood with a dark charcoal countertop. The set has a burnished, rich, dark wood look with dark wooden accents. By the sixth season, the set was lightened somewhat and the desk was changed to light tan wood and silver paneling. The new color scheme harmonized well with the vibrant, red velvet couch. Some of the dark wooden

accents remained, but were only in the background behind Stewart until they were finally eliminated entirely in the seventh season.

By the seventh season, the set closely resembled its appearance in the ninth. The dark brown wood was gone and the set glowed with blue and other cooler colors. The desk was topped in bright blue Lucite creating an effect resembling water. The desk's side paneling was black, but was also designed not to call attention to itself, unlike the silver. The effect of the set, when taken as a whole, was that the colors were meant not to evoke a talk show set as the silver, tan and red colors of the previous sets had, but, instead the seriousness of a news set.

The evolution of the title sequence and the sets were made in gradual steps with the total result of the evolution becoming a show that, with each passing season, is meant to come closer to resembling a news program rather than one that simply entertains. That the announcer in the opening title dropped the outlandish statement, "the most important television show ever" seems ironic because the show became culturally more important. It is not the most important show ever, but it has undoubtedly grown in importance.

The Monologue

In the ninth season, after the show's opening sequence, the program almost immediately diverges from most late-night talk shows because it opens with host Jon Stewart seated at his desk. Most late-night talk shows begin with the host standing, often away from his desk/couch, to deliver a monologue. Even in *The Daily Show's* predecessor, *Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher*, Maher opened the show with a traditional comedian monologue despite the fact that his program was quite different from the usual talk show. The opening monologue has a special place in late-night talk show history. Hosts have used the opening monologue to invite the audience to stay and watch the rest of the program; thus it must provide a hook and be especially funny. Indeed when there have been studies analyzing the joke content of late night talk shows, it

is nearly always the *monologue* which is the sole part of show analyzed because it is this segment which is most likely to contain elements of current political comedy. While the rest of the program contains jokes and humor, it is usually of a less topical or political nature.

Stewart uses what could be called his opening monologue to introduce the show. He greets the audience, usually announces the night's guest, and will often speak before segueing into the show's first segment. His monologues differ from the traditional late-night talk show monologues, however, in more ways than simply the positioning of him at the anchor desk. While the traditional monologue usually consists of a steady stream of topical jokes delivered in a manner that is not unlike most stand-up comedy acts, Stewart's monologues are decidedly shorter and often offer a pointed take on events of the day that happened too late to be covered by the show's other segments. These monologues may last as little as 45 seconds or as long as two or three minutes, though it is not out of character for Stewart to simply jump right into the first segment. When there is a monologue, Stewart uses several different types of openings. Some merely preview the night's guest ("Tonight we have a special treat, (blank) is here joining us.") or preview the rest of the week's guests. Stewart often likes to acknowledge the bizarre combination of having someone important (a White House cabinet member or politician) followed up by a famous (but not serious) celebrity such as Johnny Knoxville. Or Stewart seems to address bizarre non sequiturs. These non sequitur jokes are responses to questions the in-studio audience is allowed to ask prior to taping or simply Stewart's comments on the audience at the day's taping (O'Connell 2005).

It is the third type of opening monologue that is most intriguing to communications scholars. While almost every other segment of *The Daily Show* focuses on news that's happened between a day to a month prior, the monologue sometimes comments on events that happened during that day. During the monologue, there is the shortest gap between the event and *The Daily*

Show's coverage of them or, alternatively, one could say the jokes of the monologue are the freshest of the show (Larris 2004).

An earlier three-week content analysis of the program showed that in the space of 12 shows, four nights' opening monologues commented on a news event that was also featured on one national evening news broadcast that day. A fifth monologue commented on an event reported the day before and a sixth commented on the box office results of *Dawn of the Dead* beating *The Passion of the Christ*, which has elements of news commentary but was not reported by the national evening news (Larris 2004). These commentaries, like nearly all parts of the program, are intended to be humorous, but many contain elements of criticism often not directed at the events themselves, but at the media's coverage of them. This is, in fact, a running theme in much of *The Daily Show's* jokes which comments not on the events, but on their coverage. For example, in a March 31, 2004 monologue, Stewart spent 56 seconds first previewing the night's guest and then offered a discussion of a story of the day, a missing Wisconsin student who had been found. Stewart used the time to critique CNN's coverage of this event which, after revealing the woman had been found, continued to cover it as breaking news even though there was no new information to be covered.

So I'm watching the CNN today ... in Wisconsin there was a missing woman and they found her...which is wonderful ... but then they didn't move on. They stayed there and just watched the police just walking around. And the police had a dog I guess looking around for smells. So literally I just watched CNN for an hour, it's a dog walking around. And I wonder if CNN knows this, you know that show *Cops*? They edit that. They don't just leave the camera on and wait.¹⁶

The central joke was not about the student or the events surrounding her disappearance,¹⁷ but rather on the idea that CNN would follow the story to absurd lengths even when there was literally nothing more to tell. Whether the description of CNN's coverage was accurate—"an hour ... a dog walking around"—the important feature is the critique offered within the joke.

¹⁶ *The Daily Show*. March 31, 2004 episode. Transcription from personal archives.

¹⁷ It is worth noting that this student's disappearance was quickly discovered to be a hoax perpetuated by the student herself. But neither Stewart, nor more importantly CNN, knew this fact on March 31, 2004.

This joke also provided a notation of an event that happened during the day; that a missing person was found.

Headlines

After the opening monologue, the show moves into the real meat of the program. Usually the follow-up segment is one that in past seasons was called “Headlines.” This is a Stewart-led segment in which he comments and/or delivers the “news” much like a real anchor, but with a satiric twist. The events presented by Stewart are always real events presented with his commentary that interprets the “funny” aspect. They are accompanied by many of the same elements of a news broadcast: a news clip and a graphic behind and to the left of the anchor. Occasionally, the news clips presented may have new sound or graphics overlaid on top of them to aid the comedy. Many of the elements of this segment have been a part of the show since Kilborn’s era. Indeed, this type of news satire is one of the most common forms where a comedian imitates a news anchor by mimicking his daily news cast format. This approach has been used broadly by many comedy programs. However, it is prominently identified with *Saturday Night Live’s* “Weekend Update,” a segment which has been part of the show since 1976. Researcher Geoffrey Baym, who argues that *The Daily Show* represents a new form of journalism, describes the *SNL* approach to “news update satire” as disturbingly familiar to how actual TV news is presented.

The “now this” format of news, in which no topic is placed in a wider context or receives elaboration. Instead, the anchor jumps from story to story, often placing back-to-back stories of wildly different content and significance. In television news, the effect is to reduce the importance of political information to a form of “trivial pursuit” – political information and knowledge become fodder for quiz shows and trivia games, containing little perceivable real-world importance or relevance ... Both the talk show monologue and the fake news Weekend Update mimic this approach, and thus further reduce any sense of engagement with or connection to the political public sphere (Baym 2004).

In contrast to the *SNL* approach, *The Daily Show* spends a considerable amount of time on one topic, sometimes as long as eight or nine minutes, which is longer than either its comedy or news partners will give (Baym 2004, Larris 2004).

One final note about Stewart's segment, "Headlines." In the ninth season the "headlines" segment is far less delineated than it had been in previous seasons. In earlier incarnations of the show, dating back to Kilborn, "Headlines" as a comedy segment had been introduced by the host and signaled with its own theme music and video graphic. As the show progressed, the music cue and video graphics were dropped, but Stewart would still announce the introduction, "Now let's read some 'Headlines.'" By the ninth season, this convention was dropped from the show. One aspect of this change is that the early part of the program transitions smoothly from one segment to the next. There is no exaggerated signaled beginning or end to "Headlines." Even calling it "Headlines" in the plural could even be misleading. The Stewart-led segment is often devoted entirely to one news event, which will then segue smoothly into a correspondent commentary for a follow up.

Correspondent Pieces

Following the Stewart-led segment, there are several other repeatedly used segments. One type is an in-studio commentary by one of the other comedian performers in the cast, or "correspondents," as the show calls them. The correspondents might either be seated at the desk with Stewart or standing in front of a blue screen projecting an image of their supposed "location." This is actually one of the running jokes of the program—that correspondents are reporting from locations while, in fact, they are standing only feet from Stewart. The reporter-on-location joke has been stretched to include even incredulous locations such as Mars (for a report

on the Mars rover). Both the correspondents and Stewart will even comment on the incongruity between the image behind the reporter and his supposed location.

Standing in front of a picturesque, sunny scene of the Capital Building for his commentary, Corrdry said to Stewart, “Our show airs at 11 p.m., I’m ‘live’ in Washington D.C. yet somehow it’s magically sunny out. Jon, it’s *snowing* in D.C. right now! Why I am not wearing a jacket? What am I, some magical fake-news elf? As a fake, we are a sham.” (Larris 2004).

That is, however, part of the joke, as both the in-studio audience and those at home are fully aware. The correspondents are simply standing in front of a picture, yet this is an implicit critique of on-scene reporting done by nearly all local and national TV news stations where the location shots are merely window dressing and not integral to the story. That location reporting can be so easily faked is part of the critique.

The other running joke of the correspondent commentaries is that, no matter the subject, they are always referred to as “Senior” in their field. Correspondents have been called “Senior Media Ethicist,” “Senior White House Correspondents,” “Senior National Security Analyst,” and “Senior Political Media Analyst.” Furthermore, no topic is too obscure for any correspondent to be considered an expert. Correspondents have also been titled “Senior Iberian Analyst,” “Senior Irish Affairs Correspondent,” “Chief International Finance Correspondent,” “Senior Iraqi Voting Expert,” and “Senior Vice Presidential Selection Analyst.” The joke works on several levels, but the media critique is spotlighting how all news organizations refer to their correspondents and commentators as “experts” and “senior” reporters. The titles are meant to add gravitas to the reporter or analyst. The idea is that anyone can be labeled an expert. If one cannot picture a network news anchor announcing to the audience that they will now turn to their “Junior White House Correspondent” then the titling of “Senior” does seem to be somewhat euphemistic, if not unnecessary. *The Daily Show* demonstrates that the title “Senior,” or even “Analyst,” can be conferred to anyone, but doesn’t necessarily mean anything.

In the in-studio correspondent commentaries, the correspondents always interact with Stewart, a back-and-forth exchange in which Stewart plays the traditional comedy straight man. This comedy routine allows the correspondents to become increasingly cynical, irrational, or just plain crazy-sounding, which, of course, is supposed to expose the ridiculousness of the position itself. Take, for example, this correspondent commentary from a February 16, 2005 episode. This exchange between Stewart and Colbert immediately followed a Stewart-led report on the faux White House reporter Jeff Gannon. The story involved a person whose actual name was James Guckert, but had secured clearance into White House press conferences under the name of Jeff Gannon. Jeff Gannon was subsequently revealed by bloggers to be working for an apparently partisan organization, Talon News, performing a job that did not seem to bear any resemblance to journalism. Bloggers contended that “Gannon” wasn’t a reporter in the briefing room so much as a Republican plant. The story prefaced the Colbert commentary below.

JON: With more on the role of bloggers in today's media, I'm joined by Daily Show senior media correspondent, Stephen Colbert.

STEPHEN: Jon, before we begin, I'd like to get something off my chest, before I get “outed” by the bloggers. My real name isn’t Stephen Colbert. It’s Ted Hitler. No relation. Well, distant relation, two generations back. Directly. I’m Adolf Hitler’s grandson. Anyways, it’s out there. It’s no longer news.

JON: Uh, uh, wow. First of all, thank you for your honesty, Stephen...

STEPHEN: It's Ted. It's Ted Hitler.

JON: Ted, you’re sort of “old media,” you’re an old media reporter. What are your thoughts on, in your mind, the role of these new media figures?

STEPHEN: Jon, the vast majority of bloggers out there are responsible correspondents doing fine work in niche reporting fields like Gilmore Girl fan fiction, or cute things their cats do or photoshopped images of the Gilmore Girls as cats. That's great. Where I draw the line is with these “attack bloggers,” just someone with a computer who gathers, collates and publishes accurate information that is then read by the general public. They have no credibility. All they have is facts. Spare me...

JON: But, Stephen, I mean, to be perfectly...

STEPHEN: Okay, I put myself through school as a Columbian drug mule. I put heroin in condoms and I smuggled them into the country in my colon. Okay? Fine. Post away, atrios.blogspot.com

JON: Um—getting back to the story, Stephen, the medium of the internet may be new, but what bloggers do, as you just described it, is really in many respects what journalists do.

STEPHEN: “What journalists do,” Jon? As a journalist, I think I know what I do. I’m not sitting at home in front of my computer. I’m out there busting my hump every day at the White House, transcribing their press releases, repeating their talking points. That’s how you earn your nickname from President Bush. And when he stands at the podium, points at me and says “You, Chowderneck—question?” Everyone knows it’s me, Ted Hitler.

JON: But as long—as long as the blogs fact-check, as long as these bloggers check their facts, why would you even object to this kind of political coverage?

STEPHEN: Because it’s not political coverage, Jon. They’re reporting on the reporters. The first rule of journalism is “Don’t talk about journalism.” Or maybe that’s Fight Club, but my point is this. These guys need to learn: you don’t report on reporters. Nobody likes a snitch! If they’ve got to report on something, why don’t they take some of that youthful moxie of theirs and investigate this administration. Somebody ought to! You would not believe the things they’re getting away with!

JON: But Stephen...

STEPHEN: Fine, Jon. Three years ago I killed a panda. Ling-Ling! Or the other one. I can’t tell them apart. In my own defense, in my own defense Jon, it was dark, I was drunk, and it was delicious. Sorry to ruin your scoop, Colbert_Killed_A_Panda.com

JON: Now Stephen, like it or not, these bloggers have already gained a certain legitimacy.

STEPHEN: Yes, Jon, and therein lies our only hope. For with legitimacy, the bloggers will gain a seat at the table, and with that comes access, status, money, and power. And if we’ve learned anything about the mainstream media, that breeds complacency.¹⁸

From the exchange, in addition to being entertaining, there are several points raised a) that bloggers produce accurate information b) that bloggers can “fact-check” the media c) that the real media is complacent and d) that bloggers are gaining credibility by publishing facts. The exchange highlighted a discussion, particularly heightened at that time, of whether blogging was journalism, and whether bloggers should be afforded the some of the same respect as journalists. The term “attack bloggers” had been used by some in the news because bloggers had revealed

¹⁸ *The Daily Show*. February 16, 2005 episode. Transcript from <http://aolwatch.org/backup/destiny-land.shtml#colbert-on-blogs> (accessed March 27, 2005).

the existence of an alleged gay male prostitution website run by Jeff Gannon as well as naked pictures of himself which he posted online. Some in the media questioned whether bloggers had crossed a line of propriety in exposing this side of Gannon's life, while the bloggers involved in the story contended it was, in fact, important information about the faux reporter being granted access to the White House. Colbert's ridiculous statements are meant to expose the weakness in the argument that the bloggers were "attack bloggers" or that they were acting in any way different from how real reporters should act; "gathers, collates and publishes accurate information that is then read by the general public."

Of course in many ways, *The Daily Show* was not just commenting on this situation, but actively weighing in on a particular side. The show conferred credibility to bloggers not simply by raising their issue on the show in a respectful manner, but by specifically citing a real blog, "atrios.blogspot.com," which was one of the blogs discussing the Jeff Gannon story at the time. That Colbert also cited a fictional "Colbert_Killed_A_Panda.com" in the exchange is unlikely to confuse the viewer about which was a real blog and which was not.

Pre-Taped Segments

During the ninth season, the correspondents on *The Daily Show*, in addition to Stephen Colbert and Rob Corddry, also included Ed Helms, Samantha Bee, Lewis Black, and part-time correspondent Bob Wiltfong. Of all of the correspondents, Lewis Black's pieces are the most unique. His segments are standardized bits which always have Black seated at the desk with Stewart who introduces the piece with the statement, "When a news story falls through the cracks our correspondent catches it in a segment we call 'Back in Black.'" This is then followed by a graphic and a brief musical cue from the band AC/DC's song, "Back in Black." Black's commentaries are not interactions with Stewart, but a one-man rant about issues that bothering him. A typical segment was March 24, 2004 episode where Black literally ranted against

Congressional House Bill 3687, which expands the definition of profanity for broadcast standards. These segments have been part of the show since the beginning, and have been adapted from Black's stand up comedy routine, although he has revealed in interviews that they are written by the show's writers to fit in with the episode (Witchel 2005).

Another way correspondents are used on the show is in pre-taped segments which are filmed out of the studio and then edited prior to the show's taping at 7 p.m. In these segments, a correspondent will cover a story, but unlike the in-studio commentaries, these stories closely resemble in tone the typical pre-taped TV reporter pieces used not only on national news broadcasts but also on local news. Typically, several people are interviewed, sometimes including actual experts on specific subject matter. The subject matter for edited pieces is quite diverse. Some tackle national issues, but then feature the media campaign or work by a specific group such as the Coalition for Urban Renewal & Education's campaign against social security. Other segments might focus on a story specific to a particular state such as an Arizona State Legislator's bill which would have legalized the right to carry a gun into a bar. Some focus on bizarre or amusing news stories such as a town event called the "Cooter Festival." However, some don't have a specific news story to hang on. Rob Corddry's March 3, 2005 piece titled "Secrets of New Journalism Success," was an exploratory segment about bloggers which featured only one interview, Jay Rosen, a professor of Journalism and Mass Communications at New York University. Rosen was interviewed as a journalism expert who was also a blogger. On his blog, he explains the experience of being interviewed by Corddry and being booked for the show:

Much was similar to being contacted by any TV show. Several pre-interviews, vagueness about what the segment would end up looking like, some we'll-get-back-to-you's and finally a date and time to show up at their shop. The interview was taped a week before the night it ran....As it is, from a two hour interview at most 30 seconds appeared on air. And it's totally their decision about which 30 seconds.

They did tell me that I was the person they were using in this piece as a kind of straight man, although they did not use that term. It was: “someone who can tell us how journalism is supposed to work,” so they can do their satire about how it seems to be working these days.

But I knew from many television interviews and situations that any further descriptions they gave me at that point would not be the actual story, anyway. What you are told when being booked has an indefinite and mysterious relationship to what you find when you are there, as a guest on the program or an on-air “source.” Once you learn this, you can adjust to producer-talk.

Everything up to here was like any other news interview for television. But the interview itself with Rob Corddry was not. After all, he’s not a journalist, but an improvisational comedy man (that is, an artist) and an actor. The way I defined what I was doing was helping him with his art—his act.

Probably the best thing about it for me was being that close to a very good actor and comedian, as he’s acting, being inside the material, as it were, because in some ways I was “material.” (The dork who takes journalism seriously.) That’s the part I said was fun and unnerving.

I was seated about 24 inches from Corddry and could “see” his mind working and sense the command he had of his voice and body. (Fascinating.) I could also listen to him and his producer communicate about what was funny and worth having on tape for later.

The truth is they could have made me into anything they wanted, with the range of material they shot from serious analysis and punditry to gags, wisecracks and various attempts to “shock” me, so as to obtain some of the dork-doesn't-get-it reactions you see on the clip.

They told me when I got there that such “unexpected” things would happen, and that I should just... react. Don’t try to be Rob, or a performer, just be yourself. Okay, I said. I was once taken from the front row of the Big Apple Circus and used in a clown’s act, and it reminded me somewhat of that.

Of course, be yourself is advice of limited use. At one point, and out of nowhere, Rob interrupted one of my answers about reactions to blogging among journalists, got right in my face, and shouted “that’s bullshit, man!” at the top of his lungs (Rosen 2005).

Rosen’s account also confirms that interviews are conducted using only one camera. “We did the interview twice, but I didn’t answer the second time, just ‘received’ the questions. Rob was the same in both, pretty much” (Rosen 2005).

Some of the humor from correspondent pieces comes from interviewee’s reactions to questions. Other humor comes from silly statements put forth by the interviewees. This begs the question of whether the subjects are “in” on the joke—that

The Daily Show isn't a real news show asking serious questions—and if they are, then why submit to an interview with a comedy show which might make them look foolish? This is particularly puzzling when some of those interviewed in these pre-taped segments are state and local elected figures and may therefore have something to lose in being made fun of in front of a national audience. From interviews with producers, writers, and performers of the show, one said that perhaps a half to a third of interview subjects aren't exactly aware or are completely unaware of the nature of *The Daily Show*. Subjects sign a release form, but, on at least one occasion, an interview was scrapped and the segment completed with another person because of objections raised by an interviewee who refused to sign the release form after being interviewed.

However, Stephen Colbert, in an *Al Franken Show* interview, says that for the most part, the people he interviews are “in” on the game.

COLBERT: In the old days nobody understood what we were doing at all. They thought we were from CNN. We would never say we were. Although I got sued by someone claiming I said that. They just thought ‘oh you’re from cable and you’re news, I guess you’re cable news.’ These days they all know the show or at least half their kids do. But they don’t understand, they can’t follow the line of reasoning when we’re speaking to them. They don’t perceive the edit....

FRANKEN: ... But don't they know about this? Don't they?

COLBERT: No. No. Only once. A man, a columnist who used to write for the Washington Times named John Lofton ... He used to be the right wing nut-case deju ... So I interviewed him. He, in the middle of the interview...he goes ‘oh wait. Earlier you were agreeing with what I had to say. But now you’re putting forth ridiculous arguments, therefore by association my arguments will seem ridiculous. And I wanted to say...(cheers) and confetti and give him a check. And go you’re the only person in seven years of doing this who ever, and named it in a way more clearly than I could have named my own game at that moment. But I had something to deliver so I said ‘how would that work?’ And he couldn’t follow the chain of logic out. Because he wasn’t a comedian. But one guy in seven years named it.

FRANKEN: I believe more people know what’s up and are willing to go along with it. But you’re saying I’m wrong?

