THE VIEW FROM THE OVAL OFFICE: THE AUDIENCE EFFECTS OF PRESIDENTIAL APPEARANCES ON ENTERTAINMENT TALK SHOWS

A Masters Thesis.
Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of Georgetown University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in Communication, Culture, and Technology.

By

Kathryn Collier House, B.A.

Washington, DC
April 21, 2011
After Bill Clinton’s famous appearance on *The Arsenio Hall Show* during the 1992 presidential campaign, politicians began incorporating entertainment television shows into their campaign media repertoires. In this study, I label appearances by political figures on entertainment shows as politainment. Politainment allows a politician to display a more personal and appealing side of his or her persona, while also reaching a different audience than those who regularly follow traditional news outlets. While past presidents ceased these appearances after Election Day, President Obama took the politainment media strategy with him to the White House and has appeared with relative frequency on a variety of entertainment shows.

This study uses President Obama’s July 29, 2010 appearance on the daytime talk show *The View* as a case study for exploring the content of presidential politainment and its effects on audiences. Using a quantitative content analysis of this episode of *The View*, I demonstrate that presidential politainment contains substantive policy content in addition to lighter banter that shows a more relatable side of the president. In addition, I conducted quasi-experimental focus groups to examine audience effects. The focus groups yielded survey data and discussion by the participants regarding two clips from Obama’s appearance on *The View*. A quantitative analysis of this data found clear attitudinal shifts after viewing the clips regarding President Obama personally as well as
the Obama Administration’s policies. This study underscores the importance of examining politainment as a distinct type of soft news and recognizing politainment as a new and unique form of political communication.
This thesis project would not be possible without many people in my life. First and foremost, I would like to thank Diana Owen, my adviser and trusted mentor. There are no words to encompass just how grateful I am for your guidance and unwavering support, not just on my thesis, but on all the decisions I have made over the last two years. I am not just a better researcher and writer because of you, but a better human being.

I would like to thank my second reader, Stephen Farnsworth who kept raising the bar higher and insisted that I regard my own abilities and potential as a scholar seriously.

A special thanks to Hugh Cloke and Beth McKeown for letting me tag along as your Teaching Assistant these last few years and keeping me sane. You showed me how teaching is the truly fun and rewarding component of an academic life. I will miss our thrice-weekly encounters more than you can imagine.

As always, evermore thanks to all of my family and my future in-laws for the constant encouragement and for at least pretending you knew what my thesis was about. I can’t overstate how lucky and blessed all of you make me feel on a daily basis.

Like most of the recent milestones in my life, this thesis would not be possible without Rob, who encouraged me to be the nerd I always was and supported me without hesitation every step of the way.
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Like his predecessors, President Obama gave speeches from the White House Rose Garden, eulogized Americans lost amidst tragic circumstances, and delivered State of the Union addresses from the Capitol. Yet after taking his seat in the Oval Office, President Obama also appeared on a series of television programs deemed uncharacteristic of a sitting president. He discussed health care and family movie nights in the White House on *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* in May 2009; he dished about Snooki from *The Jersey Shore* and the Oil Crisis with the women of *The View* in July 2010; he promoted science education on *Mythbusters* in December 2010; and he encouraged all Americans to vote in the mid-term elections during a stop on *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* in October 2010. Presidential candidates and their wives now appear regularly on entertainment shows while campaigning, but Obama is the first president to continue these appearances after Election Day. Pundits and politicians alike have paid significant attention to Obama’s nontraditional choice of media venues, derisively referring to him as “The Entertainer-in-Chief” or “The Celebrity-in-Chief,” and questioning how presidential it is for a sitting president to appear on an entertainment program.

*The Arsenio Effect*

Bill Clinton came under similar scrutiny during the 1992 campaign when he pioneered the use of new media and took his campaign onto MTV’s *Choose or Lose* and answered the question, “Boxers or briefs?” He famously appeared on *The Arsenio Hall Show* to play a
rendition of Elvis’ “Heartbreak Hotel” on his saxophone and refute infidelity allegations\(^1\). The Clinton Campaign’s “Arsenio Strategy” included appearances on daytime talk shows and talk radio. They intentionally circumvented traditional media channels to reach young voters and black voters tuned into nontraditional programming and tuned out of network news shows (Ridout, 1993; Germond and Whitcover, 1993). Some credit the campaign’s recognition and use of the “innovative and significant force” of new media as a key turning point for Clinton in the 1992 campaign (Davis and Owen 1998). The media commentary surrounding Clinton’s campaign tactics was at once sarcastic and understanding as some columnists recognized the increasingly blurred boundaries between politics and entertainment—they just didn’t necessarily like it. Foreshadowing the new American presidential candidate that would emerge after 1992, USA Today’s Carol Orsborn wrote, “When Bill Clinton blew his sax on national TV, he was sounding the death knell for elections as usual” (Orsborn, 1992: 12A).

The 1992 presidential campaign ushered in a new era in which presidential candidates did not shy away from using new media like talk shows and talk radio, but embraced these communication avenues as opportunities to reach untapped segments of the voting population. These late-night formats allow candidates to showcase their “personal qualities rather than ‘arcane’ policy debates…{and} appeal to their relatively apolitical, entertainment-seeking audiences” (Baum, 2005: 214). A study of the 2000 campaign season showed that the late-night circuit afforded greater opportunities for presidential candidates to speak directly to the American public when compared to “an average month’s worth of evening news coverage during the 2000 campaign season” (Niven et al., 2003: 130). Leno and Letterman hosted George W.

\(^1\) Independent candidate Ross Perot also made use of new media channels and announced his candidacy on The Larry King Show. In contrast to the younger, black late-night host Clinton chose, Perot’s choice of Larry King failed to garner the same amount of attention.
Bush and a cowboy boot-clad Al Gore who attempted to reconnect with his Tennessee roots and reach a disengaged part of the electorate.

The 2008 Campaign in Context

Candidates in the 2008 presidential campaign relied heavily on new media platforms like Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, and Twitter, blogs, but entertainment media were arguably more important than ever for the presidential candidates. Barack Obama and John McCain each appeared twice on The Late Show with David Letterman and The Tonight Show with Leno. Obama used Letterman to perform damage control after the “Lipstick-on-a-Pig” gaffe. Obama used the phrase in reference to McCain’s economic agenda, but the McCain campaign believed it was a direct reference to Palin’s well-quoted sound byte: ”You know the difference between a hockey mom and a pit bull? Lipstick.” Many Americans developed opinions regarding vice presidential nominee Sarah Palin based on her Saturday Night Live impersonator, Tina Fey. One of the most widely quoted Palin sound bytes from the campaign was the remark, “I can see Russia from my house,” which Tina Fey said in a Palin sketch on SNL (Owen, 2010: 178). In 2008, it was clear that the agenda-setting power of entertainment media could not be ignored and distinctions between the role of news programming and entertainment programming eroded even further. Michael Delli Carpini (2001) suggests this erosion indicates that the traditional news media are no longer the gatekeepers for the nation’s political agenda, having lost much of their “agenda-setting authority” during the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal.

Obama’s media handlers clearly recognized this shift in the media power structure and the changes in the media landscape. Many attribute his campaign’s success to its innovative use of new media that helped gather the votes, dollars, and volunteer time of an unprecedented
number of unlikely supporters. The use of such new media “attracted first-time audiences and constituencies who are difficult to reach, such as young voters” (Owen, 2009: 26). As Obama Campaign Manager David Plouffe writes in The Audacity to Win, their supporters “were of every age, race, and income group...a potentially powerful web of people who had not been involved much, or at all, in politics” thereby instigating the campaign to seek all media avenues to reach this array of voters (Plouffe, 2009: 77).

The Obama Campaign used soft news interviews on late-night and daytime television strategically to help alter the perception of him as an Ivory Tower elitist and cast a more egalitarian light on his persona. This strategy was a necessity, particularly in the general election, to woo the Joe-the-Plumbers away from the McCain/Palin ticket and resonate with the younger, disenchanted corps of potential voters. Obama appeared not just on late-night talk shows, but danced alongside Ellen DeGeneres on her daytime television show and sat with his family for an Access Hollywood special. During the campaign, the Obama family was also featured on the cover of entertainment magazines such as People and Us Magazine. Michelle Obama used entertainment media effectively to present a softer side of herself to the American people. She appeared on The View to address criticism for saying, “For the first time in my adult lifetime, I’m really proud of my country” and convince voters of her unwavering love of country (Tapper, 2008).

When the campaign ended, Obama chanced a media firestorm to appear on The Tonight Show with Jay Leno a mere 59 days into his presidency to sell his economic agenda to a disenchanted American public amidst sagging approval ratings. Past presidents confined appearances on entertainment shows to the campaign trail, but Obama chose late-night television as a platform to reassure a disenchanted American public of his Administration’s efforts in the
economic recovery. He suffered serious backlash in the media after his Leno appearance, which led some to wonder if such a nontraditional media appearance was a fluke (House, 2009). Yet when Obama stumped for health care across from Letterman in September 2009 and then scheduled a stop on The View in July 2010, he sent a clear message that he would not discriminate between interviews on entertainment programming and news programming. The White House responded to backlash regarding his entertainment media appearances by noting that the President was merely keeping pace with the increasingly fragmented media --- 85% of households have access to about 100 television channels in contrast to just three channels in the 1970s (Prior, 2005).

Despite mounting criticism over his appearances on entertainment platforms, Obama made no apologies or showed any hint of curtailing these appearances. He explained his presence on The View to the audience and said, “I was trying to find a show that [First Lady] Michelle actually watched.” Chatting with the ladies of The View on daytime television may not carry the same prestige or convey the same tone as an address from the White House Rose Garden among some segments of the population, but plenty of Americans are paying attention and some even take political cues from entertainment shows (Hollander, 2005; Baum, 2003). Obama adapted to the declining audience for prime time presidential addresses and news conferences that began during the Reagan era (Baum and Kernell, 1999). Even the State of the Union now finds a larger audience on cable television than its original home on network television (Hagey, 2011).

Previous Research

This new age of presidential television has not received enough attention by media and political communication scholars. In this study, I label the appearances of politicians on
entertainment shows as politainment. Politainment is a soft news or infotainment report featuring a political figure. While my discussion and case study of politainment is restricted to a president in an entertainment setting, politainment could include any political figure in an entertainment setting such as Sarah Palin’s guest stint on the TLC show *Kate Plus Eight*. Politainment as both a political media strategy for the Obama Administration and a source of information for citizens demands careful study as its own form of political communication and arena of political engagement.

Studying politainment as a form of political communication acquired new significance during the Obama Administration because Obama has courted entertainment media platforms like no president before him. Previous scholars have looked extensively at candidate appearances on entertainment shows, but few have examined the emergence of politainment as a new component of the White House media strategy. In Chapter 2, I will situate politainment in the context of other news categories, including soft news and infotainment, which subsume politainment, and I will suggest clear definitions for each news category.

I will explicate entertainment-based programming with political content from a definition of infotainment and instead, introduce an additional category of politainment. This new age of politainment and presidential television presents a unique research opportunity. In this study, I will build on past research that discussed presidential campaigning in entertainment venues and political content on daytime and late-night talk shows. A slate of political communication scholars have examined political content and coverage in soft news, which often privileges the personality side of politics over the actual politics themselves. Prior (2003; 2005) and Hollander

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2 Despite how the media reported it, President Obama’s appearance on *The View* was not the first time a sitting president appeared on daytime television. George W. Bush appeared on *Dr. Phil* in 2004 during his re-election campaign.
(2005) look specifically at the impact of soft news programming on political knowledge and its potential effects on voter turnout and awareness. Baum’s *Soft News Goes to War* (2003) demonstrates the incidental learning effects of soft news viewing. In the context of presidential communication, Baum (2005) also addresses why the “E-Talk Show” (entertainment-oriented talk shows) platform appeals to certain presidential candidates who use platforms like Leno and Letterman to make them more likeable. Looking beyond presidential candidates, Farnsworth (2008) examines how presidents manipulate media to sell their policies and their character in an increasingly personality-driven political environment.