COLBERT: They know who we are, and they understand it’s a comedy show now. There’s no getting around it. Nobody who comes along doesn’t know something’s up. But it’s one thing to know it’s a comedy show, it’s another thing

to see how you might be funny. It's something that's beyond their ability to understand.¹⁹

Colbert's comment that subjects "couldn't perceive the edit" is telling. Rosen, in his blog, makes it clear that he is aware, at least after the show was broadcast, that from his two-hour-long interview, *The Daily Show* could have created any number of situations including those that made him or his ideas appear foolish. In fact, as a professor of journalism he might be more predisposed to understand this process than the average citizen. Yet despite that potential, he still agreed to be interviewed by the show. One could speculate it is because he ultimately trusted the show not to insult him or his ideas. It is also important to mention that not every person interviewed is held up for ridicule. But there is a significant difference, which the audience would likely see, between laughing *at* a subject and laughing *with* him over the antics of the correspondent. In his blog, Rosen writes that he was probably approached because someone from the show reads his blog, *Press Think*, and perhaps was a fan of his work. Such thinking, that one is approached because the producers are interested in your ideas, can be flattering to individuals. They could view the show as an opportunity to spread their messages and furthermore, be on national TV. This could be why some subjects appear clueless as to how badly they might be portrayed by the show. Not every person interviewed by the correspondents is a "nobody," but many, even those that are local and state public figures, are not used to dealing with the national press or national TV. Another story told by Colbert to *Fresh Air's* Terry Gross also demonstrates the problems of success and recognition. While some politicians are willing to be interviewed by *The Daily Show*, others are not.

GROSS: When you were at the Republican National Convention and you were interviewing some people on the floor, did they have any clue who you were?

¹⁹ *Al Franken Show*. Feb. 28, 2005 broadcast. Transcription from personal archives.

COLBERT: Less than the Democratic National Convention but not completely clueless. Tom DeLay didn't know I wasn't real, but all of his handlers did and they wouldn't let me near him.

GROSS: Right.

COLBERT: Actually I said, "Congressman DeLay, do you have a second to speak to me? Stephen Colbert from *The Daily Show*." And he goes, "Absolutely," and he starts walking over to me. And, you know, this moon eclipses Tom DeLay between the two of us and someone says, "Hi. I'm a big fan of the show. The congressman is a little busy right now."

GROSS: Right.

COLBERT: And the congressman said, "No, I'm not. I've got an hour." He goes, "Nope. You've got to go talk to CNN." "That's at 11:00." "Sir, this is not the time."²⁰

Majority House Leader Tom DeLay, or rather his handlers, unlike other *Daily Show* interviewees, clearly could "perceive the edit" and understood that DeLay might be held up for ridicule during the interview. DeLay grants few interviews to the legitimate press, and like most politicians, controls access to him by choosing which media outlets to speak to. Politicians and political players are frequently interviewed by *The Daily Show* though, including conservatives such as Rep. Kay Bailey Hutchison, Ralph Reed, and Ken Mehlman. Why would they agree to be interviewed on the show if they could potentially be held up for ridicule? The reason is perhaps because the final segment of the show completely switches in tone and style from the first part.

The Guest Interviews

The guest interviews are the last significant segment of the show. However, their placement as the last segment occurred over time. During Kilborn's years, the guest interviews were shown closer to the middle of the program and were mixed in with other segments to appear as part of the natural flow of the show. However, Kilborn's interviews were almost entirely different from Stewart's. Kilborn's interviewing method was called "Five Questions," "a

²⁰ *Fresh Air*. National Public Radio. September 30, 2004.

regular feature in which a celebrity guest is interviewed by the host and then asked such toughies as “Goobers or Raisinets?” (Margolis 1999). “Five Questions” was played like a warped trivial pursuit game in which Kilborn would rule on whether the guest correctly answered to his questions. In fact, Kilborn asserted that he owned the intellectual property rights to “Five Questions,” which he eventually took to *The Late, Late Show*. This could have resulted in some legal squabbling, but Stewart has said he was not interested in copying Kilborn’s method regardless.

When Stewart took over the program in the middle of the third season, the interview format was altered almost immediately. While still not the last segment of the show—the interview segment would not become firmly rooted at the final segment until the seventh season—Stewart conducts the celebrity interviews in much the same manner of all late-night talk show hosts. Guests are actors, comedians, or musicians who come on the program to promote a movie, an album, or themselves. Unlike some other talk shows, *The Daily Show* does not have musical guests. Even when guests are professional musicians, they do not play during the show. There is witty banter between the host and guest, amusing anecdotes, a clip from the upcoming movie—fairly standard late-night talk show fare.

For the next several seasons, the interview segment would always be placed in the latter-half of the program, but there would often be another comedy segment following it. During the show’s final segment, Stewart would sit on a stool in front of a blue screen and recap the night’s stories while also previewing the following night’s stories. It wasn’t until the seventh season that the show ended the recap segment and would finish with Stewart at his desk.

Moving the interview to the last segment of the show and canning the recaps accomplished two goals. First, it allowed more time for either the interview or the rest of the comedy segments. Second, it completely divided the program into a “first half,” comprised of news updates, correspondent commentaries, and pre-taped pieces, and a “second half” entirely

devoted to the guest interview. Audiences would now have a clear signal when the program was switching to a completely different tone. Should a viewer only wish to watch the news satire part of the program they would know when to change the channel.

Not all of *The Daily Show* interviews are alike. There are clearly two types of interviews that Stewart conducts: the celebrity interview and the non-celebrity interview. As previously mentioned, the celebrity interview is usually standard late-night talk show fare with a celebrity or entertainer appearing on the show to promote a creative project such as newly released film or musical album. They are asked questions about their personal life or their creative projects, but never about current events. This type of interview has been a standard for most late-night talk shows. However, *The Daily Show* has hosted a considerable number of guests who fall outside of the realm of entertaining celebrity. These include politicians, both sitting and retired, speechwriters, party chairmen, ex-cabinet members and campaign strategists. There are also guests who hail from the so-called world of punditry, which includes members of the media as well as non-fiction authors, partisan activists, and the occasional professor or think tank scholar. What separates the pundit and politician interviews from the celebrity interviews is the type of questions Stewart asks. The celebrity interviews are never about conveying information beyond the scope of the celebrity's life or creative projects whereas the politician and pundit interviews are conversations about issues and politics.

This returns us to the question of why politicians and political players would want to appear on *The Daily Show*. What distinguishes *The Daily Show* from every other late-night comedy program (or any non-news talk show) is the sheer number of politicians who have appeared on the program. By March 24, 2005, there have been 37 guest appearances by currently sitting politicians including, senators, representatives of Congress, and governors. There have been 92 episodes with guest appearances by a politician, either sitting or retired, or a political player within a party such as a retired White House worker or cabinet member, a campaign

strategist, or a party chairman. While during presidential elections candidates might occasionally appear on non-news talk shows, for sheer quantity and diversity perhaps only *Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher* could even come close to reaching these numbers of politicians' appearances.

Researcher Matthew Baum, in examining the 2000 presidential election as a case study, said that politicians appearing on entertainment talk shows ("E-talk") is a mutually beneficial relationship between the show and the presidential candidate.

Talk shows seek to entertain their audiences by offering "fun," human interest-oriented interviews with high profile individuals; candidates covet an opportunity to present themselves in a positive light, without having to face hostile questioning from jaded political reporters (Baum 2005).

Baum's paper concluded that hosts of E-talk shows are not critical questioners. Even David Letterman, who was considered the toughest E-talk interviewer, could not come close to approximating the types of probing questions regularly asked by political reporters on a campaign trail.

Culturally, Jon Stewart is not considered very tough on his interview subjects. While the first half of the show is largely satiric, critical, and biting, the interview segments, conversely, are not. In his trademark self-depreciation, Stewart puts down his interview segments in *Entertainment Weekly* magazine by describing them as "the weakest part of the show, through no fault of anyone's but mine" (Fretts 2003). A review of the program's guest list shows that politician visits increased as the show's popularity increased (not, in itself, a shocking discovery). During the 2000 election Bob Dole, a former senator and Republican candidate for president in 1996, was hired to be a commentator for *The Daily Show* to provide occasional updates on the election. According to the show's producers, on nights that Dole appeared there was no other guest on the program, although his appearances did not always conform to the usual guest interview structures. During the fifth season (which includes part of the 2000 election cycle), there were nine visits by politicians, including Bob Dole. In the sixth season, which took

a somber turn because of the events of September 11, 2001 as well as the subsequent Afghanistan war, there were only five politicians, including New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who appeared in the spring of 2002. Since the seventh season, each year has seen an increase in the number of guests this study coded as politicians. The number of politicians and political players visiting the guest couch doubled between the seventh and the eighth season.

The reason for this jump in visits can be explained, in part, by the increasing popularity of the show. Yet the fact that politicians, especially presidential candidates, appear on a program with such meager Nielsen ratings may seem at first odd. While an appearance on *Oprah*, *The Tonight Show*, or *Late Night* may be off the beaten path for most campaigns, it is not an uncommon occurrence. But aside from the previously discussed benefits to appearing on those shows, another reason is that their audiences are quite large, rivaling or exceeding the ratings for the network evening national news programs (Baum 2005). In contrast, *The Daily Show's* audience is tiny, averaging only one million a week by the ninth season and close to half that in earlier seasons. What the show does offer to its political guests is an extremely niche audience, one that they particularly wish to speak to: young voters. "The show beats CNN, MSNBC, and Fox News among young adults at 11 p.m." (Fretts 2003). Moreover, Nielsen ratings indicate that during the 2004 election conventions, "The Daily Show drew more 18–34 year olds during the 11:00 p.m. to 11:30 p.m. time slot than the cable news channels such as Fox, MSNBC, CNBC and CNN" (Annenberg 2004). *Entertainment Weekly* quotes Sen. Hilary Clinton's press secretary on Clinton's decision to promote her book on the program. "When the publisher suggested it, we were struck by the buzz around Jon among both his young audience as well as seasoned political professionals" (Fretts 2003). Simply put, *The Daily Show* is hip. Appearing on the program, politicians can tap into that hip audience and promote themselves or their agenda at the same time. Not to a mass audience, but to a cool one. When promoting a book or competing

in a presidential primary, one million people may be just the spark that's needed to generate buzz for larger campaigns.

Certainly the evolution of the guest list shows that *The Daily Show* had to grow into this role. As the Kilborn interviews were biting and outright bizarre, few politicians or serious people agreed to appear. Many point to the program's act during the 2000 election, coverage for which it won a Peabody award for comedy, as a turning point. "In 2000, we showed politicians that we weren't out to make fools of them ... We were making fun of ourselves and the media," said coexecutive producer Stewart Bailey (Fretts 2003).

In some ways, Stewart's method of interviewing entertainers, politicians, and pundits is very similar. Stewart, with rare exception, is generally nice to guests and allows them to speak about their topics, be it a blockbuster movie or a book about conservative methods of campaigning, all without attempting to shame or humiliate the guest. While he is certainly not above letting the audience know he doesn't agree with a guest's viewpoints, or when he feels that the guest may not be convincing, the interviews are conducted in a non-confrontational manner. An interview with Rep. Henry Bonilla, which took place right after the Democratic convention in 2004, seems to be the exception. NPR host Ray Davies played a segment of the Bonilla interview, in which Stewart becomes an unusually aggressive interviewer, repeatedly asking Bonilla to explain how he and other Republicans get the label "first most liberal" and "fourth most liberal senator" for senators John Kerry and John Edwards respectively. What distinguishes this particular interview from Stewart's others is that he pushed Bonilla for an answer and, failing to get an answer he believed was truthful, explained what he thought the truth was to Bonilla and, conversely, the audience. Stewart informed Bonilla/the audience that the labels came from the *National Journal*, but that the rankings were misleading because it was based on a year during which a campaigning Kerry and Edwards had been largely absent from the Senate. This was a ranking even the *National Journal* itself agreed was misleading. The

Bonilla interview was an unusual one for Stewart precisely because he reverted to directly telling the audience how to view the Bonilla's information. Stewart rarely is so direct in leading the audience as to how to think about a guest's statements, allowing them to draw their own inferences as to whether the guest is lying to them or sincere.

DAVIES: That's very funny stuff, but this was a real interrogation. I mean, you were doing what journalists do there.

STEWART: No, actually I think I actually was doing what journalists don't do. I mean, that's why... (unintelligible). Isn't that the issue, that journalists don't do that? They basically when you're—and I'm not talking about print, but isn't the issue that on television, those sorts of operatives for both political parties go on the air and say, "John Kerry's the first most liberal" or "The jobs created are \$9,000 less," and nobody ever says, "I'm sorry. I don't mean to stop you, but what? What was that? Where do you come up with these numbers?"²¹

Stewart won praise from fans for "carving up" Bonilla, and his access to guests with power improved during the 2004 election season. *The Daily Show* was granted an interview with Democratic presidential nominee John Kerry at a time when he was not granting interviews to members of the actual press. Afterwards however, the interview had some in the press commenting that Stewart was a disappointment, unable to practice the "toughness" on politicians that he preaches in the other parts of his show. Tucker Carlson's comments during Stewart's heated October 15, 2004 appearance on CNN's *Crossfire* are typical.

CARLSON: You have a chance to interview the Democratic nominee. You asked him questions such as – quote – "How are you holding up? Is it hard not to take the attacks personally?"

STEWART: Yes.

CARLSON: "Have you ever flip-flopped?" et cetera, et cetera.

STEWART: Yes.

CARLSON: Didn't you feel like – you got the chance to interview the guy. Why not ask him a real question, instead of just suck up to him?

STEWART: Yes. "How are you holding up?" is a real suck-up. And I was actually giving him a hot stone massage as we were doing it.²²

²¹ *Fresh Air*. National Public Radio. January 24, 2005.

²² CNN. *Crossfire*. October 15, 2004. From transcript.

In fact, Stewart's question, "How are you holding up?" is one of his typical opening gambits in interviews. Stewart used it when interviewing former counterterrorism expert Richard Clark shortly after his testimony in front of Congress's September 11 panel and also with White House Communications Director Dan Bartlett on the second night of the 2004 Republican National Convention. While Carlson's point was that Stewart was somehow behaving in a partisan manner—being congenial with Kerry because he wanted Kerry to win—congeniality seems to be an integral part of not only Stewart's interview technique, but of the entertainment talk show genre format (Baum 2005, Davis and Owen 1998).

However, let's examine the questions Stewart poses to two different guests, of opposing political ideology. On November 17, 2004, Thomas Frank was a guest on the program to promote his book, *What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America*. The book promoted a theory that Kansas residents should be voting for Democrats, and tried to explain why they were not. To compare and contrast Stewart's handling of a guest with left-of-center views, there was the April 11, 2005 guest appearance by Bryon York, who was promoting his book, *The Vast Left Wing Conspiracy: The Untold Story of How Democratic Operatives, Eccentric Billionaires, Liberal Activists, and Assorted Celebrities Tried to Bring Down a President – and Why They'll Try Even Harder Next Time*. One might hypothesize that if Stewart were a liberal or a Democrat, he might be more supportive of Frank's work and more critical of York's in his questioning. But a direct comparison of questions does not show this to be the case. In both interviews, Stewart offers some mild criticism of something the author said. To York he says, "The cover is probably more inflammatory than the book. The book is actually almost like a ledger of the variety of groups you think are working together to bring down a president... although there was an election. It wasn't exactly a coup." But this is as critical of the author's words as Stewart gets. For the most part, Stewart asks probing rather than critical questions. He does ask York a few times whether these "liberal groups" are doing something

unique or different, but in a tone that is not accusatory. It is a real question posed to the author, not an accusation that he is slanting the facts of his book. At one point Stewart comments, “the book is not a polemic by any stretch of the imagination.”

Compared to the York interview Stewart is, if anything, more openly critical of some of Frank’s statements on the program. Again, the interview is congenial and most of Stewart’s questions are asked in a probing, non-accusatory tone. He takes on Frank’s thesis that “Kansas residents vote against their own economic interests by voting Republican.” Stewart asks if this argument does not also apply to the Northeast, where richer residents vote for Democrats over *their* economic interests. “Haven’t [Republicans] learned to appeal to [Midwest voters’] vanity the same way the Democratic party appeals to the vanity of intellectuals?” Stewart asked Frank. Also, take this exchange, even without tone of voice which adds much to how a question is perceived, it is clear that Stewart is challenging a guest’s assertion.

FRANK: One of the things I mention in the book is the weird, even zany things conservatives believe the liberal conspiracy is going to do to them next. Like they are going to ban red meat. They’re going to ban major league sports. And then the last one is they’re going to ban the Bible which came up in this listserv I was on...

STEWART: [Interrupts] Well clearly that is ... I mean this election was not won by extremists. This election wasn’t won by people who thought the Bible was going to get banned.

FRANK: Well, it turns out in West Virginia there was a mass mailing saying that Kerry...

STEWART: [Interrupts] Right. In one state. But you know what I’m saying. Clearly this movement...it does seem like there’s this broader movement afoot of creating this world of nostalgia that might have never actually existed in the first place. I think what you’re talking about are people who live in Y2K bunkers. The ban-the-Bible folks.²³

Stewart’s “right, in one state” is sort of a “come on, be honest” refrain to Frank that hardly every conservative voter believed such things and that it was, perhaps, only a tiny percentage that did. While Stewart was ultimately somewhat mildly critical of Frank, he was not openly hostile to

²³ *The Daily Show*. November 17, 2004 episode. Transcription from personal archives.

him. Certainly not as hostile as many cable news interviewers would have been. The point of the interview was not to “debunk” Frank’s theories but to discuss them and leave it open to the audience as to whether they wish to agree with (or read) the author’s work.

It is the very non-partisan, non-critical nature of the program which attracts politicians. Suffice it to say that if Stewart recreated his more highly critical demeanor from the Bonilla interview towards all of his political subjects, access would likely be cut off. Therein lies a unique moral question: What is the moral, ethical responsibility to politics, media, or to their audience when *The Daily Show* and other entertainment talk shows are granted access to people of power? If politicians move to less critical media, does that program then gain a moral responsibility equivalent to that of the news media? Who decides who owns this responsibility? The hosts of the program, the press, or the viewers? These intriguing questions are beyond the scope of this project, but as politicians, political players, and pundits begin to move beyond the traditional media to spread their messages, this question deserves to be examined further in both media criticism and philosophical viewpoints.

This issue is particularly salient for *The Daily Show* because host Jon Stewart has been so vocal about the responsibility of the press, both on and off his show. He has said in interviews that networks (at least news networks) “vouch” for the character of their guests by putting them on the air.²⁴ He has said there are guests he would not invite on his show as a matter of moral principle. “Novak? No. I would not have him on. I have standards! (laughter) I would not have him on...I wouldn’t have Mike Tyson on. I wouldn’t do it. [Novak] shouldn’t be on television — CNN should not have him on the air. He should not be amongst civilized people.”²⁵

Stewart has taken all news networks, not only CNN, to task for this “vouching” of their guests. In reference to CNN’s coverage of the DC Sniper case, Stewart said that from the experts CNN put on the air before the snipers were captured he learned that “the sniper was an olive-

²⁴ CNN. *Reliable Sources*. November 2, 2002. From transcript.

²⁵ *American Perspectives*. CSpan. From speech for Newhouse School on October 14, 2004.

skinned, white-black male – men – with ties to Son of Sam, al Qaeda, and was a military kid, playing video games, white, 17, maybe 40.”²⁶ In that interview, Stewart took CNN, and all 24-hour news networks, to task for the for guests they put on the air.

HOWARD KURTZ: What should happen to all of these experts who came and filled the airwaves with all of these predictions that turned out to be completely and totally wrong?

STEWART: Well, it’s not their fault.

HOWARD KURTZ: It’s not their fault?

STEWART: No.

HOWARD KURTZ: Shouldn’t they have to resign from the talking head society?

STEWART: Shouldn’t CNN have to pay a penalty for putting them on the air? You’re Paulie Walnuts. You’re vouching. You brought a guy in, and you put him on the air and you vouched. You said, “No, Tony, this guy, he’s good people, he’s credible.” So, whatever they say, I mean, they’re called profilers....I don’t understand the idea of — you know I heard a guy talking — actually on your show — saying, “Well, the public really wanted information. They had a real thirst for information. So, because we didn’t really have that much information, we had to just speculate.”

HOWARD KURTZ: We made it up.

STEWART: Right. Which seems insane. That’s like saying, “You know, the kids were real thirsty, and we didn’t have any water, so we just gave them beer, because we figured that would work.”

HOWARD KURTZ: Well, you’re right. The cable folks who put these folks in front of the camera have to bear some of the responsibility.

STEWART: Not some, all.²⁷

Booking for television shows is a multi-tiered issue with several factors in play including ratings, star power, and obviously questions as to who is considered an acceptable guest. Stewart, like every other comic, negates any personal responsibility in shaping his viewers’ politics. Yet one cannot help but speculate what the guest list delivers to the audience. If critical questioning is not what is delivered, there may be an alternate explanation. While Stewart repeatedly says

²⁶ CNN. *Reliable Sources*. November 2, 2002. From transcript.

²⁷ IBID.

that the goal of his show is only to be “entertaining,” many guests do not seem to fit that description at all, at least as it is normally defined by this particular channel and the timeslot. This list would include guests such as Nobel Peace Prize winner Bishop Desmond Tutu and Princeton Philosophy professor Harry Frankfurt. It may be that by exploring issues and topics with his political guests, Stewart is offering information, not critical questioning. Stewart may hope that by offering information, particularly with regard to the workings of a political system or viewpoint, viewers may be able to come to conclusions about guests without Stewart having to tell them whether the guests’ ideas hold water and whether or not they are sincere. Rather than the bombastic questioning of his cable news brethren, Stewart kills his guests with kindness and lets them hang themselves with their own words if they so choose.

In the next chapter, I will examine some previous content analyses of *The Daily Show* and of the program’s youthful audience.

Chapter 5: Previous Studies of The Daily Show

Late-night comedy shows have been attracting increasing amounts of research within the past five years as both politicians and communications scholars discover the growing numbers of viewers who claim to get their news from late-night comedy. This chapter will elaborate on other studies of late-night comedy, as well as discuss at length two previous content analyses of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*.

Before the content analysis of late-night comedy shows began, communications scholars had to be tipped off that comedy shows were worth studying for political content. The Pew Research Center for People & The Press released a study in early 2004 which reported that 21% of people ages 21 to 29 say they regularly get their campaign news from comedy shows “such as *Saturday Night Live* and *The Daily Show*.” While

<i>Learn about campaign from...</i>	<u>18-29</u> %	<u>30-49</u> %	<u>50-64</u> %	<u>65+</u> %
Comedy shows*				
Regularly	21	6	5	2
Sometimes	29	21	9	9
Late Night TV**				
Regularly	13	7	7	9
Sometimes	31	20	8	14
Number of cases	(276)	(596)	(343)	(278)
* ...like <i>Saturday Night Live</i> or the <i>Daily Show</i>				
** ...like Jay Leno or David Letterman				

Table 5.1
Pew Research Center for People and the Press.
Perceptions of partisan bias seen as grown – Especially by Democrats. January 11, 2004.
Washington, DC.

only 13% made the same claim about late-night TV shows “such as David Letterman and Jay Leno” (Pew 2004a). Table 5.1 shows the breakdown by age of those who said they learned about the presidential campaign from comedy and late-night TV shows.

One point about the Pew survey: it was conducted somewhat early in the campaign season, in 2003, when many people, not just the young, did not regularly pay

attention to campaign news. In addition to asking where respondents say they regularly get campaign news, the survey also tested respondents on their campaign knowledge by asking two questions. One was whether the respondents knew which of the presidential

candidates served as an Army general (Wesley Clark) and the other asked which candidate was a former majority leader in the House of Representatives (Dick Gephardt). From these two questions, Pew concluded that “people who regularly learn about the election from entertainment program – whether young or not – are poorly informed about campaign developments ... People who say they regularly learn about the campaign from

Where They Learn and How Much They Know				
	# Correct Answers*			
	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	
Total	19	19	62	(1506)
<i>Regularly learn something from...</i>				
Internet	39	20	41	(218)
Major web news sites	37	19	44	(183)
National Public Radio	36	24	39	(229)
News magazines	33	25	42	(160)
News pages of ISPs	32	22	46	(166)
Sunday political TV	31	21	48	(202)
Talk radio	31	29	40	(141)
Daily newspaper	30	23	47	(502)
Public TV news shows	30	24	46	(177)
Cable political talk	25	25	50	(215)
Cable news networks	24	25	51	(586)
C-SPAN	24	26	50	(119)
TV news magazines	21	24	55	(192)
Nightly network news	20	22	58	(541)
Local news	14	19	67	(306)
Morning TV shows	13	20	67	(134)
Comedy shows on TV	11	21	68	(112)
Late night TV shows	8	18	74	(121)
*# of correct answers to two questions asking respondent to name the candidates who were an Army general and former House majority leader				

Table 5.2
Where Do they Learn and How much do they Know.
Pew Research Center for People and the Press.
Perceptions of partisan bias seen as grown – Especially by Democrats. January 11, 2004. Washington, DC.

entertainment programs are among the least likely to correctly answer these questions” (Pew 2004a).

Table 5.2 shows Pew’s breakdown by news source of how well respondents could answer those two questions. Pew’s study found that most young adults were uninformed about the presidential campaign, but concluded that “while many young people say they learn about the campaign from comedy and late night shows, the extent to which they gain much information is

unclear. Holding constant a person’s education, interest, and use of other media sources, there is no evidence that people who say

they learn about the campaigns from late night and comedy shows know any more about the candidates, and are at best only slightly more aware of major campaign events, than

those who do not watch these program” (Pew 2004). One issue to take with Pew’s study is that it did not differentiate between shows and that its measure of political knowledge was somewhat clumsy. Still, the Pew statistic provided— that 21% of 18- to 29-year-olds get most of their campaign news from late-night comedy shows, and that they were a poorly educated bunch at that—became a widely disseminated fact in the media. It was the Annenberg Public Policy Center who would add more nuance to these findings.

Annenberg Public Policy Center

In September 2004, the Annenberg Public Policy Center, as part of National Annenberg Public Policy Center 2004 Election Survey, released a report which, to some extent, refuted Pew’s earlier findings, or at least clarified them with regard to *Daily Show* viewers. Rather than reinforcing a stereotype of politically-unaware young people, Annenberg’s survey found just the opposite—that *Daily Show* viewers were some of the most politically aware people in their age group. In polling conducted between July 15 and September 16, 2004, Annenberg found that, on a six-item political knowledge test, *Daily Show* viewers scored higher than viewers of Leno or Letterman, as well as higher than those who did not watch any late-night comedy programs in the past week.

The six item test asked respondents

1. Who favors allowing workers to invest some of their Social Security contributions in the stock market? [Bush]
2. Who urges Congress to extend the federal law banning assault weapons? [Kerry]
3. John Kerry says that he would eliminate the Bush tax cuts on those making how much money: Over 50 thousand a year, Over 100 thousand a year, Over 200 thousand a year, Over 500,000 a year? [Over 200,000 thousand a year].
4. Who is a former prosecutor? [Kerry]
5. Who favors making the recent tax cuts permanent? [Bush]
6. Who wants to make it easier for labor unions to organize? [Kerry]

The Annenberg report release commented on the findings of this survey that:

Daily Show viewers have higher campaign knowledge than national news viewers and newspaper readers – even when education, party identification,

following politics, watching cable news, receiving campaign information online, age and gender are taken into consideration (Annenberg Public Policy Center 2004).

Dannagal Goldthwaite Young, the lead researcher for Annenberg’s study, commented in a press release that the findings “do not show that *The Daily Show* is itself responsible for the higher knowledge among its viewers ... [the program] assumes a fairly high level of political knowledge on the part of its audiences – more so than Leno or Letterman. At the same time, because *The Daily Show* does

A. Political knowledge, interest and vote intention by age and late-night comedy preference

%	% Correct of six knowledge questions	Follow politics “Most of the time”	Intend to vote
Entire sample	45%	33%	86%
Of those watching any late-night:			
Prefer Letterman	49%	38%	91%
Prefer Leno	49%	39%	90%
Prefer Stewart	60%	46%	90%
Age groups:			
18-29 years old	40%	18%	78%
30-44	46%	28%	84%
45-64	48%	40%	91%
65 and over	45%	47%	93%

Table 5.3
Annenberg Public Policy Center. Daily Show viewers knowledgeable about presidential campaign. National Annenberg Public Policy Center 2004 Election Survey. September 21, 2004. Washington DC.

deal with campaign events and issues, viewers might certainly pick up information while watching” (Annenberg Public Policy Center 2004). Table 5.3 shows Annenberg’s average breakdown of viewers’ correct scores. Despite fears about the younger generation of voters, Table 5.3 illustrates that the average correct score of 18- to 29-year-olds is only five points behind 65 and over voters.

Table 5.4 shows Annenberg’s breakdown of political knowledge of 18- to 29-year-olds average scores by media type.

Table 5.4 shows that Daily Show viewers ages 18 to 29 score on average as high as the same group that watches four days or more of cable news and higher than those who read newspapers one to three days a week. On average, they score higher than other late-night show watchers and 16 points higher than those who watch no late-night comedy at all.

B. Young people's (18-29 year olds) political knowledge, interest and vote intention by media use

%	% Correct of six knowledge questions	Follow politics “Most of the time”	Intend to vote
Among all 18-29 year olds	40%	18%	78%
No network news	38%	15%	71%
1-3 Days network news	44%	19%	87%
4 or more days network news	40%	28%	87%
No cable news	36%	12%	69%
1-3 Days cable news	40%	14%	83%
4 or more days cable news	48%	32%	87%
No newspaper	36%	11%	66%
1-3 days newspaper	39%	14%	82%
4 or more days newspaper	46%	30%	87%
No late-night comedy	39%	16%	74%
1-3 days late-night comedy	43%	20%	85%
4 or more days late-night	42%	24%	85%
Of those watching any late-night:			
Prefer Letterman	39%	17%	82%
Prefer Leno	41%	21%	82%
Prefer Stewart	48%	31%	88%

Table 5.4

Annenberg Public Policy Center. Daily Show viewers knowledgeable about presidential campaign. National Annenberg Public Policy Center 2004 Election Survey. September 21, 2004. Washington DC.

In addition to studying the *Daily Show* audience, Annenberg also studied the jokes of *The Daily Show* and its two late-night competitors, Jay Leno’s *The Tonight Show*

and David Letterman's *Late Night*. Annenberg compared the differences between Leno's and Letterman's monologues jokes and the jokes made directly by Stewart in the "Headlines" segment detailed in Chapter 4. The study examined jokes made on the shows

D. Themes and Issues in Late-night Monologues from July 15 through September 16, 2004

	Total	Letterman	Leno	Stewart
Issues mentioned in jokes				
National Security	11%	12%	11%	13%
War in Iraq	6%	4%	5%	13%
Economy	4%	1%	6%	2%
Other issue	3%	3%	2%	5%
911 Commission	2%	2%	1%	1%
Energy and Environment	1%	-	1%	2%
Gay Marriage	1%	2%	2%	-
WMD	1%	-	1%	1%
% of jokes mentioning at least one issue	25%	21%	24%	33%
Total # Political Jokes	534	136	315	83
Bush Joke Themes				
Intelligence/Competence	38%	45%	38%	22%
Is not technically president (lost in 2000)	10%	10%	11%	0%
National Guard (Did he serve?)	10%	10%	10%	11%
Economy	8%	5%	9%	0%
Integrity/Honesty	3%	10%	2%	0%
Drug and Alcohol Use	3%	5%	2%	11%
Dirty Politics	2%	0%	2%	11%
War in Iraq	2%	0%	3%	0%
Domestic policy (Other than economy)	2%	0%	3%	0%
Losing	2%	5%	1%	0%
Full of Hot air	2%	0%	1%	11%
Arrogance	2%	0%	2%	0%
Total # Jokes about Bush	126	20	97	9
Kerry Joke Themes				
Rich Family and Wife	15%	5%	20%	0%
Vietnam	15%	19%	11%	44%
Flip-Flop	15%	10%	18%	0%
Losing	13%	24%	12%	0%
Appearance	8%	14%	9%	22%
Charisma	5%	5%	9%	0%
Dirty Politics	5%	5%	5%	0%
Full of Hot air	4%	5%	4%	11%
Affection for Edwards	4%	0%	3%	22%
Integrity/Honesty	3%	5%	4%	0%
Domestic Policy	3%	5%	3%	0%
Total # Jokes about Kerry	106	21	76	9

Table 5.5

Annenberg Public Policy Center. Daily Show viewers knowledgeable about presidential campaign. National Annenberg Public Policy Center 2004 Election Survey. September 21, 2004. Washington DC.

from July 15, 2004 through September 16, 2004, a period which included *The Daily Show*'s coverage of both the Democratic and Republican conventions.

Annenberg's study found that 33% of jokes made by Stewart in his "Headlines" segment mentioned at least one policy issue compared to 24% of Leno's monologues and 21% of Letterman's.

Of the 83 political jokes made by Stewart, only 9 specifically targeted Bush. That was 11 percent of his political jokes. The same number targeted by Kerry. The *Daily Show* segments are less likely than a Leno or Letterman joke to use a quick punch-line to make fun of a candidate...instead, Stewart's lengthier segments employ irony to explore policy issues, news events, and even the media's coverage of the campaign" (Annenberg Public Policy Center 2004).

Table 5.5 shows Annenberg's breakdown of the different comics' jokes in that two month period. Annenberg's breakdown of Bush/Kerry/Issue jokes supports to the theory that the humor used in *The Daily Show* is markedly different than the humor employed by other network late-night comedians. Stewart, for example, made no jokes about Kerry being a "flip-flopper," which constituted 15% of all jokes about Kerry. Stewart made no jokes about Kerry losing which constituted another 15% of Kerry jokes. Interestingly, Bush-losing jokes by Leno and Letterman comprised only 2% of Bush jokes, while Kerry-losing jokes by Leno and Letterman comprised of 15% of Kerry jokes. Stewart also made no jokes about Kerry's rich wife/family, which comprised 20% of Leno's jokes, but only 5% of Letterman's. Finally, Stewart's jokes about Bush made no reference to Bush "losing in 2000" or not being an elected president, which was an article of much discussion among liberals such as Michael Moore during the 2004 election period. Yet Stewart does not partake in any of those types of jokes, according to Annenberg. Also, while the majority of Bush jokes from all comedians did fall into Bush-lacks-intelligence formats, Stewart draws from that well of jokes far less than his competitors.

Annenberg's study shows that the comedians' joke totals are largely balanced towards the two candidates, although Leno made more jokes about Bush than he did

about Kerry. Stewart was equally balanced toward both. The subject of those jokes directed at the candidates, and the subjects of all their jokes in total, do show differences between the three shows and the differences in these types of jokes are important.

Dannagal Goldthwaite studied whether candidate jokes in late-night during the 2000 election “prime certain candidate traits which viewers then weighed more heavily as a criteria when forming subsequent evaluations” (Goldthwaite 2002). If one is primed to look at a candidate as losing while the other is primed to look at the candidate as dumb, while the number of jokes may be even, their impact may not be. Some jokes can be more detrimental to a candidate than others. Goldthwaite found a modest amount of priming effect, that while not huge:

...suggest that the salience of certain candidate attributes may be related to late-night exposure among viewers with certain levels of knowledge, where exposure increases trait salience in some cases and decreases it in others. The results also highlight the role of political knowledge as an important conditional variable in the effects process....Even so, the fact that almost all of the significant findings occurred through exposure to Leno, who made about twice the number of candidate jokes as Letterman, at least encourages the belief that jokes do matter (2002).

Goldthwaite’s research supports the theory that the less the viewer pays attention to politics, the more the political jokes they hear shapes their opinions of candidates. This begs the question of whether *Daily Show* viewers are the type to pay attention to politics, and therefore to be *less* affected by priming effects in the political jokes of *The Daily Show*, or are they less politically aware individuals who are therefore more affected by joke priming? When compared to other 18- to 29-year-olds who watch late-night comedy shows, 31% of *Daily Show* watchers say they “follow politics most of the time” whereas only 17% of *Letterman* watchers and 21% of *Leno* watchers do. Table 5.6 offers demographic information of late-night audiences.

Table 5.6 demonstrates that *Daily Show* viewers are, as a group, better educated and richer. This suggests the reasons behind the increased political knowledge are

because *Daily Show* watchers are a unique group of late-night TV watchers who are simply more interested in politics than their late-night program counterparts. As

C. Characteristics of the Late-night audiences

% Characteristics	Total	No late-night	Watched 1 or more days of late-night and prefer:		
			Letterman	Leno	Stewart
Men	48%	46%	49%	50%	60%
Women	52%	54%	51%	50%	40%
Whites	80%	80%	78%	78%	85%
African Americans	11%	11%	14%	12%	8%
Latinos	12%	13%	5%	10%	9%
High school or less	48%	50%	44%	45%	32%
Some college	26%	25%	27%	28%	29%
College degree or more	26%	24%	29%	27%	39%
18-29 years old	21%	18%	20%	22%	40%
30-44	31%	31%	32%	29%	34%
45-64	32%	33%	33%	32%	21%
65 and over	16%	17%	15%	16%	6%
Household income below \$35,000	35%	36%	31%	33%	31%
\$35,000 to less than \$75,000	33%	33%	36%	34%	32%
\$75,000 and over	23%	22%	25%	25%	30%
Northeast	21%	21%	21%	19%	23%
Midwest	23%	22%	28%	25%	21%
South	34%	34%	36%	33%	32%
West	22%	22%	15%	23%	25%
Republican	30%	31%	27%	33%	15%
Democrat	33%	32%	38%	33%	40%
Independent	26%	26%	27%	27%	33%
Conservative	38%	40%	34%	39%	18%
Moderate	37%	37%	41%	39%	38%
Liberal	21%	19%	23%	19%	43%
Hardly follow politics at all	8%	10%	6%	5%	3%
Now and then, some of the time	58%	59%	55%	55%	51%
Follow politics most of the time	33%	31%	38%	39%	46%
Zero knowledge questions correct	10%	12%	7%	7%	5%
1 or 2 correct	36%	36%	37%	33%	20%
3 or 4 correct	38%	37%	36%	41%	41%
5 or 6 correct	16%	15%	20%	19%	34%

Table 5.6
 Annenberg Public Policy Center.
 Daily Show viewers knowledgeable about presidential campaign.
 National Annenberg Public Policy Center 2004 Election Survey.
 September 21, 2004.
 Washington DC.

Annenberg put it, “People who watch *The Daily Show* are more interested in the presidential campaign, more educated, younger, and more liberal than the average American or than Leno or Letterman viewers” (Annenberg Public Policy Center 2004). They may represent part of what the Pew Center for People and the Press called “campaign news enthusiasts” who keep close tabs on campaign news and events and represent roughly 7% of the voting-age population (Pew 2004). Out of that 7%, Pew found that 4% of that select group got regular campaign news from comedy TV shows such as *The Daily Show*. It is possible that *The Daily Show* is simply attracting political sophisticates rather than the show creating a group of politically aware audience members.

The Daily Show and News Programming

With so much content analysis focused on comparing *The Daily Show*'s jokes to that of other late-night comedy, it is worthwhile to include a previous study which compared *The Daily Show*'s topics to those discussed on two national evening news broadcasts, NBC and CBS. In a three-week content analysis of *The Daily Show*, *NBC Nightly News*, and *CBS Evening News* broadcasts, Rachel Larris compared the topics discussed on all three programs to discover how topic selection on *The Daily Show* overlapped with the evening news. From March 15 to April 1, 2004, episodes of all three programs were recorded and coded on Mondays through Thursdays of those weeks producing 12 nights of content. Shows were coded for topic discussion. A topic was defined as a broad description of the subject(s) of a news or comedy segment. A topic is the most basic description of what the segment is about when described in a few words or a sentence. Topics were differentiated from the segment's “subject” defined as the broadest and simplest possible categorization. There could be several subjects discussed

in one news segment or story, but coded only for one topic. Over the 12 days coded total topic counts for all three shows (including overlaps when a topic was discussed on more than one program) were: 151 on CBS, 126 on NBC, and 73 on *The Daily Show*. On *The Daily Show*, 32.9% of topics discussed were also discussed on either CBS or NBC or both programs leaving 67.1% of the program full of content that was not discussed on either program. Because weekends and Friday night broadcasts of the evening news, as well as episodes shortly before the study were not coded, it is possible that some topics discussed on *The Daily Show* had been discussed on either news broadcast. A search of the Vanderbilt TV Archives for certain topics did reveal that this may be the case for some topics on *The Daily Show* that did not have a match. Three topics may have been discussed on either news program before the beginning of the survey on March 15, 2004. The news programs may have covered four other topics during the missing days in the survey. Without viewing the original broadcasts, however, it is impossible to be completely certain how the topic would have been coded in the survey and therefore they are left out of the “match” statistic. Even if all seven suspected topics were coded as a match, the topics covered by *The Daily Show* that were only on *The Daily Show* would still likely count for more than 50% of the all of show’s topics for the three weeks.

News and comedy segments were also coded for the amount of time spent on a topic. In cases where there were matches found between *The Daily Show* and one of the news broadcasts, in almost every case *The Daily Show* devoted more time to the topic. This occurred whether the topic was spread out over several days or regulated to one segment. One example is how each network covered the 21-page memo from Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia issued on March 18, 2004. NBC devoted one-minute, 42 seconds to the topic; CBS, two minutes, three seconds; and *The Daily Show*, two minutes, 29 seconds. When covering a speech given by Vice President Cheney on March 17, CBS

devoted two minutes, 19 seconds, NBC two minutes, 36 seconds and *The Daily Show* three minutes, three seconds.

One reason that *The Daily Show* can spend more time on topics is perhaps, that the staff has more time to analyze the topics than did the news broadcasters. Another consistent pattern is that, as somewhat expected, *The Daily Show's* coverage of topics lagged a day to several days behind the coverage by the newscasters. While the sample matched was too small to calculate a range for the time lags between topic coverage, the general pattern was that *The Daily Show* would cover events one to two days after being covered by the evening news. The longest time lag in the study between a news program's story and *The Daily Show's* segment was six days.

The next chapter will explain the methodology used in this paper's research.

Chapter 6: Data and Methodology

This research is designed to test five hypotheses.

H₁: The audience of the Daily Show leans more toward Democrats than towards the Republicans.

H₂: The audience of *The Daily Show* is politically more liberal in the aggregate than the aggregated American population.

H₃: The show favors Democrats over Republicans and guests with right-of-center viewpoints.

H₄: The show favors guests with left-of-center viewpoints over guests with right-of-center viewpoints.

H₅: There is a correlation between the audience's political profile and the show's content as ascertainable through an analysis of the guest appearances.

I test my hypotheses through two investigations. The first creates a political profile of the program's audience using Pew Research Center for People and the Press' Biennial Media Consumption surveys from 2002 and 2004. The second examines the political leanings of the show through an analysis of the program's guest list.

Pew Surveys

Data collected by the Pew Research Center for People and the Press was used to create a political profile for the audience of *The Daily Show*. The two surveys were published on June 9, 2002²⁸ and June 8, 2004.²⁹ Both surveys were conducted using a

²⁸ The methodology for the 2002 survey is described by the Pew Research Center for People and the Press as follows:

Results for the Biennial Media Consumption survey are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates among a nationwide sample of 3,002 adults, 18 years of age or older, during the period April 26 - May 12, 2002. Based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 2 percentage points. For results based on either Form A (N=1,551) or Form B (N=1,451), the sampling error is plus or minus 3 percentage points.

²⁹ The methodology for the 2004 survey is described by the Pew Research Center for People and the Press as follows:

Results for the 2004 Biennial Media Consumption survey are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International among a nationwide sample of 3,000 adults, 18

random digit sample of telephone numbers selected from telephone exchanges in the continental United States.

In both surveys, half of the respondents were asked “Do you watch *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*: Regularly, Sometimes, Hardly Ever, Never, Don’t Know.” Results from that survey question were culled into a variable of *Daily Show* watchers and non-watchers. “Watchers” were defined as those who responded to that survey question as “regularly” and “sometimes” watchers of the program. “Non-watchers” were defined as those who answered “Hardly Ever” and “Never.” In the 2002 survey, 173 watchers were identified and 1,368 non-watchers were identified. In 2004, 216 watchers were identified and 1,271 non-watchers were identified.

Daily Show watchers’ responses were then compared to non-watchers on a variety of variables including: sex, age, income, religion, race, city size, education, political ideology, political identification, political party leaning, vote choice in 2000, and approval of George W. Bush.

In addition to demographic variables, in 2004 respondents were asked a series of media uses and gratifications questions.³⁰ These eight questions asked respondents whether they liked, disliked, or it didn’t matter to them when news was presented using different formats.

From these eight questions, two indexes were created to measure the respondent’s preference of news that is entertaining and news that is informative. These indexes were created out of four questions each.

Informative News Index Questions
(Do you like it when a News Source...)

1. Includes ordinary Americans giving their views?
2. Has in depth interviews with political leaders and policymakers?

years of age or older, during the period April 19-May 12, 2004. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling is plus or minus 2 percentage points. For results based on either Form 1 (N=1,493) or Form 2 (N=1,507), the sampling error is plus or minus 3 percentage points.