*The Case Study*

Politainment warrants careful examination as a new platform for presidential communication as it is no longer a campaign media strategy confined to the campaign trail. The goal of this study is to examine the role of politainment in the context of presidential communication. It explores what appearances in entertainment venues convey to audiences and contribute to the public discourse about the president. Specifically, I will be examining President Obama’s July 29, 2010 appearance on *The View*. I will address the following research questions: What sort of information did audience members obtain from President Obama’s appearance on *The View*? What was the level of public awareness of Obama’s appearance on *The View*? What are the effects of Obama’s appearance on *The View* on the audience? Further, was Obama’s appearance on *The View* more influential on perceptions of his personality than attitudes regarding his Administration’s policies? If these appearances have the potential to sway attitudes toward his policy or even his personality then they should not be overlooked. I have formulated the following hypothesis related to the content of Obama’s appearance:
• **H1**: The content of Obama’s appearance on *The View* included discussion of policies as well as discussion of his private life, feelings, and personality.

The hypotheses below refer specifically to the audience effects. I hypothesize that:

• **H2**: After watching clips of Obama’s appearance on *The View*, people changed their feelings about his personality.

• **H3**: After watching clips of Obama’s appearance on *The View*, people’s feelings toward his Administration’s policies changed.

Using support from previous literature on selective perception and exposure (Klapper, 1960), I will contend that preconceptions of Obama and his Administration will influence attitudes concerning his appearance on *The View*. Those who hold negative preconceptions of Obama’s policies and his personality will not hold more favorable opinions after watching the clips of *The View*. Those who look favorably on the Obama Administration’s policies will maintain these policy positions after watching his appearance. Given the ability of entertainment shows to make candidates more likeable, those who have positive attitudes about Obama’s personality will likely feel even more positively of his personality after screening *The View* clips.

Through this case study, I will establish the existence of substantive policy discussion in this specific instance of politainment. The content analysis shows how Obama controls the speaking pulpit during his appearance on *The View* and steers the conversation toward policy and not toward topics related to pop culture and life in the White House. *The View* has become an increasingly political program so the co-hosts engage in the policy discussions, but also use the
appearance to make their own political statements. In the audience analysis, I provide statistical support that the highest levels of awareness of Obama’s appearance on *The View* exist among the most educated Americans in the highest income brackets and not the hard-to-reach segments of the population that the White House hoped to reach through an entertainment show. I use findings from a semi-experimental focus group design to ascertain what audiences learn or perceive from watching Obama on *The View*. Through the focus group data, I support my hypotheses that attitudinal shifts *do* occur regarding Obama’s personality and policies after watching his appearance.

*Outline of Chapters*

The outline of this thesis follows Harold Lasswell’s communications model of who says what in which channel to whom to what effect (1949). Chapter 2 provides an overview of the literature and key concepts related to hard news, soft news, infotainment, and politainment. The literature review will address previous research regarding the content, audience and effects of entertainment programming that contains political content or features political guests. Chapter 3 introduces the case study and provides a history of *The View*, its basic format, the relevant details of each host’s background and its political programming to date. Chapter 4 looks specifically at the content of Obama’s appearance and what was actually said through a formal content analysis that is translated into SPSS for analysis. Delving into the content instead of the symbolism and media reaction of a politainment appearance is an often-overlooked component of this type of research. Chapter 5 examines the regular audience of *The View* in addition to who paid attention to Obama’s visit on *The View*. This chapter includes statistical analysis of the July 29- August 1, 2010 News Interest Index Omnibus Survey from Pew Research Center for the People and the
Press that monitored the level of public awareness regarding Obama’s appearance on *The View*. In Chapter 6, I will assess the audience effects of Obama’s appearance through data gleaned from a combination of a quasi-experimental design and a traditional focus group during which participants will screen Obama’s appearance on *The View*. Chapter 7 will review the findings and assess the contributions of politainment to the political discourse as well as the complications with politainment as a political communication strategy.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Presidents and the Press: George Washington to Andrew Jackson

As communication technology evolved in the late-19th and early-20th centuries, American presidents recognized the press as a potential mouthpiece for the office, but approached the institution with trepidation given its ability to smear and even slander. The relationship between presidents and the press, characterized frequently as one of “love-hate,” was often tempestuous, but even Presidents like George Washington, who disliked the partisan divides it created, enjoyed the limelight offered by newspapermen. The Founding Fathers regarded the press as an important component of the country’s democratic values and “endowed the newspaper with a special role in supporting the public conversation in the U.S. republic” (Barnhurst and Nerone, 2001:1). The Framers guaranteed the freedom of the press in the Constitution, subsidized particular papers, and excluded press outlets from taxation.

During the partisan press era from 1770-1820, media savvy politicians like Thomas Jefferson used the press “as a lever for overturning power in the United States,” and newspapers served primarily to organize political parties that were only loose affiliations at that time (Starr, 2010). In 1830, Andrew Jackson ensured that at least one press outlet would depict him in a favorable light by establishing his own newspaper, The Globe, which would “support the White House totally and without reservation” (Meacham, 2008: 165). Jackson installed a member of his inner circle, Francis Preston Blair, in the editor’s seat, which allowed Jackson to have more authority over how the American public viewed his administration. Until Lincoln became president, the office continued its practice of having a White House-sanctioned newspaper until
they could no longer compete financially with advertising-backed dailies in the metropolitan areas of the country.

*Gossip and Scandal: The Rise of the Penny Press and Yellow Journalism*

News has changed and evolved, but features and scandal existed throughout the last few centuries, particularly in urban areas. In the 1830s, the penny press accounted for many of the New York City newspapers (e.g. *The New York Sun*), known for its cheap price and content comprised of the latest courtroom happenings such as a wife who drunkenly threw a pitcher at bar owner and was committed to an asylum (Bergmann, 1995: 22). The penny press provided a cheap source of information and entertainment and kept prices low through the significant space it dedicated to advertisements. Neil Postman argues that while the content of penny newspapers derived largely from “human interest news,” they nonetheless provided local and functional information; he maintains, however, that the penny press began “the process of elevating irrelevance to the status of news” which continues today (Postman, 1985: 66).

Similarly, the rise of newspapermen like William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer II in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries marked the era of yellow journalism in which newspapers assumed a tabloid-style format and featured scandals, sensationalized features, and bawdy cartoons. These newspapers offended many Americans and led to boycotts by religious groups and other institutions. In 1897, the New York Ministers’ Association even led a boycott of the *Journal* and the *World* to protest this new form of journalism (Campbell, 2003: 34).

I note the existence of a history in America of a popular press that strays from what we conceive of as hard news because it is too often overlooked in contemporary discourse concerning the fate of today’s news environment and should be an important contextual frame
when assessing the state of news today. Tom Rosenstiel and Bill Kovach do not obscure the existence of the reign of tabloid newspapers during the Yellow Journalism era, but instead, draw a distinction between the yellow press and the current trend of soft news reporting: “Even when journalism was in the hands of the yellow-press mavens at the turn of the twentieth century or the tabloid sheets of the 1920s, building community and promoting democracy remained a core value” (2001: 18).

Presidents and the Press: Teddy Roosevelt to Dwight Eisenhower

Amidst the popularity of the penny press and the subsequent era of Yellow Journalism, President Theodore Roosevelt took his relationship with the press to a more formal level by hiring a press secretary, a former newsman from Roosevelt’s native Kansas, William Allen White. Woodrow Wilson then held the first presidential press conference in 1913 and answered questions submitted in writing. Franklin Roosevelt held court among reporters at his desk in a more intimate venue, but used his famous fireside chat broadcasts on the radio to avoid the press altogether and speak directly to the American people. It was Roosevelt’s “aggressive use of the mass media” that uncovered its potential to “help set the political agenda and also frame the debate to the advantage of the White House” (Farnsworth, 2009: 1-2). Richard Neustadt cites FDR’s effective use of the radio medium as an example of what he defines as presidential power, which is the power to persuade or bargain and not command (1991: 11). Farnsworth credits Roosevelt with laying the groundwork for a “new era of presidential marketing,” which would also aid the White House win favor with the American public when sparring with Congress (Farnsworth, 2009: 2). During the newspaper era, which began with Roosevelt and stretched into the Eisenhower presidency, the White House tightly controlled communication between press
and the presidency through set interactions. The press had to obtain permission to quote FDR and only began filming press conference appearances during the Eisenhower Administration (Hess, 1998: 749).

From Lapdogs to Junkyard Dogs

In light of the relationship between the president and reporters that “clearly tilted in the president’s favor” (Hess, 1998: 749), Larry Sabato marks the Roosevelt era as that of “lapdog journalism” in which the press revered the White House and wrote only favorable pieces about the president. The press would withhold commentary that might reflect poorly on the office even when armed with knowledge that said otherwise (Sabato, 1991: 25). Instead of offering criticism, lapdog journalism reinforces the political establishment. The advent of television gifted presidential candidate John Kennedy with an opportunity to outshine his debate partner, Vice President Richard Nixon in the 1960 presidential election. Those who listened to the debates on the radio favored Nixon as the clear victor, but Kennedy’s charisma and youthful appearance charmed the 70 million viewers watching the television broadcast and helped solidify Kennedy’s base of support in the national election even though he faltered on the issues (Druckman, 2003). The new reign of network television over the print medium was, for presidents like Kennedy who knew how to use television to his advantage, “an enlarging time. For others—Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon—it was a harsh searchlight” (Hess, 1998: 750).

In the wake of Kennedy’s 1963 assassination, lapdog journalism segued into “watchdog journalism” as the political establishment, with Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard Nixon at the helm, embroiled the country in the Vietnam War. Mirroring the divisive and embattled state of the country during the 1960s, the press questioned presidential action, speech and policy that it
deemed inappropriate or unethical (Sabato, 1991: 26). The Supreme Court’s 1971 decision to uphold the right of the *New York Times* to publish the Pentagon Papers validated the press’ role as watchdog. In *New York Times Co. v. United States*, the Court wrote, “The press was to serve the governed, not the governors” (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001: 17). Many believe that the media as watchdog for institutional and governmental abuses of power continues even as it evolves in Sabato’s construct from watchdog to junkyard dog journalism. The recent Wikileaks scandal resembles the Pentagon Papers controversy with similar clamoring for the protection of free speech, despite its damaging content to the U.S. reputation abroad.

The media continue their role as watchdog according to many scholars, but Sabato underscores another shift in the role of the press in regard to the presidency and politicians. The third and current era of journalism began in 1974 with Richard Nixon’s resignation. Watergate and *The Washington Post’s* role in breaking the scandal indelibly altered the press’ role in relation to the White House from that of lapdog to junkyard dog (Sabato, 1991: 26). This type of journalism contrasts with FDR’s lapdog era, for presidents and political figures become fair game for “harsh, aggressive and intrusive” feeding frenzies by the media with reporting often sourced in gossip (Sabato, 1991: 27). Yet even during the Watergate era, the press focused on political scandal and not on the personal scandals that have since dominated news coverage of presidential politics (Bennett, 2002). The current political media climate assumes many of these characteristics, particularly with a burgeoning focus on scandal and personality instead of issues related to public affairs (Sabato et. al, 2001). Accelerated in recent decades by the 24-hour news cycle and the immediacy of internet news, junkyard-dog reporters “are responding to their own drummer, not the president’s” (Hess, 1998: 748). Often, with the increasingly partisan
environment in Washington, those drummers are Rush Limbaugh, Rachel Maddow, or any number of media opinion makers.

Presidents no longer maintain the same control and authority over the press, and they also lack the ability to command attention for anything longer than a 7-second sound byte. Or rather, Presidents like Bill Clinton attracted media attention through scandals like White Water and the Starr Report, but struggled to attract positive attention from the press, particularly with the changing media consumption habits of the American people. Clinton’s legacy for politicians in the era of junkyard dog journalism is to “regularly answer probing media questions about adultery, substance abuse and other private behavior—queries that even presidential candidates once weren’t expected to answer” (Sabato et al., 2000: xiii). The days of hiring a single press secretary have long since past and in the era of cable and satellite television, “some estimates claimed that public relations accounted for as much as a third of White House personnel”(Hess, 1998: 751). The White House needed public relations personnel to form new media strategies that could cope with emerging communication platforms and adapt to changing tastes for presidential rhetoric.

*What is Meant by News Today?*

Scholars have not reached a consensus on the exact nature of the media’s surveillance duties except for “general agreement that the media system should report important events and trends – ‘the news’ – so that citizens are adequately informed” (Bennett and Serrin, 2005: 130). The relationship between the presidency and the press has evolved dramatically over the course of the last century, but the news media have also undergone significant changes that muddle our
understanding of news. Scholars lament the death of news as we know it, having forsaken investigative stories for tabloid tales and scandal-laden features (Patterson, 1994). I will now delve into the scholarly definitions of news and propose my own definitions along the news spectrum.

**Hard News**

Unlike the subsequent categories of news, a general consensus concerning a definition of hard news exists borrowing predominantly from Patterson who defines hard news as:

*Fact-based “coverage of breaking events involving top leaders, major issues, or significant disruptions in the routines of daily life”* (1994: 3)

He argues that news “is about events that have the defining attribute of newness…being recent, but also being a departure from the ordinary.” Hard news presents information to citizens that help them make sense of important issues of public affairs.

**Soft News**

Scholars use the term “soft news” to categorize reporting that falls outside the bounds of hard news. Yet few have offered any clear definition of soft news, and instead offer examples of platforms or programming in place of a definition. Lance Bennett and James Hamilton distinguish between hard news and soft news insofar as soft news is driven predominantly by a profit-motive (Bennett, 1995: 134). In light of this market incentive, Hamilton refers to soft news as “programs with low levels of public affairs information” such as programs like *Entertainment*
Tonight and Inside Edition that focus mainly on “entertainment, health, or life-style information” (Hamilton, 2004: 14-15). Similarly, Barry Hollander describes soft news as “entertainment-based” and Matthew Baum cites Live with Regis and Kelly, Oprah, and late-night television shows as examples of televised soft news (Baum, 1999; Hollander, 2010). Zaller, however, describes soft news simply as “what we once considered news, it has just ‘softened’” and “is information that is either personally useful or merely entertaining” (Zaller, 2003: 129). In constructing a usable definition of soft news that is not based on a particular platform or program, I suggest the following definition:

> Soft news is information about government and politics conveyed through feature and personality reports that may or may not be timely or based on fact.

**Infotainment**

Infotainment is often used interchangeably with soft news and similar to soft news, scholars often define it through programming instead of actual characteristics that would lend themselves to a working definition. Unlike Baum and Zaller, Markus Prior (2005) separates daytime and late-night talk shows from infotainment. Prior contends that infotainment “is a more neutral term for tabloid news shows” and uses examples similar to Baum’s such as Entertainment Tonight and Hard Copy. Prior’s suggestion of a tabloid component to infotainment is accurate and also captures the tone of infotainment content, which is frequently infused with gossip and devoid of fact. While I do not believe that soft news and infotainment should be used interchangeably, soft news certainly encompasses infotainment. I suggest the following definition for infotainment:
**Infotainment is soft news reported in a tabloid style that is entertainment-based.**

**Politainment**

Kees Brants (1998) uses Clinton’s appearance on *Arsenio* in 1992 to illustrate his understanding of infotainment. Yet while the late-night format could arguably be considered infotainment or soft news programming, featuring a political figure such as Clinton warrants separate categorization for this televised event—it is an instance of politainment. As the name suggests, politainment merges the worlds of entertainment and politics, but not necessarily in the specific manner espoused by Conley and Schultz (2000). Conley and Schultz identify politainment as an adaptive media strategy that markets a candidate as both a politician and an entertainer, but elicits votes through a candidate’s “fictional entertainment persona” rather than the actual person (2000: 58).

In my study, politainment is an identifiable media event, which requires the presence of a political figure. It is also important to position politainment in the appropriate media context. I suggest the following definition:

*Politainment is soft news or infotainment report featuring a political figure.*
He Said What? : The Content of Soft News & Politainment

_Baltimore Sun_ television critic David Zurawik was not at all surprised by President Obama’s decision to appear on *The View* in July 2010 given the circumstances: sagging presidential approval ratings of 47% on July 21, 2010 as compared to 59% from July 5, 2009 (The Roper Center) and a public relations nightmare for the White House after the abrupt firing of U.S. Department of Agriculture worker Shirley Sherrod the week before. Zurawik observed:
It follows a pattern of this presidency I've often described here as: When the going gets tough, the president goes on TV—usually in entertainment venues that guarantee he will be celebrated and can control his message. Think Jay Leno, ESPN or the Food Network. (Zurawik, 2010)

While Obama might have been the first president to take advantage of new and nontraditional media outlets as president, previous politicians and presidential candidates used entertainment media platforms because of what Zurawik suggests: they can largely control the message and expect an easier, more relaxed and nonpolitical line of questioning. Celebrity hosts and television personalities aim to “facilitate the most entertaining exchange with their guests as possible rather than uncover hard information, probe deeper into a subject, and place the news in its larger context” (Gulati, 2010: 200). The hosts themselves often seem starstruck as was the case with Jon Stewart’s interview with President Obama on The Daily Show during the week leading up to the Rally to Restore Sanity in October 2010. Stewart, a political junkie, spent more time discussing his show’s Washington, DC stage than actual policy with Obama.

Neil Postman posits that the medium of television naturally lends itself to entertaining content across all genres as: “Entertainment is the supra-ideology of all discourse on television…[its content] is there for our amusement and our pleasure” (1985: 87). Similarly, Hayes (2005) suggests that television, as opposed to print media, is the ideal medium for candidates to make personality-based appeals to voters.

Previous research indicates that soft news formats allow political figures to make their policy issues more attractive than in hard news outlets (Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999). Looking specifically at soft news in the context of political communication, the majority of scholarship examines the audience and its effects with few scholars looking closely at the actual content of appearances on these formats. Prior observes that soft news presents its content so that it
“informs and entertains at the same time” (2003, 155); others offer a more negative take on such a combined content, for it situates “politics as popular culture instead of the serious business of popular discourse” (Brants, 1998: 320).

Surveying the content of soft news can be problematic given the wide spectrum covered by a blanketed term such as soft news. Owen and Davis note that “the boundaries of what constitutes entertainment news programs can be cast rather widely…[with] significant variations in the content of programs within these categories, and some carry more overtly political stories than do others” (1998: 99).

Research into the role of humor in soft news’ political coverage, particularly in the late-night format, is usually directed at the executive branch yet the “nature of late-night humor is decidedly non-issue oriented” (Niven et al., 2003: 130). Niven et al.’s study focused on political coverage on late-night shows between 1996 and 2000. They looked at the subject of the opening monologues and the target of the jokes on The Tonight Show, Late Show, Late-night, and Politically Incorrect. The jokes targeted politicians and candidates like Bill Clinton, Bob Dole, and George W. Bush, but were devoid of real substance. Instead, the jokes made light of Clinton’s alleged sexual exploits, Dole’s age, and Bush’s former problems with alcohol and drug abuse.

Matthew Baum’s studies of candidate appearances on entertainment talk shows (2005) and foreign affairs coverage on soft news (2003) offer the most substantial content analyses on the topic to date. Baum suggests that political appearances on entertainment programs are apolitical and focus on a candidate’s personal qualities as opposed to his or her policies. Primarily since the 2000 presidential campaign, candidates appear on daytime and late-night talk shows tailored to the “personality/human-interest orientation” of these media outlets and
“repackage their messages into forms appealing to a populace with little patience for politics” (2005: 215). Baum’s content analysis of candidate appearances on entertainment talk shows in 2000 showed that interviews conducted by Oprah and Jay Leno do not reflect the same level of partisanship or political divisiveness as candidate interviews in harder news formats (2005). Whereas traditional news interviews with political candidates featured one partisan cue every minute, entertainment talk show interviews contained one partisan cue every five minutes. Baum’s study also reveals that candidates discuss policy positions and other substantive issues at a far lesser rate than on traditional news shows and national news reports, which offer three times more issue cues and issue mentions and 3.5 times more issue cues and one-third more issue mentions respectively (Baum, 2005: 223). In Soft News Goes to War (2003), Baum looks more broadly at the content of soft news programming and found that soft news offered extensive coverage of issues related to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 and other foreign policy crises.

Who is Watching?

Responding to critiques regarding Obama’s decision to appear on The View and other entertainment programs, Press Secretary Robert Gibbs defended the media strategy:

We made a decision to put the president on Jay Leno, David Letterman, 'The View,' because that's where—people have busy lives and it's best to go where they are. And I think that's what the president will do. (Hornick, 2010)

Gibbs acknowledged what has become a topic of great interest among scholars and journalists alike—audience fragmentation in the era of new media. The rise of cable television and now satellite television presents an endless menu of channel and programming options available 24-
hours a day. Audiences can thereby self-select television content based on personal preferences and are no longer limited to three networks as in the early days of television.

Yet with the rise of soft news, some political communication scholars worry that more Americans will tune out of hard news with serious-minded political content and instead, watch soft news with little to no political content (Sunstein, 2001). Prior (2003) suggests that with more choice in media content, only those who need entertainment-infused news will flock to soft news. Both Prior and Patterson (2000) argue that even amidst increasing media choice, audiences are not necessarily turning away from hard news in search of soft news and hard news continues to be more popular than soft news. Patterson notes how easily audiences can become weary of soft news:

> Soft news, if used with restraint, can expand an audience by attracting people who find the news more enjoyable when it has a touch of personal drama. But heavy doses of soft news will ultimately wear out an audience…Soft news is repetitive and thus at some point tiresome (Patterson, 2000: 9).

While it might grow tiresome, soft news shows still attract millions of viewers and consistently rank high among news options for a third of the population (Prior, 2003: 154). The White House’s media strategy of having the President appear on soft news programming clearly suggests that there is an audience to reach through these formats, but who specifically?

Past studies indicate certain distinctions in audience demographics between soft news and hard news. The audience for soft news or Baum’s entertainment talk shows is generally younger, less educated with less political interest, more liberal and female than the audience for traditional news programs (Davis and Owen, 1999; Baum, 2003). Baum’s analysis of the 2000 American National Election Study further categorizes the soft news audience along the political spectrum with an audience composition that is overwhelmingly Democrat (34%) or Independent (40%) as
opposed to Republicans (26%) (2005: 215). Moy, Xenos, and Hess (2005) offer a more nuanced audience analysis for infotainment, comparing the demographics for late-night comedy compared to that of an *Oprah* episode featuring presidential candidates Bush and Gore in 2000. Using data from the 2000 National Annenberg Election Survey, they found that late-night comedy shows attracted more men who tended to be more liberal, younger, single, not employed full time, and with more political interest. Their analysis looked at demographics for both Bush and Gore’s campaign appearances on *Oprah*. Those who watched the appearances, not *Oprah’s* general viewership, accounted for 28% of the sample and included more politically attune viewers who monitored network and cable news (Moy et al., 2005).