³⁰ A similar, although not exact, set of questions was also asked in the 2002 media consumption survey but was not asked of the same set of respondents who were asked if they watched *The Daily Show*, therefore, no comparisons of responses could be made between the two surveys.

3. Shares your point of view on politics and issues?
4. Presents debates between people with differing points of view?³¹

Entertaining News Index Questions

(Do you like it when a News Source...)

1. Is sometimes funny?
2. Stirs your emotions?
3. Makes the news enjoyable and entertaining?
4. Has reporters and anchors with pleasant personalities?³²

Different combinations of the eight questions only produced lower Cronbach's Alpha scores, offering support that the indexes were correctly correlated. From these eight questions, as well the two new indexes, *Daily Show* watchers' responses were compared both to non-watchers as well as watchers of other types of programming.

Limitations

One limitation to this investigation is the definition of "watchers" culled from those who responded that they watched the program "regularly" and "sometimes" but not "hardly ever." With no number given to differentiate between a "sometimes," watcher and a "hardly ever" watcher it is possible that some respondents included in the "watcher" variable do not, in fact, watch the program all that often. This is a standard way of asking media use questions that is not as precise as desired in this study, but is a limitation of secondary analyses.

Guest List Investigation

In the second research investigation, guests of the show were broken down into type: entertainer, politician, or pundit. When clearly identified, guests were classified by party identification and public perception of left-of-center or right-of-center viewpoints. In addition, from October 4, 2004 until March 24, 2005, I maintained a log of guest appearances on the show, recording names, dates, and length of the interview in seconds. From an earlier study of *The Daily Show* (Larris 2004), an additional three-week log of guest interviews, from March 15

³¹ Cronbach's Alpha score was .601.

³² Cronbach's Alpha score was .621.

to April 1, 2004, was used in the investigation specifically to include the interview lengths in seconds.

The investigation of the guest list tracks the show from the fourth season until March 24, 2005. The fourth season was chosen as the starting point because it is the first full season with Jon Stewart as host and executive producer. At that point he would have been able to exert control over guest bookings.

A sample of the lengths of the interviews from a portion of the guests from the ninth and eighth seasons was also included to better determine whether one type of guest was given more time on the program. A list of guests who appeared on the program was obtained from the show's producers which listed all guests from season three to half of season nine. The list included guest names, episode number, order of appearance, and episodes without guests, but no other information.

An initial biographical sketch of all guests was researched by entering their names into www.google.com. Because all guests had some degree of notoriety, all guests researched did turn up at least some biographical information in terms of the person's primary job, and/or creative or academic endeavors. In addition, because guests were famous, personal knowledge was allowed to come into play when coding as well. For example, if the guest was "Tom Cruise" the study would assume that the guest was the famous actor "Tom Cruise" rather than any other person by that name. In most cases this research made it immediately clear who had appeared on the program and what their work was. In only five cases the biography of the guest could not be immediately determined from a google search or there were two equally likely famous people to which the name could have referred. In those five cases, an inquiry to the show's producers as to who the guest was resulted in biographical information and further details as to why the guest was booked.

All guests were coded into one of three categories; entertainer, politician, or pundit based on their known biography. In situations where interviews were available for viewing, either from the research archive or from Comedy Central website, and needed for coding purposes, interviews were used to add to the coding process. But for the majority of the names researched, coding was conducted using only names and broad general background of the person.

Entertainers

Entertainers is a coding category that includes, but is not limited to, actors, comedians, musicians, fictional authors, reality TV show stars, and the occasional Muppet. What defines the “entertainer” categorization is the expectation that the guest interview did not include discussion about politics or current events. A review of guest interviews from October 2, 2004 through March 24, 2005 supports the theory that when guests do not work in the larger world of politics, news media or in what might be called “serious” fields such as history, philosophy, science or academia, questions posed to them remain grounded in the realm of usual entertainment talk show questions. That is, limited to amusing anecdotes, questions about the guest’s creative work or personal life, or random topics which do not include a discussion that touches on politics or current events. Guests coded as “entertainers” were not given any additional classification as to party or ideological leaning. Entertainer guest interviewers are considered politically neutral.

Politicians

A “politician” was coded as a guest who worked for the federal government or a political party. This group included elected officials, both currently serving and retired, party chairmen, campaign managers, and former White House aides or cabinet members, as well as ambassadors (including one from a foreign nation), diplomats, former CIA experts, a former National Security

Council expert, and a former Chairman of the Defense Policy Board Advisory Committee.³³ One issue with this system of coding was that many, if not most, of the guests who appeared on the show had retired. Nearly all appeared on the program to promote a book about their work in the federal government. Some had only recently retired from the Bush Administration, but others had been retired for years, if not decades, from their government work. These individuals were certainly far removed from their initial positions within an administration and therefore would likely be treated differently than a guest who more recently served. (For example, a guest who recently served could be expected to comment more directly about the workings of a current administration). Because some guests were far removed by time from their initial government work, a second test was applied. Those who served in the government during the Clinton or George W. Bush administrations were coded as politicians. Those who served in the government before the Clinton administration, and had not continued to work in any official capacity for a political party or campaign, were coded as pundits.³⁴

Pundits

As mentioned, the third general grouping of guests was the more amorphous term “pundit.” According to the *American Heritage College Dictionary*, the term “pundit” comes from the Hindi word *pandit*, or learned man. According to the dictionary, a pundit is a “source of opinion; a critic ... a learned person” (1109). However, the term “pundit” has come to have different connotation in regards to television. Eric Alterman’s³⁵ book, *Sound & Fury*, describes a pundit as “people anointed by the media to give their opinions on things ... Whether these people

³³ Technically speaking, the Defense Policy Board Advisory Committee is a civilian advisory board outside of the federal government. But the guest involved, Richard Perle, had been closely tied to the Bush Administration and was widely seen as an orchestrator of the Second Iraq War. Therefore it was determined his best fit would be as a “politician” because of his close work with the government.

³⁴ There were two exceptions made. Former Clinton White House aide George Stephanopolous, and former Congressman Joe Scarborough. Both Stephanopolous and Scarborough have transitioned to new careers in TV news and would have been better identified by the show’s producers for their current work in TV news than for their work in Congress or the White House. Party identification, however, would remain coded for both despite new well-known careers.

³⁵ Alterman himself was a guest on *The Daily Show*.

bring any special expertise to their subject is wholly at the discretion of those doing the anointing” (1992, 5). Alterman’s book describes what he calls a “punditocracy ... a tiny group of highly visible political pontificators who make their living offering ‘inside political opinions and forecasts’ in the elite national media” (4-5). Paul Hitlin (2005) combines elements of Alterman’s definition as well as Dan Nimmo and James Combs’ (1992) and Alan Hirsch’s (1991) to create three conditions that define a pundit. In Hitlin’s definition:

1. Pundits give opinions.
2. Pundits are considered authorities on some subject.
3. Being a pundit is a role that can be moved into or out of depending on the situation.

As already noted, different guests on *The Daily Show* are asked different types of questions. Stewart does not ask the same type of questions of actor Paul Rudd that he does to Senior Fellow in Foreign Policy Studies at the Brookings Institution Kenneth Pollack. Guests are treated in respect to their various expertise but they can be moved into an out of the role of pundit depending on the purpose of the guest booking.

A “pundit” on *The Daily Show*, is a guest who is booked to discuss an issue or area of substance in the world of politics, current events, news, science, history, or other fields of academia. A pundit, however, is separated from those who recently served in the federal government because a pundit will have a different agenda from a politician. A politician is not presented as an expert or a “learned person.” Their expertise is on the workings of the federal government or party politics from being part of the system. Those who have been removed from the system for decades do not present such an “insider” look, so they are moved to the realm of pundit.

Party Identification and Ideology

Guests coded as “politicians” and “pundits” were then coded on an additional dimension. Politicians and some pundits were also coded for party identification. Party identification was considered permanent for all former elected officials and White House workers. In effect, if a

person served in an administration or in Congress, they would be coded for their party no matter how much time had passed. The reasoning behind this decision is due to research which supports the theory that party identification among adults is relatively stable. Party identification, however, was not applied if the guest had made a well-publicized split with their party. An example would be Pat Buchanan who served in both the Nixon and Reagan White House, ran for the Republican party ticket in 1992, but then publicly separated from the Republican party in 2000 and ran as the Reform party candidate.

Party identification was limited to Democrat and Republican. In the course of the program, a few guests did appear who may be described as representing either a third party option or a political independent. A few known examples occur in the fifth season when Ralph Nader, Michael Moore, and Phil Donohue appeared within weeks of each other in the Fall of 2000 to stump for Nader's presidential bid as a member of the Green party. But isolated cases of political independents or third party representatives were difficult to track without a review of the appearances themselves and therefore "independents" and third-party politicians were not tracked. However, it is worth mentioning that either by design or accident, two of the country's most famous elected independents, Vermont Senator Jim Jeffords and Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura, never appeared as guests on the program.

However, not every guest coded as "politician" was also coded with a party identifier. Certain positions, even within administrations, are non-partisan positions such as diplomat or ambassador. Party identification was then limited to those who served the federal government or party in a strictly partisan position, such as member of Congress, governor, White House aide, or cabinet member. Party identifiers were therefore used to draw a line between guests who were well-identified as "Republicans" or "Democrats" because of their work within the party, rather than any other determining factor.

Only a handful of those coded as “pundits” had a previous background in an administration. However, many pundits were active partisans. A “partisan” is a person who advocates a consistent political viewpoint or entire political philosophy which guides their thinking and which they wish would be used to govern. A partisan not only holds political views, but actively campaigns, particularly through the media, in the hope that his or her viewpoint is adopted by the majority or will influence world events. A partisan may be closely aligned with a political party, and may be entirely devoted to aiding that party politically, but do not work directly for the party as an elected official, paid campaign worker, or in the official party organizations. Many guests are booked, not only on *The Daily Show* but on other TV programs, entirely because of their well-known partisan views. However coding pundits for party identification was not applied because partisans (which includes columnists, filmmakers, news channel commentators, and most people who are regularly paid to produce opinions on issues) do not officially “speak” for their party. They may advocate positions the party would never take or may criticize a party. They are advocates who work outside of the official party structures. Because many of the guests who appeared on *The Daily Show* had well-known partisan leanings, another level of coding was used for guests coded as “pundits.” Pundits were coded based on general knowledge of the pundit’s public perception. They were judged whether there was a general public perception that the guest had political viewpoints that were widely considered to be left-leaning or right-leaning. This test did not involve researching whether the guest actually held positions that could be labeled “left-of-center” or “right-of-center” in the political spectrum, but only that there was a widely held belief that the guest did.

Two coders were used to test the validity of the coding scheme, both graduate students studying politics. One coder was a self-avowed conservative Republican and the other a self-avowed liberal Democrat. The two coders would judge whether the guests coded as pundits had a public perception of holding views that were left-of-center or right-of-center to the general

public. If both coders were in agreement, the guest would be coded accordingly. If the coders were in disagreement, no code was entered. If there was disagreement between the two coders, no code was entered. In the majority of cases both coders agreed there was no public perception of the guest's political viewpoint at all and no code was entered. Therefore not every pundit was coded for partisan leaning.

Limitations

One limitation to coding guests without viewing the actual discussion is that it is possible that some guests coded as entertainers did discuss politics or current events during their interview. While random reviews of guest interviews from outside the study archive and from different seasons seem to confirm that nearly all “entertainer” type guests did not discuss politics, there are a few possible exceptions to these guidelines. Certain celebrities, notably actors Tim Robbins, Susan Sarandon, and Janeane Garofalo are well-known for their public political positions. Other celebrities, including actor Ron Silver and comedian Dennis Miller have also become known in 2004 for their support for George W. Bush and have been booked on other shows to discuss their personal politics. Three actors from the highly political NBC drama *The West Wing* also appeared on the program which might have sparked a discussion beyond the usual talk show fluff. It is important to note that the “entertainer” category is not based entirely on what the guest's primary job is but what they were expected to discuss on the program. Usually an actor, comedian, musician or fiction author is expected to speak primarily about their creative work. However, if guests were booked and expected to discuss politics—due to working on a political show or project—then they were not be coded as entertainers. An example would be actor Drew Barrymore's appearance on episode 9030. Initially, Barrymore would likely have been coded as an entertainer, but a review of her visit reveals that most of the interview involved Barrymore's documentary and work encouraging young people to vote in the 2004 election.

Therefore, this particular guest interview is not coded as an entertainer because she was booked on the program to speak about her documentary on voting.

When tapes of interviews were available for certain celebrities' interviews, they were used to aid in coding. However, absent video evidence this study first assumes that the actors, comedians, and musicians had not discussed politics. Using this assumption, this study would likely underplay the amount of political discussion occurring during the entertainer guest interviews. However, the amount of guests who discussed politics and were not coded as either pundits or politicians is likely negligible over the entire history of the program.

A secondary limitation is that when politicians appeared on the guest couch, the interviews may not have differed greatly from the entertainer interviews. It is a key criticism of politicians' appearances on entertainment television shows that the discussions are not substantive. This investigation does not delve into this area too deeply, but a qualitative review of politicians' visits to *The Daily Show* suggests that these types of interviews and the questions posed in them vary considerably within this guest coding.

A third limitation involves coding guests for partisan leanings. There are limitations to this type of coding. Even though the two coders had above-average political knowledge, it would be impossible for any coder to be 100% familiar with everyone's public reputations. Coding using this system is likely to produce results only for the most well-known partisans with the strongest partisan reputations. That this coding does not take into account what the guest's actual viewpoints are is also a limitation. A guest may have a reputation that is inconsistent with their actual political views. However, research has shown that a TV personality's reputation will be considered in how the audience will receive their statements (Mendelsohn 2003). Naturally, the more well-known the personality, the more this factor comes into play. Many guests appearing on *The Daily Show* are likely not familiar to many in the audience, particularly because it is a youthful audience. Whether or not a guest has a well-known political reputation in some circles,

the audience would have no reference to judge that person's statements on the show if they are unfamiliar with that person's work. Thus the coders would end up measuring those guests with the strongest partisan reputation which would correspond to much of the audience's familiarity with the guest's reputation.

In the next two chapters I will present the findings of my statistical analysis. Chapter 6 provides the audience's political profile while Chapter 7 details the political slant of the guest list.

Chapter 7: Daily Show Audience Profile

One question this research has posed is who is the audience for *The Daily Show*? What is the political profile of the audience and how does the audience’s political viewpoint correlate to the show’s political viewpoint? Statistical analysis reveals that the audience for the show is broadening in some categories, such as age and education, but narrowing in fields such as party identification, as Democrats become a more dominate part of the *Daily Show* audience.

To answer these questions, two research surveys were used to probe the audience of *The Daily Show*. The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press sponsors a biannually media consumption survey prepared for them by Princeton Survey Research Associates International. The survey is conducted by telephone “with a nationally representative sample of 3,000 adults living in continental United States” (Pew Research Center 2004). The two datasets came from the 2002 and 2004 media consumption surveys.

Audience Demographics

Daily Show watchers are significantly more male than non-watchers. In 2002, the proportion was 57.2% male and in 2004, 60.2% male. Non-watchers were 40.6% male and 41.5% male respectively. This is illustrated in Tables 7.1 and 7.2

2002 Sex

	Male	Female
Watchers	57.2%	42.8%
Non-Watchers	40.6%	59.4%

Table 7.1 $X^2=17.28$ $p<.000$

2004 Sex

	Male	Female
Watchers	60.2%	39.8%
Non-Watchers	41.5%	58.5%

Table 7.2 $X^2=26.01$ $p<.000$

Somewhat not surprisingly due to the program’s time slot and description, *Daily Show* watchers are significantly younger than non-watchers. Table 7.3 shows the breakdown of watchers’ ages in 2002, and Table 7.4 shows the breakdown in 2004.

2002 Age

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Watchers	26%	28.9%	17.3%	14.5%	6.4%	6.9%
Non-Watchers	9%	15.3%	20.2%	20%	15.2%	20.3%

Table 7.3 $X^2=83.23$ $p<.000$

2004 Age

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Watchers	26.8%	20.2%	18.3%	15%	11.3%	8.5%
Non-Watchers	8.1%	13.7%	21%	20.7%	15.3%	21.1%

Table 7.4 $X^2=84.3$ $p < .000$

Not unexpectedly, the distribution of the watchers in both years is heavily concentrated in the 18-24 and 25-34 age groups. However, while the difference between watchers and non-watchers is significant, the distribution of ages in 2004 is slightly more evenly spread across age groups. The 55-64 and 65+ age brackets, while still representing only 11.3% and 8.5% of 2004 audience demographics, is a significant increase from 2002’s 6.4% and 6.9% ratios. Indeed, while the 18-24 age group consistently remains the largest demographic in both years, the 25-34 age bracket decreases in proportion to the older brackets. This “aging up” of *The Daily Show* between 2002 and 2004 may explain some of the other findings as the audience of the program diversifies.

City Size and Education

One demographic set that was statistically significant in 2002 but not in 2004 was the city size of *Daily Show* watchers as well as their education. As Table 7.5 shows, watchers are strongly correlated to more populated regions. However, by 2004 this same demographic is not a statistically significant finding ($p > .617$), meaning that by 2004, *Daily Show* watchers are not greatly different from non-watchers in terms of where they live. Table 7.5 shows the breakdown between watchers’ regional locations in 2002 compared to non-watchers. While the plurality of *Daily Show* watchers report that they live in a small city or town, the majority live in large cities or close to large cities, while non-watchers report living in less urban areas.

2002 City size

	Large city	Suburb near a large city	Small city or town	Rural area
Watchers	27.2%	27.7%	32.9%	12.1%
Non-Watchers	20.5%	22.5%	35.4%	21.7%

Table 7.5 $X^2=12.09$ $p < .007$

Likewise, education is a statistically significant finding in 2002, but not in 2004 ($p < .104$). Table 7.6 shows the breakdown by educational level of watchers and non-watchers.

2002 Education

	High school or less	High school Grad	Some college or tech	College grad	Post-grad work
Watchers	8.7%	20.2%	31.2%	27.7%	12.1%
Non-Watchers	10.7%	30.9%	26.7%	19.4%	12.4%

Table 7.6 $X^2=12.87$ $p < .012$

Table 7.6 shows that *Daily Show* watchers in 2002 are more likely to either have some college or technical schooling or be a college graduate than non-watchers. However, by 2004, this demographic is not a statistically significant finding. Meaning, the education levels of *Daily Show* watchers are not statistically different from non-watchers. What is confusing is that, to some extent, the audience of 2004 is comprised slightly of older viewers than the 2002 audience. This leads to the expectation that the audience would be better educated in 2004 as well. However, this is not borne out statistically. Once again, the audience of the program diversifies from its 2002 audience, becoming more general and less specific in two demographic categories.

Political Orientation of *Daily Show* Watchers

Two important aspects of this research are determining the political outlook of the *Daily Show* audience, both in terms of party identification and ideological viewpoint. A significant finding is that in 2002, neither party identification ($p < .424$), party leaning ($p < .105$) or vote choice in 2000 ($p < .251$) had statistically significant findings. Simply put, in 2002, the average *Daily Show* viewer was no more likely than a non-viewer to be a Democrat or to have voted for Al Gore in 2000. However, by 2004, this had changed.

2004 Vote Choice in 2000³⁶

	Gore	Bush	Nader	Other	Too young/ Didn't vote
Watchers	34.6%	26.1%	2.8%	2.8%	33.6%
Non-Watchers	27.1%	39.8%	.7%	3.8%	28.6%

Table 7.7 $X^2=22.18$ $p > .000$ **2004 Party identification**

	Republican	Democrat	Independent	No Preference
Watchers	24.6%	38.6%	32.4%	3.9%
Non-Watchers	33.7%	34.7%	25.5%	5.6%

Table 7.8 $X^2=9.49$ $p < .050$

Tables 7.7 and 7.8 show the breakdown of vote choice in 2000 and party identification between watchers and non-watchers. While there is a plurality towards Democrats and voting for Gore in 2000, the tables illustrate that *Daily Show* viewers are far less likely to be Republicans and more likely to be independents than non-watchers. The Pew survey, however, probed these political independents further. First Pew asked respondents, “Do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat or Independent?” and then if the respondents did not have an answer or answered “independent” they were then asked to which to party did they lean. Once again, *Daily Show* watchers had a statistically significant finding of favoring Democrats over Republicans.

2004 Party leaning

	Leans Republican	Leans Democrat	Other/Don't know
Watchers	29.4%	44.7%	25.9%
Non-Watchers	27.6%	26.9%	45.5%

Table 7.9 $X^2=14.06$ $p < .001$

Table 7.9 shows that if respondents didn't initially identify themselves as belonging to one political party, they were far more likely to say they leaned towards the Democratic party. This would correspond to the relatively high percentage of the audience in 2004 who reported voting for Ralph Nader in the 2000 election, when compared to non-watchers. While *Daily Show* watchers in 2004 might not call themselves Democrats, they were clearly independents who

³⁶ In 2002, there were not enough counts in each variable to use unweighed data to draw a conclusion about vote choice in 2000. In 2004 this was not a problem, but to match testing results to 2002, data was tested in 2004 using both weighed and unweighed data. Both tests produced similar results of statistical significance. Table 7.7 displays results using a cross tabulation test with unweighed data.

avored Democrats more than Republicans. This statistic seems to be further supported when considering the ideology of *Daily Show* viewers.

Ideology

Tables 7.10 and 7.11 show that watchers are more self-described liberals than self-described conservatives, while the plurality claim to be moderates.

2002 Ideology

	Very Conservative	Conservative	Moderate	Liberal	Very Liberal	Don't Know
Watchers	3.5%	26.6%	42.8%	17.9%	6.4%	2.9%
Non-Watchers	4.7%	32.3%	39.3%	12.6%	3.7%	7.5%

Table 7.10 $X^2=13.23$ $p<.021$

2002 Ideology recoded with collapsed categories

	Conservative	Moderate	Liberal	Don't know
Watchers	30.1%	42.8%	24.3%	2.9%
Non-Watchers	37%	39.3%	16.3%	7.5%

Table 7.11 $X^2=12.81$ $p<.005$

This trend towards liberalism is continued, if not expanded, by viewing the survey results in 2004 as shown by tables 7.12 and 7.13.