Audience composition appeared to play a key role in Obama’s choice of media outlets and became an integral part of the media narrative that reported on his *View* appearance. One blogger described the audience as “the stay-at-home and unemployed viewing public” while NPR hinted that it was a tactful move to perform damage control among female viewers after the Shirley Sherrod firing debacle, simply because of her gender (Cochran, 2010; Neuman, 2010). The White House denied that his appearance on *The View* had anything to do with Sherrod.

*Audience Effects of Soft News*

The role and influence of mass media in American democracy has long been a source of debate among scholars. The protection of the press by the Constitution confirms the importance of media to even the earliest Americans. Many scholars agree that the press is a core component of deliberations within our democracy and wields significant agenda-setting power (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995; Graber, 2010). The emergence of mass media and new media have raised
concerns about the power of the press given the growing prominence of tabloid television, late-night comedy and other arenas in which information is presented alongside entertainment.

Political Knowledge

Numerous studies find that even with the proliferation of soft news programming and an increase in political content on such programming, soft news viewing does not correspond to increases in political knowledge (Prior, 2003). Analyses of the effects of nontraditional new media in the 1992 campaign similarly showed little, if any, relationship between soft news and campaign knowledge despite some listeners and viewers who nevertheless felt informed (Hollander, 1995). Yet as candidate stops on soft news programming have become routine and soft news has become increasingly political, some recent studies show positive political effects among soft news viewers.

Baum’s (2003) incidental byproduct model puts a more positive spin than previous studies on the effects of soft news. He argues that for individuals with low attentiveness to political information, paying attention to political or foreign policy information must be negligible so that they absorb this information while tuning in to entertainment-oriented programming. They learn any incidental political information passively and not intentionally. Baum suggests that soft news formats facilitate water-cooler discussion of foreign policy crises among politically inattentive viewers. In a 2005 study, Baum again tackles the politically unaware and observes that the late-night and daytime talk shows offer shortcuts to political information, but primarily to a candidate’s likeability. His study shows that the greatest learning effects from entertainment talks shows occurred among the politically unaware who “considered
the opposition party more likeably, and consequently were much more likely to cross party lines than their counterparts who did not” (2005: 230).

A study of candidate appearances on soft news shows during the 2004 Democratic primary underscored that in pursuing “amusement” on these programs audience members become “accidentally informed about the primary campaign” and soft news programs were positively related to campaign knowledge (Brewer and Cao, 2006: 31). Looking specifically at the effects of late-night programs like *The Daily Show* on younger audiences, one study showed that young people purposefully sought out entertainment programming for campaign information. The effects were otherwise limited and increased what viewers *thought* they knew about a candidate (Hollander, 2005). But another study of the 2004 presidential primaries showed that regular exposure to late-night shows like *Leno, Letterman* and *The Daily Show* created a gateway effect that led to more attention to political coverage in traditional television news outlets (Feldman and Young, 2008). These findings support previous research (Young and Tisinger, 2006) that demonstrates how young people are not circumventing traditional television and turning instead to Jon Stewart and David Letterman for political cues. Young people are actually watching late-night programs *in addition* to traditional news programs.

**Political Engagement**

There are relatively few studies that look at direct linkage between entertainment talk shows and actual political engagement. Yet scholars discovered more significant relationships between soft news viewing and political engagement, including positive effects on campaign participation among “political sophisticates” (Moy et al., 2005) and reasoned voting behavior among the politically inattentive (Baum and Jamison, 2006). Today, young people routinely cite
*The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* as sources of political information. Yet both shows and their hosts assumed national importance among political pundits after commanding their own rally on the National Mall in October 2010—The Rally to Restore Sanity/Keep Fear Alive (Seabrook, 2010). Stewart heralds his program as a fake news show and maintains that he is a comedian, not a political pundit. Reports from Stewart’s Rally to Restore Sanity nevertheless suggest that his rallying cause might not be politics, but political reporting in the media, particularly on cable news networks (Aaron, 2010).

**Selectivity Bias**

Media studies have consistently shown the effects of mass media as agents of reinforcement for previously held political beliefs and attitudes. A landmark study by Lazarsfeld et al. (1948) demonstrated through an election study from the 1940 presidential campaign how exposure to campaign media reinforced and solidified pre-existing political opinions. There was little evidence (5 percent) of people crossing party lines on Election Day after being exposed to campaign media. Schramm and Carter (1959) found similar results in which a political telethon reinforced partisan predispositions, but did not persuade voters to change their intended vote choice. Minor changes occur, but large shifts in opinion that wholly convert a person from one set of beliefs to another are rare.

Audiences also tend to gravitate toward media that reflects their values and beliefs. In a political context, voters are more likely to expose themselves to media featuring the political figures and parties they prefer (Klapper, 1960). When exposed to “unsympathetic” programming, people “selectively perceive its meaning so as to bring it into accord with their existing views” (Klapper, 1960: 11). Selective exposure and selective perception have led to increased
polarization and fragmentation among American audiences. Recent studies show that audiences base their media selection on party affiliation and political ideology. This trend has been exacerbated by drastic increases in media choice and the proliferation of new media technology. For example, a conservative viewer would likely prefer programming from the like-minded Fox News network as opposed to the more left-leaning CNN network (Iyengar and Hahn, 2009).

With increased media choice and access to worldwide media through the internet and satellite television, people have more opportunities than ever before to avoid programming that does not reflect their beliefs, political and otherwise, and avoid accidental exposure. In their study, Iyengar and Hahn demonstrate how media selectivity does not just occur with political content, but with softer news content featuring travel, sports or crime stories. They cited the “substantial level of polarization in exposure to soft news” as their most surprising finding in the study (2009: 33). Another study showed how in the 2000 and 2004 campaigns, Democrats and Republicans were attracted to different types of media. While Republicans flocked to talk radio and radio, Democrats were more likely to tune into news magazines and notably, late-night entertainment programs (Pfau et al. 2007).

Conclusion

The relationship between U.S. presidents and the press has evolved over the last few centuries, but the White House ceded much of its control over the relationship after the Watergate scandal. In search of a more friendly line to American audiences and a more amenable media venue, politicians used to appear on The Tonight Show or Oprah during campaign season. In the Age of Obama, an interview in People or across from Jon Stewart is now as common as an interview with The New York Times or across from Brian Williams. A
growing number of Americans are therefore likely to be exposed to these routine instances of politainment at greater rates. *The View* case study offers the opportunity to build upon previous research and further investigate these effects since politainment became politics as usual for the Obama White House.
CHAPTER 3: *The View* as a Case Study

“There are times when I have to say we [*The View*] are not a Sunday morning show. We still have to talk about *Dancing with the Stars*.” – Barbara Walters, June 2010

On March 28, 2008, presidential candidate Barack Obama appeared on *The View* to discuss the grueling primary season and his misgivings about his former pastor, Reverend Wright. Hilary Clinton went on the show earlier in the campaign, but it was Obama’s appearance that garnered attention for *The View* in a new capacity—that of an important media stop for political candidates. The *New York Times* described the show as “a halfway house in between a CNN interrogation and the razzing of ‘The Daily Show With Jon Stewart’” (Stanley, 2008). Co-host and producer Barbara Walters underscored the importance of providing *The View*’s audience with political guests, recognizing that many of them took political cues from *The View* (Puig, 2008). Shortly after Obama’s appearance, his opponent John McCain appeared on the show with his wife and faced a less-than-welcoming reception from the co-hosts with the exception of Republican co-host, Elisabeth Hasselbeck. Some media outlets like Fox News lambasted the “firing squad” the McCains faced on *The View* in contrast to the “kid glove” treatment of Obama. Amidst the controversy, Walters admitted to a new, consciously political direction for the show giving the rising stakes for the country and called herself a political “fundit” (Collins, 2008). This direction also coincided with a spike in ratings, for McCain’s appearance marked the show’s fourth most-watched episode in its history (Steinberg, 2007).

Co-Executive Producer Bill Geddie distinguished *The View* from political talk shows like *Meet the Press*, but did note that *The View* provided the opportunity for viewers to see the candidate’s personality as well as their stances on policy issues (Steinberg, 2008). In this chapter,
I will discuss the history of the show, the orientiations of its changing crop of co-hosts, and its burgeoning importance among the political establishment.

The View Debuts

In the summer of 1997, ABC executives began searching for a replacement for *Caryl & Marilyn: Real Friends*, a talk/variety show that witnessed a steady decline in ratings and lukewarm reviews during its year on air. They wanted another female-oriented platform that would attract a particular demographic during the 11 o’clock morning hour: the stay-at-home mother (Flanagan, 2008). ABC executives sought advice from a network star and longtime member of the ABC family, Barbara Walters, who remained one of the most famous women in journalism with her *Barbra Walters Specials* and co-hosting duties on the newsmagazine, *20/20*. Walters proposed a talk show that featured celebrity guests and roundtable discussions on issues of the day and topics in the media. Women of different backgrounds, different ages, and at different points in their career would share hosting duties with Walters stepping in one to two times a week as her schedule permitted. Previewing the concept to *Variety*, Walters seemed adamant about the tone and content of the show: “This is not a news program. We will not be discussing what’s going on in Afghanistan.” She cited *This Week with David Brinkley* and the 1950s talk show *Girl Talk* as inspiration for the show (Puig, 2008).

Walters described the format as less like a talk show in the *Oprah* tradition and more like a panel of women with *60 Minutes* veteran Meredith Vieira serving as the moderator and Walters as the matriarchal discussant. Vieira was a seasoned reporter known for her losing her *60 Minutes* gig after wanting to juggle correspondence duties with motherhood (Shister, 1992). Star Jones, an African-American female in her thirties and former prosecutor, gained some fame as a
legal analyst and correspondent for NBC and the tabloid TV program, *Inside Edition* during the O.J. Simpson trial. The youth view fell on the shoulders of 22 year-old Debbie Matenopoulos, a recent graduate of New York University whose only experience in the industry was an internship at MTV. Rounding out the panel was Joy Behar, a fiery, redheaded comedian in her 50s, who appeared every few episodes at the time and rotated with Walters (Hoban, 1997).

The first episode of *The View* premiered on August 11, 1997 to a live studio audience. But Walters did not leave audiences guessing as to her intention in creating the show. As the opening credits roll, a voiceover from the gravelly-voiced Walters begins:

I’ve always wanted to do a show with women of different generations, backgrounds and views. A working mother; a professional in her 30s (Jones); a young woman just starting out; and then somebody who’s done almost everything and will say almost anything. And in a perfect world, I’d get to join the group whenever I wanted…

Walters and the women gathered around a kitchen table with coffee in hand as Walters introduced what would become a staple of the show, an opening segment called “Hot Topics.” On the premiere episode, the women discussed the messy divorce between Donald Trump and Marla Maples playing out in gossip columns across the country. The first few episodes featured interviews with celebrity guests such as Mira Sorvino, Ray Liotta, and Raquel Welch (James, 1997).

**Early Days and the Successful Formula**

Despite initially low ratings, *The View* became a mid-day staple and a guilty-pleasure for legions of women viewers. While female talk shows weren’t necessarily a radical concept, the relative intelligence and sense of accomplishment among the female hosts was different enough to warrant careful attention from columnists and pundits (James, 1997; Millman, 1998). The
format of the show lent itself to a certain intimacy with its viewers, as they began each broadcast casually placed around the table discussing the day’s Hot Topics before splitting up into smaller groups for other segments of the show. These include the celebrity interview, a bit about fashion or food, and an audience favorite “Question of the Day” segment, which often draws on questions prompted by the audience such as “What’s the most embarrassing thing you’ve ever been caught doing?” (Flanagan, 2008) This segment endeared the show to female viewers because it depicted respectable women letting their guards down to speak about “the kind of damning things women have learned to hold in check for years” (Millman, 1998). Instead, viewers witness the serious-minded Vieira detailing how she relieved herself outside a country estate or listen as Walters admits to checking out and mentally rating the men in the ABC cafeteria. The candor and humor with which the female hosts presented themselves on air transcended the fake set and what often felt like a staged sorority house meeting. Instead, viewers felt an intimacy or kinship with the women who were able to interview a movie star in one segment and detail the embarrassment of going wigless through a McDonald’s drive-thru in the next. The multigenerational composition and relative diversity of the hosts also allowed a more widespread audience to identify with the women of The View (Flanagan, 2008).

The View resonated with a widespread female audience and quickly became a talked about component of television culture when the ladies of The View landed their own parody on SNL. Much like the 2010 SNL imitations of Today’s Kathie Lee and Hoda, the skits mocked the at once silly and awkward segments involving Walters (played by Cheri Oteri) trying to bridge the generational divide in various ways with her younger cast members, most often with Matenoupolous (played by a rotating group of female guest stars). Imitation might be the sincerest form of flattery, but The View received praise not veiled in parody from reviews in
Variety, The New York Times and Salon. They praised the talk show for taking on serious, heavy issues in Hot Topics like police brutality and for taking the show in a smart direction by demonstrating that women don’t have to be either serious and intelligent or funny and free spirited—they can be both (Millman, 1998; James, 1997). The View made no pretensions about being a talk show instead of a news show, especially in the early years. Walters and co-executive producer Bill Geddie created a unique format that positioned a diverse panel of women to speak about what was on their minds and in the news, and retain the celebrity interviews and feature segments that made shows like Today and Live! With Regis and Kathie Lee a hit (Becker, 2006).

Rotating Hosts, Emerging Tensions on the Set

Over the next several years, The View became known as much for its behind-the-scenes drama as what occurred onstage. Matenopoulous left the show at the end of 1998 amidst negative reviews and feelings among viewers that her ditzy talking points brought little to the conversation (Brumley, 1999). The View received 17,000 applications and held several on air tryouts for the hosting spot, which ultimately went to Lisa Ling, an Asian-American foreign correspondent for Channel One News (Petrozzello, 1998). Ling often brought a more serious, news-oriented tone to the show and was the force behind more investigative segments such as unequal treatment of women in the workplace. Ling came under fire after making a comment perceived as insensitive in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, but critics generally found her refreshing after “the infamously airheaded” Matenopoulus (Davis, 1999). In 2002, Ling left The View to host National Geographic Explorer on MSNBC and return to her reporting roots. The View followed its policy of trying out a small list of candidates on air after
Ling’s departure and after a week-long hosting stint, Walters announced in November 2003 that former *Survivor* contestant and NFL wife, Elisabeth Hasselbeck, would fill the void left by Ling (McClintock, 2003).

Even amidst changing people in the youth voice/Gen-X spot on *The View* panel, the show remained relatively free of controversy and enjoyed good ratings and a loyal following in its first eight seasons. Yet beginning in 2006 during its ninth season, the show became tabloid fodder with rumors of backstage tensions that were increasingly apparent on air. Ironically, just as tensions began flaring up among the hosts, *The View* lost its moderator when Vieira left the show in June to take a coveted co-hosting job on *The Today Show*, replacing Katie Couric (Johnson, 2006). It was rumored that Walters wanted Rosie O’Donnell to take Vieira’s vacated seat. O’Donnell was a controversial pick for the show because she made public comments about co-host Star Jones’ drastic weight loss and suggested that Jones misled viewers by crediting diet and exercise for her weight loss instead of gastric bypass (Faber, 2006). On June 27, 2006, Jones abruptly announced her departure from *The View* on air and ignited a war of words in the media between herself and Walters (Ridley, 2006). Other morning talk shows like *Live! With Regis and Kelly* and *Good Morning America* weighed in on the feud and described the current tone of the show as “uncomfortable” (Bianculli, 2006). While show insiders dubbed Jones’ departure “a relief” and “good riddance,” the media noted the irony of the cat fighting between the women and how it could affect the show’s credibility:

Oh, how far they’ve fallen. When Barbara Walters founded "The View" in 1997, it lent a fresh take to morning television. Instead of the traditional guy-and-gal banter of programs like "Live With Regis and Kathy Lee," "Good Morning America" and "Today," the show presented a uniquely female perspective, and purported to elevate the discussion of women's issues by focusing on respect and empowerment. Nine years later, Walters and Star Jones are doing their darndest to ruin that vaunted image (Rovzar, 2006).
Moreover, the public feuding and behind-the-scenes negotiations falsified the entire premise of the show of girlfriends confiding and dishing candidly to one another over coffee (Greppi, 2006).

*Rosie O’Donnell Fans the Partisan Flames*

*The View’s* ninth season in 2006 ushered in a new period of fighting and controversy as the content shifted toward the political and even the women of *The View* divided along partisan lines. Confirming the media speculation, Walters recruited the notoriously outspoken and openly gay Rosie O’Donnell in September to fill the moderator seat left open by Vieira. O’Donnell who once earned the nickname “Queen of Nice” while hosting her own talk show from 1996 to 2002, quickly took center stage on the set of *The View* and established herself as a controversy-provoking ring leader in their discussions and guest interviews. One television critic dubbed O’Donnell the show’s “Alpha female” and likened Walters’ decision to invite O’Donnell onto *The View* as similar to “buying an expensive, Corian counter that makes everything else in the kitchen seem drab or shabby or in need of an overhaul” (Johnson, 2006). From her first day on the show, O’Donnell often overshadowed her fellow co-hosts, including Walters, and her liberal views became a source of contention with Hasselbeck, her equally outspoken conservative counterpart.

With O’Donnell on *The View*, political issues related to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and gay marriage made it into Hot Topics with greater frequency and the debates became increasingly intense. O’Donnell and Behar often criticized the Bush Administration and its policies while Hasselbeck defended Bush and questioned the patriotism of her co-hosts. The increasing volatility of the O’Donnell-led discussions on *The View* coupled with her public sparring with Donald Trump led to the show’s highest ratings in its history—viewership...
increased by 500,000 during O’Donnell’s nine month tenure on the show, then in its tenth season (Shister, 2007). The final blow came in April when the verbal sparring between O’Donnell and Hasselbeck reached new, unsettling heights. After criticism in the media that O’Donnell did not support American troops in Iraq, O’Donnell accused Hasselbeck on air of being “cowardly” for not defending her and complacent in the media’s frame of “Rosie, big, fat, lesbian, loud Rosie, attacks innocent, pure, Christian Elisabeth.” An irate Hasselbeck screamed in response, “Do not call me a coward, Rosie. I do not hide” (Steinberg, 2007). This was the culmination of nine months of politically charged fighting between the two co-hosts and within the month, O’Donnell announced her departure from The View. O’Donnell later remarked of her decision to leave the show, “…arguing about politics is not the best use of my talent…It only became about politics with the job on The View” (Martin, 2008).

In The Election Year, The View Becomes a Political Staging Ground

During the show’s eleventh season in 2007, a relative calm encased The View when Whoopi Goldberg replaced O’Donnell as the show’s moderator and brought a more subdued sense of controversy to the table. The decision to fill O’Donnell’s spot with Goldberg stemmed largely from a desire on Walters’ part to reintegrate civility and decorum into the discussions on the show without sacrificing some of the provocative buzz that increased viewership during O’Donnell’s tenure (Steinberg, 2007). The View began devoting entire episodes to Hot Topics, but with Hasselbeck on maternity leave and Goldberg in the moderator’s seat, The View returned to its roots of funny banter offset by intelligent, frank discussions. African-American comedian Sherri Shepard, who leans right politically, joined the show to finally fill the open slot left by Star Jones and brought a new infusion of levity and humor. Yet in the fall of 2008 during its 12th
season, *The View* immersed itself in the presidential campaign and became part of the political conversation.

*The View* chose Hilary Clinton as its first candidate guest during the campaign early in October 2007, which shocked few in the media who noted the mutually beneficial choice of an “estrogen-heavy” venue and guest for both parties involved (Alexovich, 2007). Clinton remained largely on message during her appearance and discussed her priorities as president, including the withdrawal of troops from Iraq. The only personal issues discussed involved her labor-intensive hair and makeup and the role of goodwill ambassador that her husband would play as First Spouse (Alexovich 2007). Clinton’s stop on *The View* neither stirred up controversy nor did it endear her or make her more accessible to viewers. The female hosts were equally reserved, particularly after an attempt to bait Clinton on negative comments made by Michelle Obama failed to provoke any response (Rovzar and Pressler, 2007).

In contrast, Clinton’s opponent in the primary, Barack Obama, pulled off a remarkable feat on the show during his March 2008 appearance—he managed to woo the hosts, charm the audience, and address controversy in one hour-long appearance. In what would become the norm for political appearance on the show, *The View* devoted an hour to Obama as opposed to the 20-minute segment that featured Clinton. Obama took the opportunity to discuss his controversial relationship with Reverend Wright, speak glowingly about a home life surrounded by women, and speak wistfully about a future in which he and Clinton would again be friends. But it was his mannerisms and demeanor that media outlets reported on and prompted one writer to note how smooth Obama could be at “wordless communication: he mixed a cool and somewhat princely demeanor with warm smiles and touches” (Stanley, 2008). *The View* hosts were criticized for
moon ing over the candidate, especially Walters, who said he was “sexy looking;” Shepard remarked that she would leave her hosting gig to campaign for him (Steinberg, 2008).

Michelle Obama’s stop on The View in June 2008 became instrumental in her image rehab after being widely criticized for the comment, “For the first time in my adult lifetime, I'm really proud of my country” and triggered attacks from conservatives (Tapper, 2008). She addressed the controversy on The View and showed a much warmer wide to her personality and spoke predominantly on her life as a mother, not as a career woman, and spoke lovingly of her husband. She also heaped praise on Laura Bush for reaching out to her when the “proud of my country” gaffe occurred (Stanley, 2008). Cindy McCain made a similar image-saving appearance on The View that April to explain why her McCain family recipes were copied from the Food Network (her intern’s mistake) after a reporter exposed the plagiarism when the recipes were posted onto the McCain campaign’s website (Weiner, 2008).

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, when Cindy McCain joined her husband John McCain on The View in September 2008, she encountered a less welcoming environment just as the race began hurtling toward the November election. Aside from conservative host Elisabeth Hasselbeck, Walters and the rest of the co-hosts interviewed the McCains in a manner widely reported to be unfair and hostile in light of the sugary treatment of Obama months earlier (Seelye, 2008). There was little of the usual light banter and laidback conversation that was typical of political appearances on The View; instead the McCains faced tough questioning that was all politics with little room to insert personality. Joy Behar called his advertisements “lies” while Walters scoffed at his labeling of Palin as a reformer and McCain’s insistence that he never received earmarks from Congress. Goldberg asked if she should expect to be “returned to slavery” in the event he became president (Barnes and Shear, 2008). After their appearance, the
McCains took to Fox News to express outrage at their treatment on *The View* while other media outlets like *The Huffington Post* and *The New York Times* credited Walters and her co-hosts with confronting the once-“Straight Talk” Maverick with distorting the truth. In

Throughout the presidential campaign, Hasselbeck frequently stumped for McCain, introducing him at a Republican National Committee breakfast mere weeks before his September appearance on *The View*. She even introduced Sarah Palin during a Tampa rally the following month (House, 2008). But Hasselbeck annoyed Walters and prompted an official statement from ABC after she wore a self-designed t-shirt that read, “Great AmeriCain Hero” on the show during Walters’ absence. Upon her return, Walters referenced the media storm and viewer outrage surrounding the hour-long advertisement for McCain incurred by Hasselbeck’s wardrobe. The statement from ABC on behalf of Geddie and Walters condoned the clothing choice, calling it inappropriate. Hasselbeck’s campaigning for McCain continued on *The View* and she engaged Shepard in a screaming match in late October regarding Obama’s ties to Bill Ayers and McCain’s first wife (Collins, 2008).