2004 Ideology

	Very Conservative	Conservative	Moderate	Liberal	Very Liberal	Don't Know
Watchers	6.9%	20.8%	37.5%	20.8%	8.3%	5.6%
Non-Watchers	5.6%	33%	38.4%	12%	4.2%	6.8%

Table 7.12 $X^2=27.23$ $p<.000$

2004 Ideology recoded with collapsed categories

	Conservative	Moderate	Liberal	Don't know
Watchers	27.8%	37.5%	29.2%	5.6%
Non-Watchers	38.6%	38.4%	16.2%	6.8%

Table 7.13 $X^2=23.43$ $p<.000$

One conclusion we can draw from these findings is that the *Daily Show* audience has always favored liberals over conservatives, but not until 2004 did they favor Democrats over Republicans. While becoming less concentrated in age and education, the audience is moving towards the Democratic-Liberal side of the political spectrum. One possible explanation is that the show is drawing liberals and Democrats from all different walks of life, which is why neither

income nor education are important control variables and why age is spreading out from its youthful concentration.

Approval of Bush

One final Pew survey question also hints at the political profile of *Daily Show* watchers. Regardless of whether watchers called themselves liberals or independents, they may collectively share more disappointment in George W. Bush’s performance over that of non-watchers. In both the 2002 and 2004 surveys, Pew asked respondents “do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling his job?” In both surveys watchers were more likely to disapprove than non-watchers of how George W. Bush is handling his job. Table 7.14 shows the results in 2002 and Table 7.15 shows the results in 2004.

2002 Approval of Bush

	Approve	Disapprove
Watchers	75.9%	24.1%
Non-Watchers	82.9%	17.1%

Table 7.14 $X^2=4.67$ $p<.031$

2004 Approval of Bush

	Approve	Disapprove
Watchers	43.1%	56.9%
Non-Watchers	54.1%	45.9%

Table 7.15 $X^2=8.35$ $p<.004$

What is important about these two tables is not the drop in approval or disapproval of Bush—the question posed in 2002 and 2004 is measuring two different time periods of Bush’s performance. What is important to note is that in both surveys, watchers were more disapproving than non-watchers (or less approving, as it is a dichotomy). This begged the question of whether disapproval of Bush was correlated to increased viewership of *The Daily Show*. Were those who watched the show “regularly” more disapproving of Bush than those who watched it “sometimes,” “hardly ever,” and “never?” The evidence suggests this is the case in 2004. Table 7.16 shows the correlations between increased viewership and decreased levels of approval.

2004 Approval of Bush by viewership

Watches Daily Show	Approve	Disapprove
Regularly	37.2%	62.8%
Sometimes	41.9%	58.1%
Hardly Ever	46.6%	53.4%
Never	53.9%	46.1%

Table 7.16 $X^2=23.39$ $p<.000$

In 2002, the relationship between increased viewing of *The Daily Show* and disapproval of Bush is not as strongly correlated. Table 7.17 shows the correlations between approval and viewership in 2002.

2002 Approval of Bush by viewership

Watches Daily Show	Approve	Disapprove
Regularly	70%	30%
Sometimes	77.3%	22.7%
Hardly Ever	76.8%	23.2%
Never	83.4%	16.6%

Table 7.17 $X^2=8.28$ $p>.041$

While in 2004 approval/disapproval is strongly correlated with viewership, in 2002 the ratios of approval/disapproval are similar in those who watched the show “sometimes” and “hardly ever.” However, since “regular” viewers still disapprove of Bush’s handling of his job far more than “sometimes” or “hardly ever” viewers, there is still a correlation between disapproval of Bush and increased viewership of *The Daily Show*.

Binary Logistic Regression

A final series of analyses was used to test whether certain demographic variables were predictive of whether a person watched *The Daily Show*. Variables chosen in the regression included vote choice in 2000, race (black or white), ideology (liberal or conservative), and party identification (Democrat or Republican). Party was also rotated out with “independent” because a significant percentage of *Daily Show* watchers were self-identified independents. The dependent variable was dichotomous, watchers (coded as 1) and non-watchers (coded as 0).

Table 7.18 shows the coefficients scores and their correspondents to levels of statistical significance. As we can see from Table 7.18, liberalism, younger age, and slightly higher education is predictive of watching *The Daily Show* in 2004. This is interesting because when a cross tabulation test of education was run by itself, the results proved to be non-statistically significant. In addition, vote choice in 2000 drops out as a predictor even though the results of the cross tabulation test was statistical significant.

When we rotate in party identifications to compute a coefficient for Democrats, Republicans and independents, we notice a change in their statistical significance, becoming a predictive variable. Tables 7.19 and 7.20 show the same regressions but with “independent” rotated in the party identification mix.

2004: Predictors of watching Daily Show

	B	S.E.	Wald	Sig.
Step 1(a) Gore voter	.137	.332	.172	.679
Bush voter	-.398	.341	1.368	.242
No voter	-.311	.329	.893	.345
White	.478	.297	2.596	.107
Black	.073	.378	.038	.846
conservative	.014	.200	.005	.943
Liberal***	.438	.195	5.072	.024
Democrat	-.160	.202	.625	.429
Republican	-.300	.230	1.702	.192
Age***	-.417	.056	54.981	.000
Education***	.166	.085	3.812	.051
Constant	-1.030	.508	4.112	.043

Table 7.18

***** denotes statistically significant predictor variables**

2004: Predictors of watching Daily Show 2

	B	S.E.	Wald	Sig.
Step 1(a) Gore voter	.107	.332	.103	.748
Bush voter	-.426	.335	1.620	.203
No voter	-.321	.330	.946	.331
White	.470	.296	2.518	.113
Black	.066	.379	.031	.861
Conservative	.024	.197	.015	.903
Liberal***	.431	.195	4.902	.027
Democrat	.166	.234	.505	.477
Independent*	.426	.208	4.188	.041
Age***	-.418	.056	55.300	.000
Education***	.165	.085	3.800	.051
Constant	-1.321	.527	6.288	.012

Table 7.19**2004: Predictors of watching Daily Show 3**

	B	S.E.	Wald	Sig.
Step 1(a) Gore voter	.160	.326	.240	.624
Bush voter	-.385	.341	1.272	.259
No voter	-.286	.329	.752	.386
White	.445	.297	2.518	.115
Black	.068	.379	.031	.865
Conservative	-.001	.199	.000	.998
Liberal***	.464	.193	5.802	.016
Republican	.017	.245	.005	.945
Independent*	.357	.193	3.426	.064
Age***	-.397	.055	52.050	.000
Education***	.167	.084	3.909	.048
Constant	-.965	.439	4.835	.028

Table 7.20

From my binary logistic regression analyses, I can draw the following conclusions: that liberalism, younger age, slightly higher education, and self-described independence from party identity are all predictive variables to watching *The Daily Show*. Yet when the same analysis was run from responses to the 2002 survey, only younger age remained a predictive variable to watching *The Daily Show*.

Uses and Gratifications

In Pew's 2004 media consumption survey, a series of uses and gratifications questions were asked of the same group that was asked whether they watched *The Daily Show*. The uses and gratifications measures, in a theory first described by Blumler and Katz (1974), tap into the

motivations audience members have for turning to media. These questions are described in detail in Chapter 6. Pew asked respondents separately whether they liked news: that was funny, that included ordinary Americans giving their views, that has in depth interviews, that stirs their emotions, that shares their point of view or conversely offers debates with differing opinions, that is enjoyable and entertaining, and finally news has anchors and reporters with pleasant personalities. In all of the uses and gratifications questions, respondents split the majority of responses between “like it” and “doesn’t matter” with only a small percentage of respondents answering “dislike it” to any of the queries. The query with the highest percentage of “dislike it” respondents was to the question of whether they liked it or disliked it when a news source “stirs [their] emotions.” This question had a 12.3% of responses say they disliked it when a news source stirs their emotions. Of the eight uses and gratifications questions posed by Pew, *Daily Show* watchers were statistically different from non-watchers in their responses to two questions. Interestingly, the question with the strongest statistical significance was the question of whether respondents liked it or disliked it when a news source “has in depth interviews with political leaders and policymakers.” Table 7.21 shows the breakdown between viewers’ and non-viewers’ responses.

News source: Has in-depth interviews

	Like it	Dislike it	Doesn't Matter
Watchers	63.1%	4.2%	32.7%
Non-Watchers	48.1%	8.7%	43.2%

Table 7.21 $X^2=17.59$ $p<.000$

As Table 7.21 shows more than half of *Daily Show* watchers claim to like it when a news source has in-depth interviews with politicians, while just less than half of non-watchers do. What is interesting about this question is that it directly relates to the guest interviews of *The Daily Show*. As Chapter 8 will elaborate, the guest interviews with politicians and pundits are a significant portion of the later seasons of the show. The average length of an interview with a politician is 7 minutes, 31 seconds. Whether or not these interviews are

“in-depth,” it is likely that watchers of a program with interviews would be more predisposed to like it when a news source has interviews with political leaders and policymakers.

Two other questions also had statistically relevant responses. When *Daily Show* watchers were asked “Do you generally like it or dislike when a news source stirs your emotions?” they were less likely to dislike it than non-watchers as Table 7.22 demonstrates.

News source: Stirs your emotions

	Like it	Dislike it	Doesn't Matter
Watchers	33.2%	7.7%	59.1%
Non-Watchers	29.2%	13.7%	57.1%

Table 7.22 $X^2=6.05$ $p < .049$

Different from non-watchers, *Daily Show* watchers were slightly more likely to both like it and say it doesn't matter to them when a news source stirs their emotion.

A final question provided a response that does approach statistical significance and is therefore worth reporting. Table 7.23 shows the responses to the question “Do you generally like it or dislike it when a news source shares your point of view on politics and issues?”

News source: Shares your point of view

	Like it	Dislike it	Doesn't Matter
Watchers	44.7%	4.2%	51.2%
Non-Watchers	36.6%	4.7%	58.7%

Table 7.23 $X^2=5.13$ $p > .077$

This question is particularly relevant to the central research question of this paper in asking whether the political beliefs of the audience of *The Daily Show* correlate with the political bent of *The Daily Show's* content. If this correlation was supported, the expected response from watchers would be that they like it when a news source shares their point of view on politics. Of course, one could argue that if the *Daily Show* watchers do not consider *The Daily Show* a “news source,” then their responses to this question might not apply anyway. But it would demonstrate a mentality that watchers prefer political content with which they share an agreement. Even Jon

Stewart has said that audience members are only likely to laugh when they agree with viewpoint of the joke.

People's sense of humor goes as far as their ideology. People will laugh like hell at anything you're saying as long as it corresponds to their personal world belief. And once you go over that, you can't worry about it. So I take pride in spending absolutely no time, no moments out of my day, worrying about what anyone else believes. We have one thing to do, and that is to make it as funny as we believe possible.³⁷

Although there may be some personal bravado reflected in Stewart's statement as to his writing process, his analysis of people's joke reception is probably correct. Table 7.23 demonstrates that watchers do like it when they share a political viewpoint with their news source more than non-watchers. Table 7.23 has a Pearson Chi-Square value of 5.13 which corresponds to a significance level of .077. This significance level is approaching statistical significance, although the evidence is not as strong as would be liked for this central research hypothesis.

Entertaining News Vs. Informative News

One final series of tests was run to create a political profile of Daily Show watchers. From the eight uses and gratifications questions, two indexes were created.³⁸ One measured whether respondents liked news that was "entertaining," the other measured whether respondents liked news that was "informative." It should be noted that these two concepts are not necessarily mutually exclusive. But there has been much research has been devoted to tracking the trend of turning news programming into less about giving important information than about grabbing high ratings with "exciting" content (Hamilton 2004). Both indexes created a scale of 4-12. Each question had three choices: "like it, doesn't matter, dislike it." "Like it" was scaled to 3, "doesn't matter" was scaled to 2, and "dislike it" was scaled to 1. The index range was eight and the closer to four on the index meant the less the respondent enjoyed either "informative" or

³⁷ *Al Franken Show*. April 7, 2004 broadcast. Transcription from personal archives.

³⁸ Factor analysis and Cronbach's Alpha scores which lead to the creation of these indexes can be found in the Appendix section.

“entertaining” news. The closer to 12 meant they enjoyed that particular quality more. Table 7.24 shows the mean scores for both indexes for the entire survey.

Entire Survey	Mean
Entertaining News	9.54
Informative News	9.68

Table 7.24

Table 7.25 shows the mean score on both index for *Daily Show* watchers and non-watchers.

Daily Show	Mean	Ind. Sample T-Test (2-tailed)
Entertaining News Watchers	9.66	.194
Non-Watchers	9.50	
Informative News Watchers	10.06	.001***
Non-Watchers	9.65	

Table 7.25

***denotes statistically significant findings

As Table 7.25 demonstrates, *Daily Show* watchers do not differ on average from non-watchers on the Entertaining News index. Yet, on the Informative News index, there is a .41 difference of means. The independent sample t-test corresponds to a significance level of .001, meaning the differences in means is statistically significant. *Daily Show* watchers are more likely to like it when news is informative. However, it was important to see where *Daily Show* watchers ranked in terms of watchers of other programming. In addition to asking whether its respondents watch *The Daily Show*, survey respondents were queried about their watching habits of many other programs. Nineteen shows, networks, and types of shows were compiled into “watchers” and “non-watchers” in a similar methodology for the *Daily Show* watchers.³⁹

Of all the different types of shows, programming and networks tested on the indexes, only three groups did not have statistically significant results on either the Entertaining News index or Informative News index. Those were listeners of religious radio shows, Don Imus’ radio show, and watchers of ESPN’s sports news programming. Listeners of those programs scored no differently than non-listeners on the indexes.

³⁹ Four of the programs are in fact radio stations or programs. “Watchers” in this case naturally refers to listeners.

Watchers/Listeners	Informative News Mean	Difference of means between Watchers/non-watchers	Ind. Sample T-Test (2-tailed)
NewsHour**	10.08	.5	.000
The O'Reilly Factor***	10.06	.49	.000
The Daily Show***	10.06	.41	.001
Sunday political talk shows***	10	.48	.000
CSPAN***	10	.42	.000
Rush Limbaugh***	10	.36	.001
Larry King Live***	9.92	.3	.001
NPR	9.88	.31	.000
National evening news	9.86	.41	.000
Late-night TV	9.85	.26	.000
MSNBC	9.82	.3	.000
News magazines shows	9.81	.38	.000
Any Cable***	9.81	.35	.000
CNN***	9.81	.34	.000
Morning news shows	9.78	.18	.002
Entertainment news (Access, ET!)	9.78	.15	.017
FOX News	9.76	.23	.008
Local News	9.74	.34	.000
Entire Survey	9.68		

Table 7.26

**** denotes a lower mean than non-watchers on Entertaining News index**

*****denotes non-statistically significant findings on Entertaining News index, i.e. watchers did not differ from non-watchers of those programs. All others had a statistically significant finding of greater mean scores than non-watchers on Entertaining News index.**

Other than those exceptions, every tested group scored higher than non-watchers on their preferment of informative news. Table 7.26 shows the mean scores of watchers/listeners of those types of programming which reached a statistically significant level of difference between watchers and non-watchers.

Table 7.26 demonstrates that *Daily Show* watchers rank high on the scale of watchers of other types of programming for preferment of informative news. This is particularly significant if

one keeps in mind that the mean for the entire survey is 9.68. *Daily Show* watchers preference for news that is informative puts them closer to the audiences of *The O'Reilly Factor with Bill O'Reilly*, Sunday morning political talk shows, *NewsHour*, C-SPAN, Rush Limbaugh's radio show, and *Larry King Live*. One point to note about Table 7.26 is that the categories are non-exclusive. A *Daily Show* watcher may listen to Rush Limbaugh's radio show and watch entertainment news programming. The independent sample-t tests run scored only the differences between watchers of those programs and non-watchers. Not between watchers of one program and watchers of another.

Of the 19 types of programming tested on the Entertaining News index, many did not have statistically significant results and only one, watchers of PBS's *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, had a mean that was actually ranked lower than non-watchers on preference for news that is entertaining. Eight types of programming had non-significant results on the Entertaining News index, meaning that watchers did not differ from non-watchers in their responses. Those shows were: *The Daily Show*, *The O'Reilly Factor*, Rush Limbaugh's radio show, C-SPAN, Sunday political talk shows, *Larry King Live*, CNN, or watchers of any cable news network.⁴⁰

It is somewhat surprising that watchers of *The Daily Show* are included in this group, while viewers of late-night TV, "such as David Letterman and Jay Leno," are not. It is an unexpected finding that watchers of a political news satire program would not, on average, rank higher for enjoying entertaining news than non-watchers, while the audience for a similar class of programming, late-night talk shows, would.

On one level, this series of means tests show support to the theory that the more "serious" the news programming, the more watchers of that program are likely to prefer news that is informative and not prefer news that is presented entertainingly. What is surprising is that *Daily*

⁴⁰ As table 7.26 demonstrates, watchers of Fox News or MSNBC specifically, are not included in that list of non-significant findings on the Entertaining News index. But respondents to Pew's survey question "do you watch any cable news" are. The difference in findings between these similar groups is likely due to the inclusion of CNN watchers in the broader categorization.

Show watchers are lumped in with the same group of shows that are often considered very “serious,” such as C-SPAN, the Sunday political talk shows, and *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*. With those “serious” programs are also watchers of *The O’Reilly Factor*, Rush Limbaugh’s radio show, *Larry King Live*, and CNN. However, not FOX News, MSNBC, watchers of local news, or national evening news programming. This leads to a conclusion that if one considers *The Daily Show* to be an entertaining news program, such inclusion would make sense. But if one did not consider *The Daily Show* to be a news program of any kind, than its placement on par with watchers of C-SPAN and *The O’Reilly Factor* does seem strange. Another conclusion that could be drawn about *Daily Show* watchers is that they may be a class of watchers who enjoy news or politics more than non-watchers despite the “comedy” designation of the show which is why they are more alike to the audience of *The O’Reilly Factor* than the audience of *The Tonight Show*.

One survey question supports this conclusion. Pew asked respondents “how closely do you follow news about political figures and events in Washington either in the newspaper, on television or on the radio?” Table 7.27 shows the breakdown of respondent’s answers.

2004: Follow news about politics?

	Very closely	Somewhat	Not very	Not at all closely
Watchers	36.7%	38.1%	17.2%	7.9%
Non-Watchers	25.8%	44.6%	16.2%	13.4%

Table 7.27 $X^2=14.23$ $p<.003$

As we can see from Table 7.27, *Daily Show* watchers are more likely than non-watchers to “very closely” follow news about political figures and events in Washington, DC. They are also less likely than non-watchers to “not at all” closely follow the news. We can even compare the *Daily Show* watchers’ responses of 2004 to those of 2002. Table 7.28 shows the breakdown of 2002 responses.

2002: Follow news about politics?

	Very closely	Somewhat	Not very	Not at all closely
Watchers	21.4%	55.5%	13.9%	9.2%
Non-Watchers	21.7%	45.3%	19.1%	13.8%

Table 7.28 $X^2=8.129$ $p<.043$

As we can see from Table 7.28, in 2002 *Daily Show* watchers were mostly different from non-watchers in “somewhat” closely following political news. While they were more engaged than non-watchers, there weren’t as ardently engaged as they were in 2004.

From my statistical analyses, we can begin to draw a profile of the audience of the *Daily Show* as one that is evolving from a predominately younger demographic of 18- to 24-year-olds with some college education into a politically-interested, liberal-leaning and Democratically-favoring demographic who do not differ from non-watchers in terms of income or education. Therefore, we can reject our null hypothesis that the *Daily Show* audience does not favor Democrats over Republicans and that they are not more liberal than the average American and accept our research hypothesis.

In my next chapter, I will detail the results of my findings about the political content of the show as determined through an examination of the guest list.

Chapter 8: Guest List Findings

This chapter highlights the findings of the statistical analysis of nearly six seasons of guest appearances on *The Daily Show* beginning with the fourth season up to March 24, 2005, a date which ends at two-thirds of the ninth season completed. The analysis covers the number of appearances by guests, as well as analyzes the length of time given to guests in a sample of episodes from the eighth and ninth seasons. This chapter details the description of guest frequencies, cross tabulations, and sample t-tests. A discussion of the significance of the findings and hypotheses follow. Detailed tables depicting study results can be found in the Appendix.

To restate the hypothesis examined in this chapter:

H₁: The guest list of *The Daily Show* favors Democrats over Republicans.

H₁₀: The guest list of *The Daily Show* does not favor Democrats over Republicans.

H₂: The guest list of *The Daily Show* favors guests with left-of-center views over those with right-of-center views.

H₂₀: The guest list of *The Daily Show* does not favor guests with left-of-center views over those with right-of-center views over right-of-center views.

H₃: The guest list of *The Daily Show* favors the combined appearances of Democrats and left-of-center guests over the combined appearances of Republicans and with right-of-center guests.

H₃₀: The guest list of *The Daily Show* does not favor the combined appearances of Democrats and left-of-center guests over the combined appearances of Republicans and with right-of-center guests.

The guest list can show favoritism either by having types of guests appear more often, or those guests being granted more interview time over other guests.

Over the course of five and a half seasons, 891 guests were recorded in the study; however, there were 12 episodes which lacked a guest. This lack was coded as “none” which became a ghost factor within the guest variable. Some episodes had more than one guest, but if there were two guests they would always be related in their work in some way. An example would be episode 4020 which had Ed Sanchez and Dan Myrick, the two directors of *The Blair*

Witch Project, appeared together on the guest couch. If the two guests were coded as entertainers, they were not counted separately. Two guests of non-entertainment coding was much rarer and mostly limited to special political events such as the night of the first debate during the 2004 Presidential election and election night 2004. Because these two guests were often of opposing political viewpoints, they were coded separately. In five and a half seasons there were 888 episodes in the study.

Table 8.1 shows the raw numbers and percentages of guest appearances by for the entire study.

All Guests

Total	Entertainer	Pundit	Politician	Democrat	Republican	Left	Right
All years	625	162	92	48	45	29	23
%	70.1	18.2	10.3	5.4	5.1	3.3	2.6

Table 8.1

At first glance, it appears that entertainers have dominated the show for its five and half seasons. However, table 8.2 shows the raw numbers of each coding variable which begin to show how the program evolved. That the number of guests does not perfectly mirror the number of episodes is due to the fact some episodes did not have a guest.

All Guests by Season

Years	Season	Episodes	# Guests	Entertainer	Pundit	Politician	Dem	Repub	Left	Right
7/99–6/00	4	161	159	151	3	5	1	4	1	0
7/00–6/01	5	158	153	134	10	9	3	6	3	1
7/01–6/02	6	135	133	96	31	6	3	4	4	2
7/02–6/03	7	157	157	105	38	14	11	5	5	6
7/03–6/04	8	161	161	92	41	28	16	12	11	9
7/04–6/05	9	116	116	47	39	30	14	14	5	4

Table 8.2

Table 8.3 shows the percentages of each variable within its own season. What Tables 8.2 and 8.3 make clear is the decline of the entertainer category of guest as the show has progressed.

Between seasons five and six, the number of pundits nearly tripled, while politicians showed a slight decline between the same span. Two factors may account for this statistic. The events of

Percentage of Guests by Season

Season	Entertainer	Pundit	Politician	Democrat	Republican	Left	Right
4	93.8%	1.9%	3.1%	.6%	2.5%	.6%	0%
5	84.8%	6.3%	5.7%	1.9%	3.8%	1.9%	.6%
6	71.1%	23%	4.4%	2.2%	3%	3%	1.4%
7	66.9%	24.2%	8.9%	7%	3.2%	3.2%	3.8%
8	56.8%	25.3%	17.3%	9.9%	7.4%	6.8%	6.2%
9	39.8%	33.1%	25.4%	11.9%	11.9%	4.2%	3.4%

Table 8.3 1

September 11, 2001 occurred early in season six. In the wake of the terrorist attack and the resulting Afghanistan invasion, it is possible that the party reasons for appearing on a program like *The Daily Show* would have also declined, while the country experienced a brief decrease in partisanship. That season six had only 135 episodes is evidence of that season being different from others. In addition, July 2001 to June 2002 was not an overtly political season. While the midterm elections occurred in November 2002 (which fell during season seven) because the election of Congress is fought in many different battlegrounds, rather than as a national discussion, it is not certain that it would make much sense for candidates to appear on a program like *The Daily Show* the way presidential candidates do. Nor might the show be willing to book a senatorial or gubernatorial candidate of one state for a national TV program. The lone senator to appear on the show in the sixth season was Sen. John McCain. New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg also appeared, but only after winning his election that year. Moreover, Bloomberg, as mayor of New York City after September 11, was a national figure in a way most other political candidates were not.

What the tables reveal is that by the eighth season, only half of the show's guests were entertainers. Recall that entertainers are the traditional late-night talk show guest, the kind who regularly appear on *The Tonight Show* and *Late Night* and *The Late Show*. For almost half of a late-night talk show's guest slots to be awarded to guests for what might be called serious—even

semi-serious—discussions of politics, current events, journalism, even history and academia is remarkable for this time-slot and type of programming. With season nine’s incomplete guest totals, it is impossible to say if the ratios of entertainers to politicians and pundits would continue to decrease, but with two-thirds of the season accounted for it would be impossible for the ratios to be less than those of season eight.

I ran several levels of statistical analysis to determine whether the ratio of guest appearances could have occurred by chance. Table 8.4 tests whether differences in the numbers of appearances by guest type; entertainers, pundits and politicians, could have appeared by chance. Although this was not a relationship I specifically hypothesized, it would be interesting to know whether the ratios of the types of guests were statistically significant relationships.

Season by Guest Type

Season	Entertainers	Pundits	Politicians
4	151	3	5
5	134	10	9
6	96	31	6
7	105	38	14
8	92	41	28
9	47	39	30

Table 8.4 $X^2=147.16$ $p<.000$

Table 8.4 demonstrates that the decreasing ratios of entertainers to pundits and politicians is a meaningful relationship. *The Daily Show* is indeed evolving to include more guests of a “serious” nature.

Tables 8.5 and 8.6 respectively, test H_1 and H_2 , whether the show favors Democrats and those with left-of-center views.

Season by Party id

Season	Democrats	Republicans
4	1	4
5	3	6
6	3	4
7	11	5
8	16	12
9	14	14

Table 8.5 Linear-by-Linear =1.65 $p>.199$

Season by Ideology		
Season	Left	Right
4	1	0
5	3	1
6	4	2
7	5	6
8	11	10
9	5	4

Table 8.6 Linear-by-Linear =2.67 p>.337

My first hypothesis was that the show would favor Democrats over Republicans. Because party identification was nominal level data, a cross tabulation test of the number of appearances by Democrats and Republicans by season was run to determine whether differences in the number of appearances could have appeared by chance. Some cells contained less than five counts, therefore the linear-by-linear value was used to determine statistical significance. For table 8.5 the linear-by-linear chi square value of 1.65 corresponds to a significance level of .199. This means I cannot reject H_{10} and that slight percent (.3%) increase of Democrats appearances over Republicans is not a statistically significant number. This does not support the first hypothesis.

The second hypothesis was that the show would favor guests with perceived left-of-center views over guests with perceived right-of-center views. While there is a .7% increase of Left guests over Right, a cross tabulation test yielded a linear-by-linear chi square value of 2.67 which corresponds to a significance level of .339. This means I cannot reject H_{20} and, like the slight increase of Democrats, the slight increase of left guests over right (.7%) is not a statistically significant number and does not support the third hypothesis.

For the third and final hypothesis, a test was run combining party identification and ideology variables to determine if the two groups of guests together—Democrats + left-of-center and Republicans + right-of-center—would show evidence of the show supporting one particular ideological viewpoint, since left-of-center views are commonly associated with Democrats and

right-of-center views are commonly associated with Republicans. Table 8.7 shows the breakdown of the combination of party id and ideology by season.

Party+Ideology by Season

Season	Dem+Left	Repub+Right
4	2	4
5	6	7
6	7	5
7	15	10
8	26	19
9	19	17

Table 8.7 Linear-by-Linear =.450 p>.502

Since several cells in table 8.7 had less than five counts, the linear-by-linear association chi square value was used to determine statistical significance. However, when the two groups were combined and a cross tabulation test was run comparing appearances of both groups by season, the linear-by-linear value was .450, which corresponds to a significance level of .502. Therefore I cannot reject H_{30} . This does not, then, support the hypothesis that the show favors either ideological side of the political spectrum. Whether or not the relationships are statistically significant, it is worth noting that in season eight there were seven more appearance by Dem+Left than Repub+Right guests. One explanation for this number, however, may have been due to the Democratic primary season which occurred in season eight which might have spurred a few more invitations for Democrats and their ideological allies because there was an open primary for the Democrats.

This series of tests support the theory that, despite many commonplace assumptions about the ideological bent of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, the show is not stacking the deck with guests of one political stripe over another. In fact, the numbers show that, either by accident or by design, in the course of five and a half seasons the show has booked almost an equal number of guests from both sides of the political aisle. While this survey has not conducted a content analysis of the substances of these interviews, and it is possible that the show treats some

guests more harshly than others, a less qualitative review of the last two seasons has shown this not to be the case. In my opinion, however, further study is needed.

Time

A final component of the interviews was examined—the length of time granted to guests. The interview segment of the show ranged wildly from as short as 4 minutes, 55 seconds to 10 minutes and 55 seconds, and although not included in the sample, even longer interviews with Bill Clinton and John Kerry have been recorded at close to 12 minutes each. The average time for all guests, however, was 6 minutes, 51 seconds.

While some types of guests may have been granted a statistically equal number of appearances, the raw number of appearances could be misleading if different guests were offered more time to speak than others. From a five month, three-week sample of shows, 85 guest appearances were timed. The mean time for all guests together was 410 seconds, or 6 minutes, 50 seconds. One interview, a January 20, 2005 interview with Senator Joe Lieberman, was dropped from the time sample as an outlier, being only four minutes, 47 seconds, far shorter than any other politician interview. The interview was the shortest coded, and, aside from the short length, was particularly atypical of *Daily Show* interviews as it was conducted not in studio, but from a remote location. In short, it was a “talking head” interview. The date of the interview was important, as it was Inauguration Day. That *The Daily Show* decided to have Joe Lieberman on

Mean and Median Interview Times in Seconds

	Entertainer	Pundit	Politician	Democrat	Republican	Left	Right
Mean	371.8	435.8	461.9	436.8	466.5	446.3	486
Median	362	418	433	423.5	442.5	430	420
Cases	38	30	16	8	6	3	3

Table 8.8

the program, in any capacity, on George W. Bush’s second inauguration day, is a notable editorial choice. Nonetheless, the interview length was determined to be an outlier and was,

therefore, not included in the final analysis. Without Lieberman's interview, the mean for all guests is 411.6 seconds. Table 8.8 reveals the means and median times for all guests.

My first hypothesis about time is that entertainers would be given less time than either politicians or pundits. The null hypothesis is that there would be no difference between mean times of entertainers and politicians or pundits.

At first glance, table 8.8 seems to bear out this hypothesis. Entertainers, on average, received not only less time than either pundits or politicians, but almost 40 seconds less than the average for all guests. An independent sample t-test was run on the difference between the mean times of all three groups of guests. An independent sample t-test was run comparing means between entertainers and politicians, entertainers and pundits. Both reached similar findings of statistical significance. The Levene's test for equality of variances was significant at the .002 level and equal variances are not assumed. The t-test value was -4.414 which corresponds to a significance level of .000. This means we can reject the null hypothesis and that the difference in mean times between entertainers and other groups is statistically significant. A similar independent sample t-test was run between politicians and pundits, Democrats and Republicans, and left-of-center and right-of-center guests. Between politicians and pundits, the Levene's test for equality of variances was not significant at the .585 level and equal variances were not assumed. The t-test value was -.630 which corresponds to the significance level of .508. Between Democrats and Republicans, the Levene's test for equality of variances was not significant at the .989 level and equal variances were assumed. The t-test value was -1.197 which corresponds to the significance level of .255. Between left-of-center and right-of-center, the Levene's test for equality of variances was not significant at the .689 level and equal variances were assumed. The t-test value was -.827 which corresponds to the significance level of .424. The results of all tests support the theory that the differences in the mean times for all guests are not statistically

significant except for the difference between entertainers and other guests. Once again, H_{10} and H_{20} cannot be rejected using the variable of time as a measure.

When both Democrats and left-of-center guests were combined and Republican and right-of-center, the t-test value was -1.264 which corresponds to a significance level of .223. Once again, the differences between times granted to guests of opposing political viewpoints was not statistically significant. As with H_{10} , and H_{20} , this test shows that H_{30} cannot be rejected and therefore the research hypothesis that the show favors Democrats or guests with left-of-center viewpoints, is not supported by the evidence.

Who Appears, Who Doesn't

Like many long-standing programs, *The Daily Show* has developed a stable of what might be called “favorites.” These are guests who have repeatedly returned to the program. While the repeated return of entertainers is commonplace to most late-night talk shows, due to the fact most that entertainers must continually promote new films or creative projects, the

	Guest	Number of appearances
All	Bob Dole ⁴¹	8
Entertainer	Andy Richter/Paul Rudd	5
Politician (other than Bob Dole)	John McCain	6
Pundit	Fareed Zakaria/Michael Moore	5
Democrat	Joe Lieberman/Charles Schumer	4
Left of Center	Michael Moore	5
Right of Center	Bill Kristol/Bill O'Reilly	3
Pundit without coding ⁴²	Fareed Zakaria	5

Table 8.9 Highest Number of Appearances

⁴¹ The senator's first two appearances was a single interview cut and shown during two consecutive episodes in December 1999 and his last appearance was in February 2004. These three appearances were unrelated to his role on the show. Between March 8 and November 7, 2000 Dole appeared five times on the program as part of his arrangement to be the show's Guest Political Commentator for their "Indecision 2000" election coverage. When he would appear on the show during this time period, Dole would be the only guest in that episode and therefore coded as a regular guest in the study.

⁴² A pundit without coding, is a pundit who was neither a Democrat nor a Republican, nor had a general public reputation as having views that were either left-of-Center or right-of-center.

repeated return of both pundits and politicians is somewhat surprising. While there are increasing numbers of politicians appearing on late-night TV, those that appear usually only appear once as a stunt. Moreover, these appearances are very closely linked to presidential campaigns—unless that person is Arnold Schwarzenegger. Only *Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher* duplicated the kind of numerous repeat appearances by non-candidate politicians on a late-night comedy program. However, even *P.I.* could not continue those appearances indefinitely. In *Entertaining Politics*, Jones reveals that the longer *Political Incorrect* was on the air the less frequent were appearances by politicians due to the risk factor of unscripted television (2005). However, on *The Daily Show*, this trend is reversed; the longer *The Daily Show* is on the air, the more appearances there are by active sitting politicians. That former senator and 1996 Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole became a semi-regular commentator on the program, a mere four years after losing the White House, is quite remarkable. Table 8.9 lists the guests with the highest number of repeat performances.

A glance at the entire history of *The Daily Show*'s guest list reveals many common names in the world of punditry and news. Likely because it is a show about news—a condition Stewart has said the people media finds “flattering” to themselves—the program has attracted a fair amount of guests who work for news divisions of other channels. Table 8.10 shows the number of appearances by employees of a news network or news division, this includes multiple appearances by the same person.

ABC	NBC ⁴³	CBS	CNN	FOX News ⁴⁴	MSNBC	PBS
13	9	4	15	8	4	1

Table 8.10

The relatively few employees of CBS News to appear on the program is somewhat fascinating because CBS is owned by Viacom, which also owns Comedy Central, which owns *The Daily*

⁴³ Includes one appearance by Ashleigh Bamfield who also works on MSNBC. Bamfield is counted in both NBC and MSNBC's columns.

⁴⁴ Sean Hannity and Alan Colmes appeared jointly but are counted as one appearance in column totals.

Show. One of the fears about giant media companies, such as Viacom, is that they would produce only cross-promotion of products put out by the corporate family. Indeed, a few guests from the news divisions seem to be promoting an upcoming news special just like entertainers promoted new movies. Katie Couric appeared on December 16, 2004, initially promoting her new children's book but also discussed an upcoming news special where she investigated the sex lives of teenagers. Similarly, Peter Jennings' February 23, 2005 appearance was almost entirely devoted to his upcoming news special about UFOs which aired the following night. As a closing remark Stewart said to Jennings, "maybe next time we can talk about Iraq."

Another interesting fact from the guest list is that the anchors of the ABC and NBC evening news programs appeared multiple times, but not the anchor of CBS's evening national news program. ABC's Peter Jennings appeared twice, NBC's Tom Brokaw appeared three times, and his successor, Brian Williams, also appeared three times. To date, however, CBS's Dan Rather, has never appeared as a guest on *The Daily Show*. Two CBS employees who have appeared on *The Daily Show* were from *60 Minutes* (Don Hewitt and Leslie Stahl).

Why did Peter Jennings and Tom Brokaw appear but not Dan Rather? I can only speculate that perhaps the lack of appearances by Dan Rather was his choice and not *The Daily Show's* and/or perhaps the joint relationship between Comedy Central and CBS may actually be a bit of a hindrance in booking guests from CBS News.

Yet CNN's prominence of guests, far exceeding Fox News or MSNBC News, is also intriguing, particularly in light of Stewart's comments about the network.

Fox News has the phrase 'fair and balanced' which has journalists wringing their hands about it....CNN says 'you can depend on CNN.' Guess what? I watch CNN. No you can't. I watch it all the time. So your slogan is just as misleading as theirs.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ *60 Minutes*. Oct. 25, 2004.

The booking of guests from a network Stewart has said publicly he does not admire seems to once again invoke the specter, discussed in Chapter 4, of Stewart the media critic who does not practice what he preaches.

This raises the question of whether Stewart and the producers of *The Daily Show* are attempting to use the guest bookings on program to do a little agenda setting of their own by promoting some voices over others. For example, right-of-center pundit Ann Coulter only made one appearance on the program as did Sean Hannity in a joint appearance with Alan Colmes. Other familiar faces from the world of punditry, Tucker Carlson,⁴⁶ James Carville, George Will, Paul Begala, and Michelle Malkin have never appeared on the program despite fitting in the same molds of other guests who are booked repeatedly such as Michael Moore, Bill Kristol, and Arianna Huffington. Of course *The Daily Show*, with only 161 episodes a season, and even if one is generous, only half of those spots going to pundits, it is possible that Ann Coulter's single appearance or James Carville's lack of appearances is not indicative of anything purposeful by the producers of the show. Or that the promotion of one author's non-fiction book while another author is not booked, is not an endorsement by the program of the author's viewpoint or a negation of the missed author's views. Guest bookings are a delicate dance. Shows, both late-night and news talk shows, attempt to garner high ratings and prestige by getting the most important guests, however their respective fields define importance. It is very likely that not everyone *The Daily Show* producers want to appear is willing to come on the show. And likewise, not everyone who would like to appear can. Yet *The Daily Show* has also booked many guests who seem very out of place on the program, being neither "funny" nor charismatic in the usual sense from the

⁴⁶ None of CNN's *Crossfire* stable of guests ever appeared on the program, even well before Stewart started calling Bob Novak a "douchebag for liberty" repeatedly on his show in the eighth season or before Stewart's single heated appearance on *Crossfire* in 2004.

pundit world, nor likely very well-known to their youthful audience. Guests like Richard Clarke,⁴⁷ Princeton professor of Philosophy Harry Frankfurt, and Nobel Peace Prize winner Bishop Desmond Tutu stand out on the program like fish out of water. Nevertheless, I speculate that as much as certain guests did not fit in the traditional sense of a “good” guest for most entertaining talk shows, *The Daily Show* wished to book them, not because they would be particularly “entertaining,” but that they might otherwise be “informative” for the audience as they collectively claim to want information. By booking some guests and not others, *The Daily Show* may be attempting to direct its audience’s attention to areas the producers wish to them to think about, if only for six minutes, 51 seconds. That this possible agenda-setting appears not to be directed in a liberal-conservative, or Democrat-Republican manner does not mean there may not be some agenda hidden in the appearances of the guest list.

While my exploration of the guest list reveals no statistical evidence of bias towards one political party or one ideology, in sheer raw number there were nine more appearances, out of 879 total guests, who were either Democrats or left-of-center guests over Republicans and right-of-center guests. This might partially be explained by the open Democratic primary in the 2004 election, to which it will be interesting to note in the future if the open Republican primary predicted for the 2008 presidential election will spur many visits by Republican candidates for president on the program.

In my final chapter, I will offer my conclusions to my research studies and suggest possible avenues of research in the future.

⁴⁷ Richard Clark’s first appearance on the program came shortly after his testimony to Congress’s September 11 Commission. The week leading up to Clark’s appearance *The Daily Show* ran many long segments about Clarke’s testimony. Many of the segments were flattering to Clarke personally and detrimental to his critics. Clarke however, a veteran of the serious Sunday political talk shows, seemed very awkward on the guest couch of *The Daily Show*, unused to the witty banter of Stewart. The audience of the program, however, had they watched the week before would have “known” who Clarke was and why he was important that week. What is more impressive is that despite Clark’s awkward first interview, he was on the program again the following season.

Chapter 9: Further Research and Conclusions

In some ways the analyses of this study about the *Daily Show* replicates the conclusions of an earlier study by the Annenberg Public Policy Center. This research and Annenberg's concluded that *Daily Show* viewers are more educated, younger and more liberal than the average American. While Annenberg further finds that the *Daily Show* audience skews slightly richer as well, my research did not find that. This difference however, could be due to the fact that Annenberg defined *Daily Show* watchers differently than the Pew Research Center did. But Annenberg did find that these differences between *The Daily Show* audience and other audiences "do not explain the differences in levels of campaign knowledge between those who watch *The Daily Show* and those who do not" (Annenberg Public Policy Center 2004). My analysis may explain these differences as due to the fact that the *Daily Show* audience seems to care about news, particularly the type of political news presented on the *Daily Show* and measured by Annenberg. *The Daily Show* audience ranks right up there with other politically interested audiences in wanting news that is more informative and less entertaining. *Daily Show* audiences may be young, but they are not necessarily uncaring about politics, which sets them apart from many of their generation.

But if my analysis of the audience of *The Daily Show* was supported by other findings, my guest list analysis did not support my hypothesis. If one assumes *The Daily Show* is a "liberal" program because of the personal politics of the show's staff or that Stewart wanted John Kerry to win—as Stewart admitted that was who he was going to vote for⁴⁸—than it would be reasonable to assume the show would promote those Democratic and liberal voices over Republicans and conservative voices. Even the hoary old cliché of the "liberal media" could have been applied to Stewart in this fashion. But that is not what I found. Instead, Stewart

⁴⁸ *American Perspectives*. C-SPAN. From speech for Newhouse School on October 14, 2004.

allowed both sides, indeed all four of them, ample time on his program to make their case to his audience. This is interesting even in light of the fact that Stewart says he doesn't feel the need to "be equal opportunity anything"⁴⁹ to both sides of the political spectrum. It is certainly possible that there are constraints on Stewart should he wish to turn his program into a platform for political views of only one stripe. Stewart cannot stretch his program too far beyond his "entertainment" genre. He is capable of being critical only as long as he is entertaining. The minute Stewart and *The Daily Show* stops being funny and starts being serious is when they will lose their authority. Stephen Colbert even expressed this issue their way:

I think one thing that comedians have—that protects them—is that they just continue to be funny. If they're making jokes and trying to be entertaining and not – you know, I think one of the things that people on the Left got in trouble with when they were protesting the latest war in Iraq, was that they – at the moment at which these entertainers should have used what they do best, which is entertain, they stopped and they said, "No, I want to make a political statement." They were vilified and, you know, ostracized by the general public because of that.

And there's nothing wrong with making a political statement, but you've got to do it with what you do best. You know, you've got to continue to be funny.⁵⁰

Colbert is probably correct that entertainers on the left "get into trouble" when they stepped out of their prescribed roles as entertainers to make political statements. When Jon Stewart dropped his "monkey" role to criticize Tucker Carlson and the hosts of CNN's *Crossfire* in complete sincerity, it brought a bit of a backlash to him. Who is Stewart, after all, to accuse someone of not being critical enough to his guests? While this project did not study empirically the questions during the guest interviews there is much qualitative evidence offered in this project that the show is deeply segmented, with the first "fake news" part being deeply critical and the show then utterly changing tones and styles in the "second half" of the program. I cannot either support or accept the H₅ hypothesis that the liberal/democratic-leaning audience correlates to the content of the program because of this segmentation. There is much circumstantial evidence that the first

⁴⁹ *60 Minutes*. October 25, 2004.