*Post-Election, Politics Become the Usual*

The political debates on the show became increasingly heated leading up to the election and cemented *The View’s* status as a worthy contender in the political media game and potential as an agenda-setter. In the days following the election, *The View* devoted little attention to celebrity news and guests and instead, continued to keep the conversation geared toward the political. The co-hosts discussed and fought over Proposition 8 and hosted politicians like Governor Mike Huckabee. Even after a long campaign season, for the first time in its history, *The View* became daytime’s most watched program during the week after the election and earned
its largest audience ever (6.2 million) on November 5, 2008, the day after the election (Frankel, 2008). Clearly, the winning formula for The View had evolved over the years. The View hosted other politicians such as former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney and Indiana Senator Evan Bayh who announced that he would not seek reelection while on The View. Prior to Obama’s historic return to the show on July 29, 2010, The View welcomed Vice President Joe Biden in April to talk tax cuts, United Nations sanctions, and reflect on his use of the F-Bomb during the signing of the health care legislation3 (de Moraes, 2010). Biden’s comments on sanctions against Iran nabbed nearly as many news headlines and blog posts in the aftermath of his appearance as his statements about Obama’s reaction to the F-Bomb (“he laughed like the Devil”). The Vice President’s appearance and the media attention it spawned resulted in a widely-read article in The Wall Street Journal with a headline that answered any lingering questions as to the power of a cup of coffee with the ladies of The View: “A Little Gab, A Little Politics: The View Becomes a Must-Stop for Politicians Trying to Reach Women, And Willing to Dish on Iran and Love” (Chozick, 2010).

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3 When President Obama was signing the health care bill, Biden leaned in and whispered, “This is a big [expletive]-ing deal.” The microphones picked up the remark for the world to hear.
CHAPTER 4: CONTENT ANALYSIS OF PRESIDENT OBAMA’S APPEARANCE ON THE VIEW

Obama’s media handlers knew that appearing on an entertainment show like The View would create headlines and push radio conservatives like Rush Limbaugh into a feeding frenzy. They knew because of the backlash that occurred when Obama went on late-night television to talk about unemployment with Jay Leno 59 days into his presidency and offer hope for economic recovery. So what did Obama need to express on The View that was worth the inevitable media backlash? Prior to the show, journalists mused that perhaps Obama was saving face after the controversial firing of Department of Agriculture employee Shirley Sherrod or that he was trying to make himself more likeable among an important voting bloc of women. When he went on The Late Show with David Letterman in September 2009, the appearance was one of many media stops in an effort to gain support for pending health care legislation that was stalled in congress. The timing of his stop on The View makes his motivation less clear as it did not coincide with a media blitz and occurred during one of the quietest months in Congress. To better understand the motivation behind his decision to appear on The View, I will analyze the discussion between Obama and The View co-hosts that occurred during this landmark episode of the show. This chapter serves as the backbone for the remainder of this study in which I explore the perceived learning effects from watching Obama on The View.

This episode of The View provides insight into what kind of discussions the White House wants to occur between the president and entertainment hosts as part of an ongoing politainment media strategy. The content and nature of the discussion also unveils the type of environment that The View is creating for political guests who are increasingly part of their programming slate. With a growing number of political guests on the show, The View often incorporates more
serious discussion topics when interviewing people like Vice President Biden and present viewers with a mix of light banter and policy information. I therefore hypothesize that:

\[ \text{H}_1 : \text{The content of Obama’s appearance on The View included discussion of policies as well as discussion of his family life, feelings, and attitude toward popular culture.} \]

This analysis will dismantle the preconception that presidential appearances on entertainment programming are devoid of substantive policy content and only involve topical conversations about gaffes, family, and life in the White House.

Content Coding

For the most in-depth understanding of what was said when Obama went on The View, I performed a content analysis using a coding scheme that I developed (see the Methodological Appendix for the coding sheet). After coding the entire episode of The View, I transferred the data into SPSS for statistical analysis. I watched the episode eight times before devising a coding sheet for this content analysis in order to identify themes and patterns over the hour-long appearance. I used a speaking turn as the unit of analysis. Guests and hosts often interrupt each other and speak over one another on the talk show format. I chose not to count such interruptions as speaking turns so long as the primary speaker retained control of the conversation after the interruption. Moreover, the interruptions on this episode of The View were kept to a minimum, likely because the President was the guest and the hosts were following a strict format. I did not include speaking turns that worked as commercial segues or those that occurred prior to Obama’s entrance on the set. For each turn, I noted the speaker, the length of the turn in seconds. The
subject of the turn was coded as 1 – policy issue, 2 – human interest or pop culture\textsuperscript{4} or 3 – the Obama family.

The speaking turns were coded for specific topics referenced. The categories include:

- The Economy
- The Oil Crisis
- Afghanistan
- Shirley Sherrod
- Politics
- Family
- Pop Culture
- Race
- Media
- Hardship of the Presidency
- America/American people

Some of the categories such as Shirley Sherrod are specific in nature and require the trigger of a particular word or phrase, like using Sherrod’s actual name. Other categories like The Economy encompass a broader field, including discussion of jobs, financial reform, and bailouts.

I coded the episode by watching each segment on my computer with the coding sheet, generated by Excel, on one side of the computer and the stopwatch on the other side. I had already watched the episode eight times so I was familiar with the pace of the show and who spoke when. I watched many of the turns several different times to ensure timing accuracy. There were 64 total turns.

\textsuperscript{4} For the second category, human interest refers to discussion of Obama’s personal feelings without any mention of a specific policy issue.
Intercoder Reliability

I recruited a second coder to perform an intercoder reliability analysis. I provided the coding sheet to the second coder and ensured that the categories were defined in scope as clearly as possible. The second coder coded 15 turns or 23% of turns. The intercoder’s reliability coefficient was 1.0 for all turns with the exception of one speaking turn 60 in which I noted a reference to politics that she omitted.

Overview of The Episode’s Segments

The episode in its entirety consists of four different segments, separated by commercial breaks. *The View* co-hosts discuss the importance of the occasion, but also talk briefly about Walters’ recent heart surgery. After airing footage from Obama’s election night speech, Obama then enters the stage and this is the point at which my analysis begins.

Segment #1 (nine minutes and 57 seconds): The discussion begins with easy banter, primarily between Walters and Obama, about why he came on *The View*, the comfort of the couches, and his past appearance during the campaign. Walters asks Obama to talk about the Rose and the Thorn game he plays with his family at night during which they discuss the best and worst parts of their day. He offers a family trip to Maine as a recent rose and the media, Afghanistan, H1N1, and the oil spill as recent thorns.

After Obama answers the thorn question from Walters a second time, Behar interjects with a comment about the right wing and Fox News. The discussion evolves into one about the repercussions of the current media environment and partisanship in America. The conversation shifts gears in the final few minutes of the segment when Shepard asks about Shirley Sherrod and Goldberg follows with questions about the possibility of a post-racial America. Goldberg
and Obama share a comfortable rapport that comes across most clearly at this moment when they actually finish each other’s sentences at one point.

Segment #2 (nine minutes and 23 seconds): The second segment begins once again with banter, but this time it involves Obama’s new crop of grey hairs since taking office. That aside, this segment is the most serious and policy-minded of the entire show and the questioning falls mainly to Hasselbeck and Walters. The most outspoken conservative on the show and McCain supporter during the 2008 election, Hasselbeck asks Obama about the state of joblessness sweeping America and admonishes him for masking joblessness behind “saved jobs” rhetoric. His pointed response elicits applause from the audience at one point as he provides an update on the economy and unemployment. There is an underlying hostility to their exchange with Obama frequenting referring to her by name, which he does not do when speaking to the other hosts, and with Hasselbeck interrupting him on two occasions.

During the second half of this segment, Walters takes over from Hasselbeck and asks Obama why the U.S. continues to wage war in Afghanistan. He cites, for a second time, the heartbreak of writing letters to the parents of fallen soldiers, but speaks to the importance of finishing the job. At Behar’s prodding, he repeats a campaign promise that they will begin removing troops in July 2011.

Segment #3 (four minutes and eight seconds): The third segment contains the most widely quoted utterances that appeared in the media after Obama’s appearance. Unlike the previous segment, this one is devoid of policy and devoted to popular culture and gossip. Behar leads Obama through a series of questions related to celebrities in the news, such as Mel Gibson, Snooki from *The Jersey Shore*, and Lindsay Lohan. The co-hosts then take turns quizzing him on his use of social media and what’s currently playing on his iPod. He assures Shepard that he
understands why he’s not invited to Chelsea Clinton’s wedding and remarks that Sasha and Malia’s wedding similarly will be a family and close friends affair. The biggest laugh from the audience comes when he emphatically denies that his girls are dating and they are not entertaining male visitors at the White House.

Segment #4 (four minutes and 57 seconds): The last segment allows Obama the opportunity to put his term in perspective. Goldberg inquires about how he handles the criticism and backlash over recent events like the oil spill and the Sherrod scandal. Obama underscores the successes of his presidency to date—health care, financial reform, education reform—and how his low approval ratings are similar to those of past presidents, including Ronald Reagan’s. He issues a similar response when Walters asks the last question of the show, “What do you want your legacy to be?”

Analysis: Distribution of Speaking Turns

My statistical strategy for the content analysis was to look primarily at the treatment of topics that I coded for and the behavior of the hosts and Obama in relation to those different topics. I therefore wanted to see the division of that labor among Obama and the hosts and the average time they talked per speaking turn.

Obama had 30 of the 64 speaking turns in my analysis. While he had four fewer speaking turns than The View hosts combined, Obama’s average speaking turn was much longer with an average of 48.5 seconds (see Table 4.1). He dominated the conversation, speaking about 80% of the time for a total of 24 minutes and 25 seconds. In contrast, The View co-hosts spoke for a combined total of six minutes and 21 seconds during the segments with Obama.

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5 As Obama answers Goldberg’s question, Hasselbeck interrupts to ask if the young Americans he refers to will even have jobs.
Of *The View* co-hosts, the frequencies indicate that Barbara Walters spoke the most followed by Behar, Goldberg, Shepard, and Hasselbeck (see Table 4.1). Given Walters’ prominence and reputation as a respected female journalist, it is not surprising that she spoke with greater frequency than the other hosts. In addition, she came back from a leave of absence just for the opportunity to interview President Obama. Behar has been a part of *The View* since its inception and therefore holds the most seniority among the other co-hosts, which explains why she spoke with greater frequency than the other hosts.

**Table 4.1: Breakdown of Speaking Turns by Speaker**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Frequency of Turns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barack Obama</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara Walters</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy Behar</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whoopi Goldberg</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherri Shepard</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elisabeth Hasselbeck</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using an Analysis of Variance Model (ANOVA) to reveal the average number of seconds per turn by host paints a slightly different picture (see Table 4.2 below). ANOVA is a statistical methodology that allows for comparisons between multiple groups simultaneously.

**Table 4.2: Average Turn Time per Host**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Average # of Seconds per Speaking Turn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barack Obama</td>
<td>48.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara Walters</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy Behar</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whoopi Goldberg</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherri Shepard</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elisabeth Hasselbeck</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significance  t-test = .000

Despite having just four speaking turns on the show, Hasselbeck controlled the conversation for longer periods than Walters. Hasselbeck essentially runs the discussion of the economic policies...
that occurs during the second segment. Hasselbeck does not merely ask Obama questions, she also espouses her own conservative commentary. Similarly, Goldberg speaks far less frequently than Walters, but particularly in the fourth segment, she details the backlash that Obama faced and her actual question is lost among her attempts to empathize with him. Goldberg uses her speaking turns to express frustration with Obama’s critics. In contrast, Hasselbeck takes her speaking opportunities to criticize and question the effectiveness of the Obama Administration’s economic policies.

Analysis: Topic and Thematic Composition of the Episode

I used a multi-part statistical strategy for uncovering the attention devoted to the topics and subjects discussed on the program. The frequencies in Table 4.3 reveal how many speaking turns clustered in each topic and allowed for rank ordering of the topics as such:

**Table 4.3: Frequency for Each Topic**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Frequency of Turns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pop Culture</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardship; America</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil; Sherrod</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The key policy issues discussed on the show, Afghanistan (6 turns) and the economy (8 turns), did not warrant the same amount of turns as discussion of pop culture (27 turns) and family (13 turns). Politics (16 turns) and the media (14 turns) were also popular topics during this episode.
Most of the discussions surrounding those topics was negative and focused on partisanship in Washington and liberal/conservative bias in the press. Even in an effort to include more serious issues, *The View* maintains some of the stereotypical components of a daytime talk show such as talking about family and obstacle’s in one’s life, which, in the president’s case, is the media and partisanship in Washington.

The subject variable aggregates the information on the general thematic composition of the show, which was not as apparent with the individual topic variables. I coded each turn for Subject as either 1 (policy issue), 2 (pop culture/human interest) or 3 (the Obama family). The mode for this variable was 2, which is not surprising given the relatively high frequency for pop culture in Table 4.3. The pop culture/human interest category of the subject variable has a frequency of 30 so the pop culture variable’s frequency of 25 (Table 4.3) suggests that it provided the majority of cases for pop culture/human interest choice in the subject variable (Table 4.4). To see the average time devoted to each of the three subjects per turn, I used an ANOVA model with the results detailed in Table 4.4 below.

**Table 4.4: Average Turn Time per Subject**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Turns Devoted to Subject (N)</th>
<th>Mean (average seconds per turn)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – Policy</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>62.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – pop culture/human interest</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - family</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significance t-test = .000

This ANOVA model shows that the 24 speaking turns that dealt with policy issues were generally much longer (62.1 seconds) than the 10 speaking turns devoted to family (11.8 seconds) or the 30 speaking turns spent on pop culture/human interest (7.3 seconds). The differences between the means per turn are statistically significant at .000. This supports the
hypothesis that the content of the show included policy discussion and further, that on average, the hosts and Obama took more time to speak on policy. It also helps explain why the media picked its sound bytes from pop culture-related comments, for an average quip of 7.3 seconds is more conducive to media replay than a minute-long policy statement.

I took the analysis above a step further and re-ran the ANOVA model two different times, dividing the sample into Obama’s turns versus all of the hosts’ turns. I first held the hosts constant to see how much time per turn Obama devoted to the three different subjects. I then ran the same ANOVA, but held Obama constant so I could see the results for the hosts collectively (see table 4.5 below).

**Table 4.5: Average Turns and Turn Time per Subject for Obama and Co-Hosts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Obama: Turns Devoted to Subject (N)</th>
<th>Hosts: Turns Devoted to Subject (N)</th>
<th>Obama: Mean (average seconds per turn)</th>
<th>Hosts: Mean (average seconds per turn)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – Policy</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>101.4</td>
<td>22.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – pop culture/human interest</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - family</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significance t-test = .010

Table 4.5 illustrates how much more time Obama spent discussing policy when compared to *The View* hosts. Comparatively, his responses concerning pop culture/human interest and family were much shorter, which was also the case for *The View* hosts. The higher number of turns devoted to pop culture/human interest in Table 4.6 stems from the fourth segment in which Behar asks Obama a rapid fire round of pop culture questions. While the mean for policy turns is much
smaller in Table 4.6 than in Table 4.5, it still shows that the policy questions and statements from the women on *The View* were more substantial than in the other two categories.

In the final part of the statistical analysis, I used crosstabs to see the percentages of turns spent on each subject by each individual on the episode. Given the range of political ideology among the hosts, explicit or assumed, I chose not to group the hosts together (Table 4.6).

**Table 4.6: Speaking Turns per Topic for Each Speaker**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Human Interest/Pop Culture</th>
<th>Family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obama</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walters</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hasselbeck</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behar</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldberg</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shepard</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This crosstab sheds insight into the role and priorities of the different hosts. Walters adheres to a common interviewing format she adopted over the years that offers a balance. This includes serious, issue-based questions, light-hearted questions or questions about a person’s feelings, and humanizing questions about family. Hasselbeck’s agenda to assert her own misgivings and conservative ideology is clear given the high percentage of her turns categorized as policy.

As discussed previously, Behar has the highest percentage within the second category due to her role as the pop culture maven during the show. Shepard’s role is kept to a minimum, likely because of her status as the newest member of the show. She leads the questioning on Sherrod, yet spends the majority of her time on Chelsea Clinton’s wedding, which explains the spike in the second category. Goldberg speaks with similar frequency to Shepard, but her statements involve more discussion of current events. The even split between category one
(policy) and category two (human interest/pop culture) likely occurred because Goldberg also takes over the pop culture discussion from Behar to quiz Obama on the content of his iPod.

Finally, I was interested to see the percentage of turns devoted to the variables of media and hardship, between Obama and the hosts collectively. I ran two different crosstabs: one for media and one for hardship (Table 4.7).

**Table 4.7: Number of Media and Hardship Speaking Turns**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Media</th>
<th>Hardship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obama</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The View</em> hosts</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.7 shows how willing Obama was to speak on the media and its role in partisanship, spending some portion of eight of his 30 speaking turns on the topic. In contrast, he was less likely to speak about the criticism and backlash he faced since taking office whereas *The View* hosts touched on it during eight of their speaking turns. Obama’s discussion of media might also be a way of explaining his fallen approval ratings without complaining explicitly about hardship in the Oval Office. Additionally, the hardship category is an important one to notice, particularly in relation to the hosts, because that theme represents a core component of their show dynamic. Whether it is a recently rehabbed celebrity or a media embattled president, *The View* hosts administer talk therapy.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I analyzed the results from a content analysis of Obama’s appearance on *The View*. I found that while pop culture content accounted for the majority of speaking turns, the co-hosts and Obama also spoke on policy issues including the economy, the war in Afghanistan, and the BP oil spill. On average, speaking turns in which Obama discussed policy...
ran longer than those in which he discussed his family or pop culture. The overall amount of policy content was high, and Obama was able to control the policy agenda as the show unfolded. Next to Obama, Barbara Walters spoke the most frequently, but conservative host Elisabeth Hasselbeck spoke for the longest amount of time among the women. While Walters stuck to her role as interviewer, Hasselbeck and even Goldberg and Behar did not simply question Obama, they made statements regarding their own feelings on his treatment by the press and the American public. As discussed in Chapter 3, *The View* has a recent history of policy discussions and political debates, and the policy component assumes an appropriate level of importance during this episode. But neither the hosts nor Obama would benefit from this episode if it didn’t contain the defining elements of a daytime talk show. Walters in particular uses the rose and thorn metaphor to nudge Obama into discussing the most human aspect of the presidency—the effects of criticism by the media, other politicians, and former supporters on himself and his family. Obama, in turn, uses *The View* as a safe platform to critique partisanship in the media and in Washington and diffuse criticism for firing Sherrod and for rampant unemployment. In the next chapter I will conduct an audience analysis to examine who, among Americans, paid attention to this particular episode of *The View* in addition to the regular viewership for the show.
CHAPTER 5: AUDIENCE ANALYSIS—WHO WAS EXPOSED TO AND AWARE OF PRESIDENT OBAMA’S APPEARANCE ON THE VIEW

When ABC announced that President Obama would appear on The View, the network ignited a media frenzy. The appearance quickly became a favorite discussion topic for Republicans like Sarah Palin during their appearances on cable news programs (Viebeck, 2010). The criticism ranged from how inappropriate and demeaning to the presidency the appearance would be to how manipulative and obvious this strategy was given The View’s audience and Obama’s falling poll numbers. The White House cited audience fragmentation as much of the reason why Obama chose to appear on The View and other nontraditional television programs like Mythbusters. Which audience was Obama trying to reach by appearing on The View? In addition to the regular viewership for the show, who among Americans was aware of Obama’s View appearance?

In this chapter, I use Nielsen data to explore who was likely watching President Obama’s appearance on The View given the show’s average demographics. I analyze Pew Research Center data to uncover who was aware of his appearance based on demographics and news interests.

The Audience for The View

Prior to President Obama’s appearance, The View obtained its largest audience immediately after the 2008 presidential election for its post-election episode where they recapped the Election Day events. As discussed in Chapter Three, The View earned significantly higher ratings and increased its viewership as the show began progressing more toward the political, in

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6 On July 26, 2010, Obama’s job approval rating was at 45%, down from his all-time high of 76% on February 7, 2009 (Roper Center Public Opinion Archives).
tone and through its choice of guests once Rosie O’Donnell joined the show (Tucker, 2007). Currently, *The View* has an audience of 3.7 million viewers, seated just behind *Oprah* as the second most popular daily talk show (Hibberd, 2010). Nielsen data indicate that 79% of the show’s audience is female, which supports Obama’s own observation that his wife, like many women, regularly tunes into *The View*. The show is first in its time slot among women aged 18-49, but the median age of the show’s viewer is 59 (Aurthur, 2006; Chozick, 2010). With the 2010 mid-term elections in sight, appearing on a program that targets one of the key swing voter blocs, middle-class women in their 40s and 50s, was probably no accident.

When Obama appeared on *The View*, the show earned its best ratings in its 13-year history with an estimated 5.5 million households tuned in and 6.5 million viewers watching (*nielsenwire* 2010). The viewership for Obama’s appearance broke records for *The View*, but it also indicated, when compared to President Obama’s other television appearances, that people would rather watch an interview with the ladies of *The View* than an interview on a Sunday morning news show such as *Face the Nation*. By the time President Obama appeared on *The View*, he had already set a new precedent with entertainment media by becoming the first sitting president to appear on a late-night talk show when he appeared on *The Tonight Show* on March 19, 2009 (See Table 5.1). He made another late-night appearance on September 1, 2009 across from David Letterman. Obama’s appearances on *Leno* and *Letterman* garnered more viewers than his appearance on *The View*, some of which can be attributed to a preferable time slot for those who are employed full-time. In addition, *Leno* and *Letterman* are traditional late-night talk shows that appeal across gender lines.

His appearance on *The View* eclipsed viewership of Obama’s appearances as president on *Meet the Press*, *This Week*, and *Face the Nation* (See Table 5.1). These Sunday morning news
shows are not as likely to attract the younger and apolitical viewers that would tune in to watch Obama on *Leno* or *The View*. The *60 Minutes* interview that attracted the most viewers was the first televised featured interview that Obama gave as president and therefore attracted an unusually large number of viewers. *60 Minutes* interviews also tend to be respected as in-depth and often revealing interviews regardless of the subject. The show does not explicitly embrace the political partisanship and media bias that the Sunday morning news shows embrace. In addition, *60 Minutes* benefits from lead-ins from sports broadcasts that command large audiences among the American population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th># of Households</th>
<th># of Persons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>60 Minutes</td>
<td>11/16/08</td>
<td>17,329,000</td>
<td>25,105,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>60 Minutes</td>
<td>3/22/09</td>
<td>11,960,000</td>
<td>17,042,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Tonight Show with Jay Leno</td>
<td>3/19/09</td>
<td>11,077,000</td>
<td>14,634,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>60 Minutes</td>
<td>9/13/09</td>
<td>7,908,000</td>
<td>10,518,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Late Show with David Letterman</td>
<td>9/21/09</td>
<td>5,876,000</td>
<td>7,417,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The View</td>
<td>7/29/10</td>
<td>5,466,368</td>
<td>6,589,673</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Meet the Press</td>
<td>12/7/08</td>
<td>5,180,000</td>
<td>6,561,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>This Week</td>
<td>1/11/09</td>
<td>3,430,000</td>
<td>4,339,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Face the Nation</td>
<td>3/29/09</td>
<td>3,010,000</td>
<td>3,700,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Who’s Paying Attention?*

Given the frequency of his presidential appearances on non-traditional media outlets, I wanted to gauge actual levels of awareness surrounding Obama’s *View* appearance among the American people instead of perceived levels as reported in the media. For comparative purposes, I looked at the level of awareness surrounding Michelle Obama’s 2008 campaign stop on *The*
View to see if it is newsworthy for a candidate’s spouse to appear on entertainment programming during presidential campaigns.