⁵⁰ U.S. Comedy Arts Festival. Panel "Who's Funnier—The Left or The Right?" March 6, 2004. From transcript.

part of the program is slanted towards left-of-center values by design in how the producers and writers view their very role on the show an “iconoclast status quo attack”⁵¹ is a “liberal” virtue by their own definition. That President Bush and the Republicans have largely been “the status quo” during Stewart’s tenure on *The Daily Show* makes it somewhat difficult to separate oppositional humor from anti-Republican humor. Had John Kerry won the 2004 election it would have made an excellent case study as to how the nature of the show might have changed, or not changed, with a Democrat in the White House. Indeed, the 2008 election, which Stewart is

currently scheduled to work through on *The Daily Show*, with its open primaries for both political parties will also serve as a good case study in how many Republican candidates appear on the program, compared to the open Democratic primary of the 2004 election. However, if the trending of *The Daily Show* continues towards the liberal-Democratic side of the political spectrum, then it is possible that Stewart’s ability to attract Republicans (beyond favorites like John McCain and Bob Dole) will be greatly diminished. To some extent, this has already happened.

During the 2004 election, after John Kerry appeared on *The Daily Show*, Jon Stewart began making public pleas for President George W. Bush to appear. Whatever behind-the-scenes

THE DAILYSHOW
with **JON STEWART** cordially invites

George Walker Bush

43rd President of the United States

to be a guest on our basic cable television program

11p.m. Monday-Thursday

The Daily Show Studios (see map below)

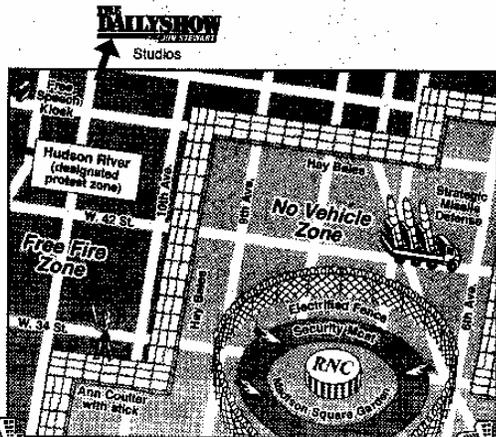
Attire: Presidential casual

A light meal of fun-sized candy bars will be served in the green room

R.S.V.P.

- I will attend alone I will attend with my Vice President
 I am unaware of your existence

Please send in your response along with a list of pre-approved questions no later than November 2, 2004.



**Convention Coverage Continues
Tonight at 11p | 10c**

Flyer seen distributed during 2004 Republican National Convention.

⁵¹ *Al Franken Show*. Feb. 28, 2005 broadcast.

efforts were made to attract President Bush are unknown, Stewart and the producers of *The Daily Show* made their case to Bush a bit of a public show, asking RNC Chairman Ed Gillespie—who’s interview on *The Daily Show* occurred the night after Kerry’s—to please have Bush appear on his program. Stewart made a similar point of discussion with White House Director of Communications Dan Bartlett, who appeared on the program during the Republican National Convention. *The Daily Show* producers even went so far as to produce “R.S.V.P. invites” for Bush during the Republican Convention which read:

The Daily Show cordially invites:
George Walker Bush, 43rd President of the United States to be a guest
on our basic cable television program.
11 p.m. Monday-Thursday
The Daily Show Studios,
Attire: Presidential casual.
A light meal of fun-sized candy bars will be served in the green room.

Whether or not *The Daily Show* was serious about actually wanting Bush to appear—and it appears the PR campaign was a mix of earnest and silly intentions—Stewart somewhat undercut his own campaign during a *60 Minutes* interview with Steve Kroft that aired shortly before the election. Kroft asked Stewart if he wanted the president to appear on his show, to which Stewart answered:

The President? Probably not. It’d be very uncomfortable...What I would like to say to him I feel like I wouldn’t be able to. Because he’s the president. And the respect I have for the office and the person holding it, whoever it is, would be constraining.⁵²

As Stewart later said to Kroft in that interview, “access doesn’t work for us.” Stewart even begged Gillespie to bring Bush on the program “because I will be such a pussy” [in how he interviews him]. This seems to the general complaint made about new media as described by Davis and Owen (1998) that its standards simply are too soft for critical inquiry. Even Stewart made this connection when he remarked to Chris Matthews of MSNBC that Barbara Walters, after trying so hard to secure the Monica Lewinsky

⁵² *60 Minutes*. October 25, 2004.

interview couldn't ask tough questions; "they're pals. Barbara wouldn't do that to a friend."⁵³ New media, which included the politicization of entertainment talk shows, offered great hope that this presentation of politics would spark a greater interest in the American political democracy with its low voting numbers and high political apathy.

Davis and Owen write that this view of new media is perhaps:

The most optimistic, and perhaps most unrealistic, perspective sees new media as a force in a democratic revolution, with new media stimulating political interest and activism among citizens. Media populism abounds, as ordinary citizens work their way into a political arena that once was primarily the domain of elites (1998, 256)

Yet that optimistic vision simply does not play out as Davis and Owen found.

We began this project with open minds. We intended to leave the question of the democratizing influence of new media open for debate, reasoning that the answer would become clear over time. However, the preponderance of the evidence we collected indicates that the new media are not the new democratic facilitators. Instead, the profit motive that drives all new media and structures the discourse in these channels compromises the new media's ability to provide genuine and meaningful citizenship initiatives. (1998, 258-259)

As more studies like The Pew Research Center's and Annenberg Public Policy Center's report that audiences report learning something from comedy TV shows and *The Daily Show*, the more important it becomes to analyze those sources for their messages. Up until now, most of those studies (Goldthwaite 2002, Baum 2005) of late-night comedy have focused on a very narrow range of political knowledge, that of the presidential campaign and presidential candidates. But such campaigns, as important as they are, occur only once every four years. Politics and current events are discussed on these programs nearly nightly and there are jokes about a wide variety of topics beyond the presidency. Earlier content studies of *The Daily Show* (Larris 2004) showed that nearly half of its topics match topics discussed on the national evening news and these were not all jokes about the President and John Kerry. With Diana Mutz's intriguing experiment with *Daily Show* viewer processing (2004) showing support to the theory that audiences

⁵³ *The Daily Show*. September 2, 2004.

may not be cognitively making a distinction in how they receive information from *The Daily Show* as compared to how they would receive such information from a “news program,” much more research needs to be conducted as to how the audience approaches the program. Do they approach it intending to learn something and, what does it mean when they report “regularly learning something” from it (Pew Research Center 2004). What is the audience actually learning? While Stewart denies his audience can learn anything from his show and Dannagal Goldthwaite Young, speaking for the Annenberg Public Policy Center (2004) concedes that it is possible that audience members are picking up some information, the extent of this understanding of what information audiences of *The Daily Show* are learning is not been studied at all beyond knowledge about the 2004 election.

Furthermore, while this study shows that the serious guests Stewart brings on his program are starting to outnumber the entertainers, I did not systematically study what is discussed during these interviews. It is possible that Stewart, for all his access to people of seriousness, conducts interviews that provide only personal details and no real information or ideas to his audience. A future study should analyze Stewart’s interview technique, particularly amidst the criticisms of new media and Stewart in particular, for being “too soft” on his subjects. Some earlier analyses of talk show hosts found them to be non-critical questioners (Baum 2005), but these studies were somewhat narrow in defining critical questioning since it was limited to interviews with presidential candidates. Stewart, in addition to interviewing presidential candidates, interviews many other men and women of importance including senators, representatives, and those who might be called “newsmakers” for their impact on events. These newsmakers included Richard Clarke and Joe Wilson, both of whom were centrally involved in important political events of 2004. I speculate that Stewart’s interviews might fit somewhere on a

critical inquiry scale, with non-critical entertainment talk shows like *Dr. Phil* and *Oprah* on one extreme, and C-SPAN and PBS programs on the other extreme. There are also Stewart's cable news brethren, Bill O'Reilly, Chris Matthews, Sean Hannity, Alan Colmes and Anderson Cooper who fit somewhere on this scale. What is important to remember about critical interviews is that noise and "heat" are not always productive in soliciting information. Yet non-critical questioning, asking questions without challenging answers, is also not particularly helpful to an unsophisticated audience who may not be able to critically judge the guest's words. Stewart may not seem to ask hard questions, but he doesn't talk over his guests either. His line of inquiry dances between "happy talk" and serious criticism. The next line of research inquiry is whether Stewart's serious criticism sinks in, or whether his "happy talk" does.

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Appendix

2004 Income

	\$20,000 or less	\$20,000-\$30,000	\$30,000-\$40,000	\$40,000-\$50,000	\$50,000-\$100,000	\$100,000+
Watchers	15.5%	14%	13%	13.5%	31.1%	13%
Non-Watchers	18.1%	13%	12.3%	12.4%	29.5%	14.7%

Table A.1 $X^2=1.404$ $p>.924$

2002 Income

	\$20,000 or less	\$20,000-\$30,000	\$30,000-\$40,000	\$40,000-\$50,000	\$50,000-\$100,000	\$100,000+
Watchers	16.1%	13.4%	14.1%	11.4%	32.2%	12.8%
Non-Watchers	18.8%	15.3%	14.9%	11.6%	11.6%	10.6%

Table A.2 $X^2=1.97$ $p>.854$

2004 Race

	White	Black	Hispanic	Other
Watchers	78.7%	8.5%	8.1%	4.7%
Non-Watchers	79.5%	9.5%	6.2%	4.8%

Table A.3 $X^2=1.17$ $p>.759$

2004 City size

	Large city	Suburb near a large city	Small city or town	Rural area
Watchers	20.3%	24.1%	37.3%	18.4%
Non-Watchers	18.1%	25.4%	34.9%	21.6%

Table A.4 $X^2=1.79$ $p>.617$

2004 Education

	High school less	High school Grad	Some college or tech	College grad	Post-grad work
Watchers	7.9%	25.5%	27.3%	26.4%	13%
Non-Watchers	8.8%	29.8%	28.2%	18.5%	14.8%

Table A.5 $X^2=7.69$ $p<.104$

2002 Party identification

	Republican	Democrat	Independent	No Preference
Watchers	28%	36.3%	29.8%	6%
Non-Watchers	32.6%	31.7%	28%	7.8%

Table A.6 $X^2=2.8$ $p<.424$

2002 Party leaning

	Leans Republican	Leans Democrat	Other/Don't know
Watchers	29.2%	36.9%	33.8%
Non-Watchers	26%	26.9%	47.1%

Table A.7 $X^2=4.51$ $p<.105$

2004 Registered voters

	Yes	No
Watchers	76.3%	23.7%
Non-Watchers	81.3%	18.7%

Table A.8 $X^2=3.02$ $p<.082$

2002 Registered voters

	Yes	No
Watchers	75.6%	24.4%
Non-Watchers	81.4%	18.6%

Table A.9 $X^2=3.27$ $p<.071$

2004 Vote Choice in 2000

	Gore	Bush	Nader	Other	Too young/ Didn't vote
Watchers	34.6%	26.1%	2.8%	2.8%	33.6%
Non-Watchers	27.1%	39.8%	.7%	3.8%	28.6%

Table A.10 $X^2=22.18$ $p>.000$

2004 Vote Choice in 2000 (weighed)

	Gore	Bush	Nader	Other	Too young/ Didn't vote
Watchers	33%	23.6%	3.4%	2.9%	37.2%
Non-Watchers	25.7%	36.5%	.7%	3.6%	33.4%

Table A.11 $X^2=44.49$ $p>.000$

2002 Vote Choice in 2000 (weighed)

	Gore	Bush	Other	Too young/ Didn't vote
Watchers	29.5%	36%	3%	31.4%
Non-Watchers	25.2%	39.2%	4%	31.5%

Table A.12 $X^2=4.10$ $p<.251$

2004 How often vote

	Always	Nearly Always	Part of the time	Seldom	Never
Watchers	42.4%	25.2%	10.5%	13.8%	8.1%
Non-Watchers	47.2%	25.2%	10.7%	9.8%	7.2%

Table A.13 $X^2=3.89$ $p<.421$

2002 How often vote

	Always	Nearly Always	Part of the time	Seldom	Never
Watchers	36.6%	30.8%	12.2%	11%	9.3%
Non-Watchers	45.8%	25.4%	10.1%	9.6%	8.9%

Table A.14 $X^2=5.57p<.234$

News Source: Is sometimes funny

	Like it	Dislike it	Doesn't Matter
Watchers	52.8%	3.7%	43.5%
Non-Watchers	47.5%	6.3%	46.3%

Table A.15 $X^2=3.47$ $p<.176$

News Source: Includes ordinary Americans giving views

	Like it	Dislike it	Doesn't Matter
Watchers	53.5%	7%	39.5%
Non-Watchers	48.7%	6.7%	44.6%

Table A.16 $X^2=1.97$ $p<.374$

News Source: Presents debates between differing views

	Like it	Dislike it	Doesn't Matter
Watchers	63.6%	5.1%	31.3%
Non-Watchers	57%	6.3%	36.7%

Table A.17 $X^2=3.25$ $p<.197$

News Source: Makes news enjoyable, entertaining

	Like it	Dislike it	Doesn't Matter
Watchers	47.2%	6.9%	45.8%
Non-Watchers	48%	6.9%	45.1%

Table A.18 $X^2=.048$ $p<.976$

News Source: Has reporters with pleasant personalities

	Like it	Dislike it	Doesn't Matter
Watchers	54%	3.7%	42.3%
Non-Watchers	56.5%	2.7%	40.9%

Table A.19 $X^2=.986$ $p<.611$

2004 Enjoy keeping up with news (weighed)

	A lot	Some	Not much	Not at all
Watchers	49.9%	44.2%	3.8%	2%
Non-Watchers	50.8%	38.9%	7.1%	3.1%

Table A.20 $X^2=9.07$ $p>.028$

Percentage of Guests by Type

Years	Season	# Guests	Entertainer	Pundit	Politician
7/99-6/00	4	159	95%	1.9%	3.1%
7/00-6/01	5	153	87.6%	6.5%	5.9%
7/01-6/02	6	133	72.2%	23.3%	4.5%
7/02-6/03	7	157	66.9%	24.2%	8.9%
7/03-6/04	8	161	57.1%	25.5%	17.4%
7/04-6/05	9	116	40.5%	33.6%	25.9%

Table A.21

THE DAILYSHOW

WITH JON STEWART

Guests – 3rd Season

- | | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 3075 - Michael J. Fox | 3101 – Ryan Phillippe | 3128 – Chris Robinson |
| 3076 - Sandra Bernhard | 3102 - Ian McKellen | 3129 – Joy Behar |
| 3077 - Tracey Ullman | 3103 - Jon Voight | 3130 - Thomas Gibson |
| 3078 - Gillian Anderson | 3104 - Sammy Hagar | 3131 - Paula Cale |
| | 3105 - Hootie & The Blowfish | 3132 - Ted Danson |
| | | 3133 - Esai Morales |
| 3079 - David Alan Grier | 3106 - Peter Krause | |
| 3080 - William Baldwin | 3107 - Chris Isaak | 3134 - Jane Seymour |
| 3081 - Michael Stipe | 3108 - John Larroquette | 3135 - Robert Schimmel |
| 3082 - Carmen Electra | 3109 - Joseph Gordon-Levitt | 3136 - Camryn Manheim |
| | | 3137 - Ray Romano |
| 3083 - Matthew Lillard | 3110 - Jennifer Grey | |
| 3084 - David Cross | 3111 - Norm Macdonald | 3138 - Patricia Richardson |
| 3085 - Yasmine Bleeth | 3112 - Sandra Bullock | 3139 - Suzanne Somers |
| 3086 - D.L. Hughley | 3113 - Janine Turner | 3140 - Natalie Portman |
| | | 3141 - Jamie Foxx |
| 3087 - George Carlin | 3114 - Ron Howard | |
| 3088 - Dave Foley | 3115 - Omar Epps | 3142 - Harry Connick, Jr. |
| 3089 - Kelly Martin | 3116 - Diane Lane | 3143 - Caroline Rhea |
| 3090 - Jerry O'Connell | 3117 - Stephen Baldwin | 3144 - Damon Wayans |
| | | 3145 - Timothy Hutton |
| 3091 - Melissa Gilbert | 3118 - Ernie Hudson | |
| 3092 - Brendan Fraser | 3119 - Josh Charles | 3146 - Mike Myers (part I) |
| 3093 - Pamela Anderson Lee | 3120 - Jackie Chan | 3147 - Rob Lowe |
| 3094 - Daniel Stern | 3121 - Marlee Matlin | 3148 - Mike Myers (part II) |
| | | 3149 - Heather Graham |
| 3095 - Melina Kanakaredes | 3122 - Sharon Lawrence | |
| 3096 - Ed McMahon | 3123 - Rob Estes | 3150 - Felicity Huffman |
| 3097 - Mike Judge | 3124 - Angelina Jolie | 3151 - Jimmy Kimmel |
| | 3125 - David Spade | 3152 - Adam Sandler |
| 3098 - John Tesh | | 3153 - Richard Belzer |
| 3099 - Eric McCormack | 3126 - Seth Green | |
| 3100 - Jeri Ryan | 3127 - Sheryl Lee Ralph | |

3154 - Margaret Cho
3155 - Scott Wolf
3156 - Roseanne
3157 - Rob Schneider

Guests – 4th Season

4001 - Adam Arkin	4037 - Norm Macdonald	4071 - Joan Lunden
4002 - Miss Piggy	4038 - Melissa Joan Hart	4072 - Shannen Doherty
4003 - John Leguizamo	4039 - Richard Lewis	4073 - George Carlin
4004 - Robert Klein	4040 - Bruce McCulloch	
		4074 - David Boreanaz
4005 - Christa Miller	4041 - Greg Proops	4075 - Jewel
4006 - David Brenner	4042 - Maury Povich	
4007 - none (3 rd Anniversary)	4043 - Brooke Shields	4076 - Jerry Springer
4008 - Joely Fisher	4044 - Molly Shannon	4077 - Robbie Williams
		4078 - Richard Belzer
4009 - Donny Osmond	4045 - Rebecca Gayheart	
4010 - Wendie Malick	4046 - Steven Wright	
4011 - Vince Neil	4047 - Amy Brenneman	4079 - Joe Montana
4012 - Janeane Garofalo	4048 - Melissa Gilbert	4080 - Will Ferrell
		4081 - Ice Cube
4013 - Bebe Neuwirth	4049 - Cathy Moriarity	4082 - Michael Stipe
4014 - Garry Marshall	4050 - Louie Anderson	
4015 - Denis Leary	4051 - Sarah Michelle Gellar	4083 - Penelope Ann Miller
4016 - Jeffrey Tambor	4052 - Melanie C. ("Spice Girls")	4084 - Frankie Muniz
		4085 - Freddie Prinze Jr.
4017 - Dave Foley	4053 - Chris O'Donnell	4086 - Jerry Springer
4018 - Dom Irrera	4054 - Jennifer Love Hewitt	4087 - Selma Blair
4019 - Pierce Brosnan	4055 - Dave Grohl	4088 - Peter Krause
4020 - Ed Sanchez & Dan Myrick	4056 - Roshumba	4089 - Jenny McCarthy
		4090 - David Arquette
4021 - Carson Daly	4057 - Kellie Martin	
4022 - Molly Ringwald	4058 - Kathy Griffin	4091 - Jeff Bridges
4023 - Sarah Jessica Parker		4092 - Focus on NH (no guest)
4024 - French Stewart		4093 - Jason Priestley
4025 - Cheryl Ladd	4059 - Christina Ricci	4094 - Moby
4026 - LL Cool J	4060 - Tori Amos	4095 - Dennis Farina
4027 - Dwight Yoakam	4061 - Yasmine Bleeth	4096 - Matthew Perry
4028 - Nia Long	4062 - Bill Maher	4097 - Ed McMahon
4029 - Elayne Boosler	4063 - Goo Goo Dolls	4098 - Snoop Dogg
4030 - Tom Green	4064 - Stephen Rea	4099 - Charlize Theron
4031 - Jason Priestley	4065 - Laura San Giacomo	4100 - Rachael Leigh Cook
4032 - David Cross	4066 - Michael Boatman	
4033 - Andy Richter	4067 - Paul Rudd	4101 - Forest Whitaker
4034 - Donny & Marie Osmond	4068 - Bob Dole, part 1	4102 - Vin Diesel
4035 - Dave Chappelle	4069 - Bob Dole, part 2	4103 - Tobey Maguire
4036 - Steve Zahn	4070 - Rob Schneider	4104 - Ellen DeGeneres

4105 - Neil Patrick Harris	4144 - Michael Rappaport
4106 - Kevin Pollack	4145 - Thandie Newton
4107 - Senator Robert Dole	4146 - Amy Jo Johnson
4108 - Garry Shandling	4147 - "Survivor" member
4109 - Eddie Izzard	4148 - Penn+Teller
4110 - Kim Delaney	4149 - Kelli Williams
4111 - Wolf Blitzer	4150 - Michael Moore
4112 - Drew Carey	
4113 - Chris Meloni	4151 - Mark Curry
4114 - Marla Sokoloff	4152 - Jimmy Kimmel
4115 - Eric Idle	& Adam Carolla
4116 - Lee Lee Sobieski	4153 - Julie Brown
4117 - John Lydon	4154 - Heather Donahue
4118 - Joshua Jackson	4155 - Joe Lockhart
4119 - Sam Donaldson	4156 - Freddie Prinze Jr.
4120 - Jimmy Smits	4157 - Alicia Silverstone
4121 - Roger Daltry	4158 - Cheri Oteri
4122 - Ben Stein	4159 - Jeff Probst
4123 - Patrick Stewart	4160 - Richie Sambora
4124 - David Alan Grier	4161 - John C. Reilly
4125 - Stanley Tucci	***end season four***
4126 - Samantha Mathis	
4127 - Diamond Dallas Page	
4128 - Sen. Arlen Specter	
4129 - Hugh Hefner and the Bentley twins	
4130 - Kirsten Dunst	
4131 - Jeanne Tripplehorn	
4132 - Stephen Baldwin	
4133 - S. Epatha Merkerson	
4134 - Luke Wilson	
4135 - Julie Warner	
4136 - Eric Close	
4137 - Wendy Malick	
4138 - Jesse Martin	
4139 - Andy Richter	
4140 - Betty White	
4141 - Tracey Ullman	
4142 - Kyle MacLachlan	
4143 - Jane Leeves	

Guests – 5th Season

5001 - Anna Paquin	5034 - Jonathan Katz	5070 - Ira Glass
5002 - J.K. Simmons	5035 - Goldberg	5071 - Greta Van Susteren
5003 - Famke Janssen	5036 - Sylvester Stallone	5072 - none (live show)
5004 - Billy Crudup	5037 - Tony Danza	5073 - Wolf Blitzer
5005 - Shawn & Marlon Wayans	5038 - Dean Cain	5074 - Marla Sokoloff
5006 - Halle Berry	5039 - Ashton Kutcher	5075 - Marisa Tomei
5007 - no guest (4 th Anniv.)	5040 - Jewel	5076 - Jeri Ryan
5008 - Al Roker	5041 - Ralph Nader	5077 - Gillian Anderson
5009 - Peter Fonda	5042 - Alice Cooper	5078 - Richard Lewis
5010 - Joe Eszterhas	5043 - Christian Slater	5079 - Vitamin C
5011 - Jennifer Beals	5044 - Joshua Jackson	5080 - Julia Stiles
5012 - Sen. Bob Dole	5046 - Kevin James	5081 - Willem Dafoe
5013 - Rep. Mary Bono	5047 - Jeff Garlin	5082 - Tim Robbins
5014 - Sen. Bob Dole	5048 - Posh and Baby Spice	5083 - Sam Donaldson
5015 - none	5049 - Steven Weber	5084 - Lynn Whitfield
5016 - Sen. Bob Kerrey	5050 - Brett Butler	5085 - Bill O'Reilly
5017 - William Baldwin	5051 - Sir David Frost	5086 - Matthew McConaughey
5018 - none	5052 - Phil Donohue	5087 - Terry Bradshaw
5019 - Sen. Bob Dole	5053 - Michael Richards	5088 - Topher Grace
5020 - Jeremy Piven	5054 - Sen. Arlen Specter	5089 - David Boreanaz
5021 - Slash	5055 - Sen. Bob Dole	5090 - Dyan Cannon
5022 - Vincent D'Onofrio	5056 - Richard Belzer	5091 - James Van Der Beek
	5057 - Michael Moore	5092 - Tim Blake Nelson
5023 - Donal Logue	5058 - Adam Sandler-Part 1	5093 - Dave Grohl
5024 - Greg Kinnear	5059 - Patricia Arquette	5094 - Kermit the Frog
5025 - Spinal Tap	5060 - Adam Sandler-Part 2	5095 - Jessica Alba
	5061 - Rhys Ifans	5096 - Wanda Sykes
5026 - Joe Montegna	5062 - John Goodman	5097 - Greg Germann
5027 - Eugene Levy	5063 - Laura SanGiacomo	5098 - Chris Rock
5028 - Lennox Lewis	5064 - Billy Campbell	5099 - Kelly Ripa
5029 - Senator Joe Lieberman	5065 - Anthony Clark	
5030 - Ryan Phillippe	5066 - Thomas Gibson	5100 - Ted Danson
5031 - Jamie Lee Curtis	5067 - Faith Ford	5101 - Joe Pantoliano
5032 - Bare Naked Ladies	5068 - Chris O'Donnell	5102 - Heather Locklear
5033 - Jamie Foxx	5069 - Marlon Wayans	5103 - Warren Christopher

5104 - Martin Short	5143 - Jake Johanssen
5105 - Ed Burns	5144 - Richard Belzer
5106 - Carmen Electra	5145 - Al Roker
5107 - Javier Bardem	5146 - Bernie Mac
5108 - Chris Meloni	5147 - Joe Queenan
5109 - Mary Stuart Masterson	5148 - Gene Simmons
5110 - Jeff Varner	5149 - David Duchovny
5111 - Denis Leary	5150 - Jeff Greenfield
5112 - Richard Roeper	5151 - Martin Short
5113 - Richard Lewis	5152 - Michael Rapaport
5114 - Mark Harmon	5153 - Alec Baldwin
5115 - Jennifer Love Hewitt	5154 - Mya
5116 - Lisa Ling	5155 - Sam Robards
5117 - Amy Sedaris	5156 - Johnny Knoxville
5118 - D.L. Hughley	5157 - Jet Li
5119 - Steven Weber	5158 - Bridget Fonda
5120 - Paul Reubens	***end season five***
5121 - Bob Costas	
5122 - Damon Wayans	
5123 - Brittany Daniel	
5124 - Don Hewitt	
5125 - Rachael Leigh Cook	
5126 - Tom Green	
5127 - Tom Cavanagh	
5128 - Eric McCormack	
5129 - Dominic Chianese	
5130 - no guest	
5131 - Robert Patrick	
5132 - Chris Robinson	
5133 - James Van Der Beek	
5134 - Richie Sanbora	
5135 - Patricia Richardson	
5136 - Maura Tierney	
5137 - Miss Universe	
5138 - Heath Ledger	
5139 - Jerry Springer	
5140 - Richard Schiff	
5141 - Brad Whitford	
5142 - Leah Remini	

Guests – 6th Season

6001 - Sean Hayes
6002 - Spice Girls
6003 - James Woods
6004 - Vince Vaughn

6005 - Jon Favreau
6006 - Maria Bartiromo
6007 - Ed Norton
6008 - Hank Azaria

6009 - Larry Miller
6010 - Paul Giametti
6011 - Sen. Joe Lieberman
6012 - Sen. John McCain

6013 - Jeri Manthey
6014 - Peter Krause
6015 - Jackie Chan
6016 - Janeane Garofalo

6017 - Andie MacDowell
6018 - Joe Rogan
6019 - Tara Reid
6020 - Jason Biggs

6021 - David Rakoff
6022 - John Carpenter
6023 - Seth Green
6024 - Fabio

6025 - Cuba Gooding, Jr.
6026 - Griffin Dunne
6027 - Will Ferrell
6028 - Kevin Smith

6029 - They Might Be Giants

6030 - none

6031 - Frank Rich
6032 - Aaron Brown
6033 - Jeff Greenfield
6034 - Tenacious D

6035 - Kelsey Grammer
6036 - Jim Belushi
6037 - Prof. Stephen Morse
6038 - Kate Beckinsale

6039 - Owen Wilson
6040 - Jeremy Piven
6041 - John Miller

6042 - Emeril Lagasse
6043 - Lorraine Bracco
6044 - Snoop Dogg
6045 - Fareed Zakaria

6046 - Lance Bass
6047 - Don Dahler
6048 - Greta Van Susteren
6049 - Jeff Bridges

6050 - Rob Morrow
6051 - Richard Holbrooke
6052 - Kevin Spacey

6053 - Paul Rudd
6054 - PJ O'Rourke
6055 - George Stephanopolous
6056 - Jennifer Saunders

6057 - Steve Kroft
6058 - Anne Robinson
6059 - Carson Daly
6060 - John Stamos

6061 - Ed Burns
6062 - Star Jones
6063 - Jennifer Garner
6064 - David Halberstam

6065 - Nadine Strossen
6066 - John Edward
6067 - Marg Helgenberger
6068 - Ted Danson

6069 - Stephen Colbert as Rev. Al
6070 - Dave Gorman
6071 - Janeane Garofalo
6072 - Tracey Ullman

6073 - Elijah Wood
6074 - Peggy Noonan
6075 - Gary Sinese
6076 - Jamie Foxx

6077 - Anjelica Huston
6078 - Luke Wilson
6079 - Jack Black

6080 - Lesley Stahl
6081 - Ian McKellen
6082 - Colin Hanks
6083 - Jeremy Northam

6107 - Bea Arthur
6108 - Denis Leary
6109 - Joe Klein
6110 - Bill O'Reilly

6111 - Andy Richter
6112 - Sen. John McCain
6113 - John Leguizamo
6114 - Aidan Quinn

6115 - Paula Zahn
6116 - David Brock
6117 - Jon Favreau
6118 - Ashley Judd

6119 - Tony Danza
6120 - Judy Woodruff
6121 - Patricia Arquette
6122 - Goo Goo Dolls

6123 - Samuel L. Jackson
6124 - Lisa Beyer
6125 - Tara Reid
6126 - Richard Dreyfuss

6127 - Michael Clarke Duncan
6128 - Beau Bridges
6129 - Elvis Costello
6130 - H.W. Crocker

6131 - Susan Caskie
6132 - Alanis Morissette
6133 - Robin Roberts
6134 - Willem Dafoe

6135 - Simon Baker
6136 - Mark Bowden
6137 - Diane Lane
6138 - David Boreanaz

6139 - Moby
6140 - Liev Schrieber
6141 - Rupert Everett
6142 - Allison Janney

6143 - Colin Firth
6144 - Ashleigh Bamfield
6145 - Jimmy Kimmel/Adam Carolla
6146 - Christopher Whitcomb

6147 - Charles Grodin
6148 - Val Kilmer
6149 - Mayor Michael Bloomberg
6150 - Joseph Cirincione

6151 - Freddie Prinze, Jr.
6152 - Christian Slater
6153 - Cynthia McFadden
6154 - Bob Odenkirk & David Cross

6155 - Colin Farrell
6156 - David Scheffer
6157 - Paul Sorvino
6158 - Clint Mathis

end season six

Guests – 7th Season

7001 - Adam Sandler	7036 - Kate Hudson	7069 - Vice President Al Gore
7002 - John King	7037 - George Stephanopoulos	7070 - Tom Brokaw
7003 - Busta Rhymes	7038 - Goldie Hawn	7071 - Sandra Bullock
7004 - Steve Irwin		7072 - Anna Paquin
7005 - John Ritter	7039 - Bonnie Hunt	7073 - Sen. Charles Schumer
7006 - Michele Williams	7040 - Patrick Dempsey	7074 - Charles Barkley
7007 - Ann Coulter	7041 - David Schwimmer	7075 - Edward Norton
7008 - Natasha Henstridge	7042 - Rita Wilson	7076 - John Cusack
7009 - Regis Philbin	7043 - Jake Gyllenhaal	
7010 - Tim Blake Nelson	7044 - Jill Hennessy	7077 - Cameron Diaz
7011 - Steven Weber	7045 - Peter Jennings	7078 - Ray Liotta
7012 - Seth Green	7046 - Oliver North	7079 - Philip Seymour Hoffman
7013 - Cynthia Nixon		7080 - Kathy Bates
7014 - Robert Wagner	7047 - Judy Woodruff	7081 - Michael Moore
7015 - Martin Lawrence	7048 - Richard Lewis	7082 - Dave Chappelle
7016 - Mike Myers	7049 - Greg Kinnear	7083 - Sen. Joseph Lieberman
7017 - Sen. Charles Schumer	7050 - Sen. John Edwards	7084 - Merv Griffin
7018 - Antonio Banderas	7051 - Victoria Clarke	7085 - Simon Cowell
7019 - Vin Diesel	7052 - Pat Buchanan	7086 - John C. Reilly
7020 - Paul Rudd	7053 - Ted Koppel	7087 - Jimmy Kimmel
7021 - Michael C. Hall	7054 - Christina Aguilera	7088 - Rosie Perez
7022 - Scott Ritter	7055 - Sen. John McCain	7089 - Sam Rockwell
7023 - Kevin Nealon	7056 - Candy Crowley	7090 - Jeff Greenfield
7024 - Rich Eisen	7057 - Jakob Dylan	7091 - Laurence Fishburne
7025 - Denis Leary		7092 - Doug Wilson
7026 - Jim Lehrer	7058 - Alexandra Pelosi	7093 - Kate Hudson
7027 - Robin Williams	7059 - Kiefer Sutherland	7094 - Arianna Huffington
7028 - Matthew Perry	7060 - Tom Arnold	7095 - David Frum
7029 - Lorraine Bracco	7061 - Ja Rule	7096 - Joe Klein
7030 - Zach Braff	7062 - Rep. Harold Ford	7097 - Bebe Neuwirth
9/11 - no show	7063 - Catherine Crier	7098 - Michael Clarke Duncan
7031 - Sarah Vowell	7064 - Kevin James	7099 - Ben Affleck
7032 - John Miller	7065 - Andy Richter	
7033 - Jason Lee	7066 - Katrina Vanden Heuvel	7100 - Steve Kroft
7034 - Damon Wayans	7067 - Colin Quinn	7101 - Jeff Daniels
7035 - Djimon Hounsou	7068 - Rob Schneider	7102 - Luke Wilson

7103 - Eric Idle
7104 - Walter Isaacson
7105 - Adrien Brody
7106 - David Cross

7107 - Les Gelb
7108 - Colin Quinn
7109 - Rep. Dick Gephardt
7110 - Tom Cavanagh

7111 - Eric Alterman
7112 - Jason Lee
7113 - John Hulsman
7114 - Eddie Griffin

7115 - Jim Kelly
7116 - Connie Nielsen
7117 - Ringo Starr
7118 - Hilary Swank

7119 - Chris Rock
7120 - Anthony Swofford
7121 - Kelly Preston
7122 - Colin Farrell

7123 - Martha Burk
7124 - Susan Sarandon
7125 - Amb. David Scheffer
7126 - Dennis Miller

7127 - Patrick Stewart
7128 - Rachel Weisz
7129 - Richard Lewis
7130 - Freed Zakaria

7131 - Dr. Sanjay Gupta
7132 - Julia Louis-Dreyfus
7133 - John Malkovich
7134 - Famke Janssen

7135 - Chris Matthews
7136 - Caroline Kennedy
7137 - Graham Norton
7138 - Paul Rudd

7139 - Randy Jackson
7140 - Joshua Jackson
7141 - Diane Ravitch
7142 - Michael Kinsley

7143 - Bill Kristol
7144 - Lisa Ling
7145 - David Halberstam

7146 - Bill Hemmer
7147 - Eddie Izzard
7148 - Sec. Madeleine Albright
7149 - Tyrese

7150 - Guy Pearce
7151 - Rep. Newt Gingrich
7152 - Sidney Blumenthal
7153 - Ludacris

7154 - Harrison Ford
7155 - Lewis Lapham
7156 - Kelly Clarkson
7157 - Ron Livingston

end season seven

Guests – 8th Season

8001 - Tony Snow	8034 - Michael Caine	8069 - Eva Mendes
8002 - Erica Jong	8035 - Ben Stiller	8070 - Steve Buscemi
8003 - Carson Daly	8036 - Jonah Goldberg	8071 - Sen. Zell Miller
		8072 - General Wesley Clark
8004 - Angelina Jolie	8037 - Jack Black	
8005 - Sen. Gary Hart	8038 - Joe Scarborough	8073 - Maggie Gyllenhaal
8006 - Rowan Atkinson	8039 - Vivica A. Fox	8074 - Ben Affleck
8007 - Martin Lawrence	8040 - Rob Lowe	8075 - Julia Stiles
		8076 - Natalie Portman
8008 - Gabrielle Union	8041 - Michael Moore	
8009 - Scott Glenn	8042 - Arianna Huffington	
8010 - Dick Morris	8043 - Sen. Hillary Clinton	8077 - Tom Brokaw
8011 - Amb. Joseph Wilson	8044 - Tim Robbins	8078 - Elijah Wood
		8079 - Charlize Theron
8012 - Paul Teutel Jr. & Sr.	8045 - Dr. Henry Kissinger	
8013 - Brian Williams	8046 - Angelina Jolie	8080 - Richard Lewis
8014 - Alyson Hannigan	8047 - Walter Isaacson	8081 - Dr. Catherine Weitz
8015 - Soledad O'Brien	8048 - Sir Anthony Hopkins	8082 - Amb. Carol Moseley Braun
		8083 - Sen. Joe Biden
8016 - Denis Leary	8049 - Ted Danson	
8017 - John Popper	8050 - Wanda Sykes	
8018 - Robert Duvall	8051 - Norm Macdonald	8084 - Philip Seymour Hoffman
8019 - Tracy Ullman	8052 - Neal Pollack	8085 - Jeff Garlin
		8086 - Sen. John McCain
8020 - Samuel L. Jackson	8053 - Kyle MacLachlan	8087 - Erika Christensen
8021 - Kim Cattrall	8054 - Michale Beschloss	
8022 - Paul Giamatti	8055 - Bob Newhart	8088 - Ken Auletta
	8056 - Colin Firth	8089 - Richard Perle
8023 - Jim Hightower	8057 - Will Ferrell	8090 - Gov. Christie Whitman
8024 - Cynthia Nixon	8058 - Peter Dinklage	8091 - Kelsey Grammer
8025 - Will Shortz	8059 - Wyclef Jean	
8026 - Rep. Dennis Kucinich	8060 - Brendan Fraser	8092 - Randy Jackson
		8093 - Donald Trump
		8094 - Sen. Bob Dole
		8095 - Noah Wyle
8027 - Al Franken	8061 - Heidi Klum	
8028 - Kate Beckinsale	8062 - Bernard Goldberg	8096 - Charles Lewis
8029 - no guest	8063 - James Spader	8097 - Dave Chappelle
	8064 - Billy Bob Thornton	8098 - Paul Rudd
		8099 - Drew Barrymore
8030 - Cuba Gooding, Jr.	8065 - Adam Goldberg	
8031 - Sec. Madeleine Albright	8066 - Sen. Tom Daschle	
8032 - Charlie Sheen	8067 - Sean Hannity & Alan Colmes	8100 - Tyra Banks
8033 - Christina Ricci	8068 - Alec Baldwin	8101 - John Podhoretz
		8102 - Norah Jones
		8103 - Samuel L. Jackson

8104 - Edie Falco
8105 - Mark Ebner
8106 - Rudy Giuliani
8107 - Willem Dafoe

8108 - Val Kilmer
8109 - Ed Gillespie
8110 - George Carlin
8111 - Paula Zahn

8112 - Sen. Charles Schumer
8113 - John Stossel
8114 - Mekhi Phifer
8115 - Ethan Hawke

8116 - Wynton Marsalis
8117 - Tom Hanks
8118 - Jamie Foxx
8119 - Al Franken

8120 - Jennifer Beals
8121 - Richard Clarke
8122 - Karen Hughes
8123 - Johnny Knoxville

8124 - Jerry Seinfeld
8125 - Bruce Willis/Matthew
Perry
8126 - Tim Robbins
8127 - Jason Bateman

8128 - Melissa Etheridge
8129 - Mark Ruffalo
8130 - John Gibson
8131 - Ariana Huffington

8132 - Bob Kerrey
8133 - Rebecca Romijn-Stamos
8134 - Fareed Zakaria
8135 - Bob Woodward

8136 - Janeane Garofalo
8137 - Amb. Joe Wilson
8138 - Kareem Abdul-Jabbar
8139 - Andy Richter

8140 - Senator John McCain
8141 - Tim Russert
8142 - Ken Mehlman

8143 - Bill Kristol
8144 - David Cross
8145 - Thomas Friedman
8146 - Gov. Mario Cuomo

8147 - Donna Brazile
8148 - David Brooks
8149 - Morgan Spurlock
8150 - Jennifer Love Hewitt

8151 - Stanley Tucci
8152 - Hassan Ibrahim
8153 - Robert Reich
8154 - Graham Norton

8155 - Stephen F. Hayes
8156 - Ashley Judd
8157 - Kevin Kline
8158 - Michael Moore

8159 - Terry McAuliffe
8160 - Edward Conlon
8161 - Calvin Trillin

end season eight

Guests – 9th Season

9001 - Ralph Nader	9034 - Richard Clarke
9002 - Will Ferrell	9035 - Marc Racicot
9003 - Christina Applegate	9036 - Matthew Broderick
9004 - Wolf Blitzer	9037 - Rosie Perez
9005 - Michael Isikoff	9038 - Ralph Reed
9006 - Sarah Vowell	9039 - Seymour Hersh
9007 - Sacha Baron Cohen	9040 - Rudolph Giuliani & Gen Wesley Clark
9008 - Gov. Bill Richardson	9041 - Bishop Desmond Tutu
9009 - Sen. Joe Biden	9042 - Billy Bob Thorton
9010 - no guest	9043 - Bob Schieffer
9011 - no guest	9044 - Bill O'Reilly
9012 - Rep. Henry Bonilla	9045 - Ed Koch
9013 - Spike Lee	9046 - Marisa Tomei
9014 - Aaron Eckhart	9047 - Fareed Zakaria
9015 - Natalie Portman	9048 - Billy Crudup
9016 - Pres. Bill Clinton	9049 - Madeleine Albright
9017 - Maureen Dowd	9050 - Sen. Bob Kerrey
9018 - Tom Cruise	9051 - Rev. Jesse Jackson
9019 - Bryan Keefer	9052 - John Zogby
9020 - Sen. Norm Coleman	9053 – Chris Wallace
9021 - Burt Reynolds	9054 – Al Sharpton & Bill Weld (election night)
9022 - Seth Green	9055 – Charles Schumer
9023 - Robert Smith	9056 – Bill Kristol
9024 - Sen. John Kerry	9057 – Richard Branson
9025 - Ed Gillespie	9058 – Tom Wolfe
9026 - Ted Koppel	9059 – Kenneth Pollack
9027 - Dan Bartlett	9060 – Kay Baily Hutchinson
9028 - Sen. John McCain	9061 – Tom Brokaw
9029 - Chris Matthews	9062 – Thomas Frank
9030 - Drew Barrymore	9063 – Woody Harrelson
9031 - Pat Buchanan	9064 – Jude Law
9032 - Alec Baldwin	9065 – Brian William
9033 - Gwyneth Paltrow	

9066	Christopher Hitchens	9096	Alan Cummings
9067	Stephen King	9097	Mark Mills
9068	Isabella Rosselli	9098	Rachel Weisz
9069	Paul O'Neil	9099	Peter Jennings
9070	Seth Mnookin	9100	Christina Ricci
9071	Kate Bosworth	9101	Ben Nelson
9072	Kevin Spacey	9102	Am. Nancy Soderberg
9073	Am. Dore Gold	9103	The Rock
9074	Billy Connolly	9104	Ari Fleischer
9075	Katie Couric	9105	Melissa Boyle Mahle
9076	Paul Giametti	9106	Brian Williams
9077	Don Cheadle	9107	Bruce Willis
9078	Howard Zinn	9108	Paul Krugman
9079	John Grisham	9109	Harry Frankfurt
9080	Samuel L. Jackson	9110	Tom Fenton
9081	Dennis Quaid	9111	Al Green
9082	Annette Bening	9112	Craig Ferguson
9083	Brian Ross	9113	Sandra Bullock
9084	Jim Wallis	9114	Catherine Keener
9085	Michael Beschloss	9115	Ozzy Osbourne
9086	Joe Lieberman	9116	RZA from Wu-Tang
9087	Richard Viguerie		
9087	Seymour Hersh		
9088	John Lequizamo		
9089	Christie Todd Whitman		
9090	Fareed Zakaria		
9091	Paula Abdul		
9092	Anderson Cooper		
9093	Joe Klein		
9094	Redmond O'Hanlon		
9095	Eric Idle		