Concepts & Indicators

To investigate the attention garnered by these two appearances on The View, I am using the June 20-23, 2008 News Interest Index Omnibus Survey and the July 29-August 1, 2010 News Interest Index Omnibus Survey from the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. The June 2008 survey asks specifically how much the respondent has heard about Michelle Obama’s appearance on The View while the July/August 2010 survey asks the same question for President Obama’s appearance on The View. The variable of “Michelle” represents that question from the June 2008 survey while the variable of “Barack” represents the same question in the July/August 2010 survey. If a respondent answered “a lot” to that question, it indicates a high level of awareness for my analysis. Other items include:

- In the July/August 2010 data set, the news stories concerning the Oil spill in the Gulf, Afghanistan, Arizona immigration laws, and the 2010 mid-term congressional elections are indicators of hard news. Pew asks specifically about these news stories in this survey.

- In the July/August 2010 data set, Chelsea Clinton’s wedding is an indicator of a soft news story. Pew asks specifically about the respondent’s knowledge of this news story in this survey.

- President Obama and Michelle Obama’s appearances on The View are indicators of politainment in this analysis. (See the Methodological Appendix for key conceptual definitions for this analysis)

Specifically, I wanted to uncover what segments of the population possessed the highest level of awareness of The View appearances? Did Barack’s appearance garner more attention than Michelle’s campaign appearance on The View? I also wanted to examine the correlations, if any, between paying attention to hard news items and Obama’s appearance on The View. Finally, I
analyzed differences between awareness levels of Obama’s *View* appearance and the soft news item of Chelsea Clinton’s wedding as they relate to party identification and sex.

**Statistical Analysis**

My statistical analysis for this project consists of several parts. The first was to run crosstabs on the dependent variables and each of the independent variables to understand the relationship across categories of a given variable such as political party identification. Performing crosstabs provides insight into the particular demographics of the American public that are aware of these appearances on *The View*. Moreover, the Pearson’s Chi-Square test of statistical significance indicates if the observed relationship is one that is occurring by chance or if it is a real relationship. I then computed the Pearson’s R correlation coefficient for the dependent variables related to *The View* with the independent variables of the other news stories in each news interest index. Correlating with the other news stories allowed me to investigate the relationship between the two instances of politainment on *The View* with awareness levels of hard news and soft news stories that were occurring at the same time. In addition, I performed a MANOVA analysis to compare awareness levels of Obama’s *View* appearance with awareness of Chelsea Clinton’s wedding, the softest of the news items in the July/August 2010 dataset.

**Finding: Crosstabs**

When I ran crosstabs on the dependent variable Barack and each independent variable, the results were interesting and in several cases, surprising. I hypothesized that:
H1: Republicans have higher levels of awareness than Democrats of President Obama’s appearance on *The View*.

Because most of the media outcry against President Obama appearing on nontraditional programming like *The View* came from Republicans and the right-leaning media, I was most interested in Party Identification (PID) as it relates to awareness levels of his appearance. I found that the highest percentage in the “a lot” category was among Republicans with 38.6%. Independents and Democrats followed closely behind with 33.5% (I) and 37.4% (D). Independents had heard the least about his appearance with 26.4% followed by Democrats at 23.3% and Republicans at 19.3%. While this supports my research hypothesis that Obama’s appearance is more newsworthy among Republicans than among Democrats, the Pearson’s Chi-Square was not statistically significant (.292). I found similar results for the Michelle variable and PID with the Republicans finding her appearance most newsworthy at 30.2% in contrast to Independents (25.6%) and Democrats (28.9%). The Pearson’s Chi-Square’s significance of .459 also indicated that this was not a real relationship and could have occurred by chance (See Table 5.2).
### Table 5.2: Party Identification and Awareness of View appearances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How much, if anything, have you heard...</th>
<th>Barack</th>
<th>Michelle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A Lot</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>38.6%</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>33.5%</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>37.4%</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A Little</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>42.1%</td>
<td>34.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>40.1%</td>
<td>34.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>39.3%</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nothing at all</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td>35.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
<td>40.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
<td>34.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson’s Chi-Square</td>
<td>.292</td>
<td>.459</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In analyzing the relationship between gender and the dependent Barack variable, I hypothesized that:

\[ H_2: \text{There is little to no difference regarding awareness levels of President Obama’s appearance on The View among men and women.} \]

The contingency table for the dependent variable and gender showed little difference between males and females as 35.4% of males and 35.7% heard “a lot” about President Obama’s appearance. This supports the research hypothesis that there is little to no difference among men and women in terms of their awareness of his appearance on The View. The Pearson’s Chi-Square significance of .993 indicates that this is not a real relationship and could have occurred by chance. In contrast, more females (31.6%) than males (24.2%) heard a lot about Michelle Obama’s appearance on The View and the significance of the Pearson’s Chi-Square (.032)
suggests that this is, in fact, a real relationship. During the campaign, American women paid more attention than men to the candidates’ wives be it a gaffe (Michelle Obama not being proud of her country) or their fashion (Jill Biden’s knee-high boots). This finding is not surprising in light of such a trend (Table 5.3).

**Table 5.3: Gender and Awareness of *View* Appearances**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How much if anything have you heard…</th>
<th>Barack</th>
<th>Michelle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Lot</td>
<td>35.4%</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Little</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>41.0%</td>
<td>33.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing at all</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>39.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
<td>35.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>.993</td>
<td>.032</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most significant relationships occurred in two similar categories: education and income. I formulated separate hypotheses for each of these variables:

\[ H_3: \text{President Obama’s appearance on } \textit{The View} \text{ is more newsworthy among Americans in higher income brackets than among Americans in lower income brackets.} \]

\[ H_4: \text{President Obama’s appearance on } \textit{The View} \text{ is more newsworthy among more educated Americans than among less educated Americans.} \]

The contingency tables (see Tables 5.4 and 5.5 below) for each of these independent variables and the dependent variable showed nearly identical results. Those respondents with some college (42.2%) and college+ (36.4%) had heard the most about President Obama’s appearance on *The
Those with less than high school had heard the least about his appearance with 31.8% in contrast to those with college+, which was 18.8%. The Pearson’s Chi Square indicates a significance of .005 so the relationship is significant. Similarly, those respondents in the highest income bracket of $75K+ had heard the most about President Obama’s appearance and the most respondents who had heard ‘nothing at all’ about it fell under the lowest income bracket of Under $30K. The significance of the Pearson’s Chi-Square for this contingency table was .000. These findings support two related hypotheses that Americans in higher income brackets and with the highest levels of education heard the most about President Obama’s appearance on The View. Perhaps among the less educated and those in lower income brackets, the newsworthiness of a presidential appearance on an entertainment show was not apparent because they were not exposed to coverage of his appearance in the media.

Table 5.4: Education and Awareness of View Appearances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How much if anything have you heard…</th>
<th>Barack</th>
<th>Michelle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Lot</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LT HS</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS Grad</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>42.2%</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College+</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Little</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LT HS</td>
<td>40.9%</td>
<td>32.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS Grad</td>
<td>41.1%</td>
<td>33.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>36.1%</td>
<td>34.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College+</td>
<td>44.8%</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing at all</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LT HS</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
<td>52.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS Grad</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
<td>42.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>35.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College+</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>33.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson’s Chi-Square</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.022</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 5.5: Income and Awareness of *View* Appearances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How much, if anything, have you heard…</th>
<th>Barack</th>
<th>Michelle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A Lot</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under $30K</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$30K-LT$50K</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50K-LT$75K</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$75K+</td>
<td>39.6%</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A Little</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under $30K</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$30K-LT$50K</td>
<td>37.4%</td>
<td>41.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50K-LT$75K</td>
<td>33.6%</td>
<td>35.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$75K+</td>
<td>42.7%</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nothing at all</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under $30K</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>43.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$30K-LT$50K</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
<td>37.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50K-LT$75K</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$75K+</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson’s Chi-Square</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.042</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because of the intense media coverage of Barack’s appearance as president and the frequent use of entertainment media during presidential campaigns, I hypothesized that:

H₆: There were higher levels of awareness of President Obama’s appearance on *The View* compared to Michelle Obama’s appearance on *The View* during the 2008 campaign.

When I ran the same crosstabs for the dependent variable of Michelle Obama’s appearance on *The View* using the same variables, the results were similar with a few exceptions such as gender, which I noted above. Yet it was striking to see that when compared to the contingency tables for her husband’s presidential appearance on the show, the percentages for having heard “a lot” about the appearance were generally lower, but higher in the category of “nothing at all.” This helps to support my hypothesis that Barack’s appearance as President received more attention.
than Michelle’s appearance on the same show as a candidate’s wife. Politainment on the campaign trail is not the same media event in terms of coverage and interest as presidential politainment.

Findings: Correlations with Other News Stories

The next phase of my data analysis resulted in some of the more interesting findings pertaining to awareness of soft news items and patterns in news consumption. I hypothesized that:

H7: There is a positive correlation among those who are paying attention to soft news stories and those who paid attention to President Obama’s appearance on The View.

H8: Paying attention to hard news is negatively correlated with paying attention to President Obama’s appearance on The View.

I performed correlations on each of the news stories mentioned in the individual surveys, including the news item about The View. The Pearson’s Correlation Coefficients were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>News Story</th>
<th>Barack on the View</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chelsea Clinton’s wedding</td>
<td>.351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wikileaks</td>
<td>.341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlie Rangel’s ethics violations</td>
<td>.304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration issues</td>
<td>.271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>.270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Economy</td>
<td>.266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>.258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil leak in the Gulf</td>
<td>.124</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.8: Correlations for Michelle on *The View* with Other News Stories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>News Story</th>
<th>Michelle on the View</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obama on public financing</td>
<td>-.130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorist legislation in Congress</td>
<td>-.081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same sex marriage legislation</td>
<td>-.061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>-.058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate election news</td>
<td>-.053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>-.047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floods in the midwest</td>
<td>-.031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil ban</td>
<td>-.008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For Table 5.7 and the Barack variable, the news story of his appearance on *The View* is most highly correlated with an easily defined soft news item, which is Chelsea Clinton’s wedding. It is then most highly correlated with two additional news items that lend themselves to sensationalized soft news: Wikileaks and Charlie Rangel’s ethics violations. The lowest correlation is between his appearance on *The View* and the oil leak in the Gulf, a hard news item. This supports my hypothesis that there is a correlation among those who are paying attention to hard news stories and those who paid attention to President Obama’s appearance on *The View*.

In Table 5.8, the correlations between the news story of Michelle Obama appearing on *The View* and the other news items are far lower than the correlations between all of the other news items and Barack’s appearance on *The View*. This finding suggests that even though the Barack variable is most highly correlated with the soft news items, there is still a positive correlation between the harder news stories and the story concerning his appearance on *The View*. I cannot support my final hypothesis that paying attention to hard news is negatively correlated with paying attention to President Obama’s appearance on *The View*. This finding further fuels my reasoning for conducting this research in the first place: that so-called soft news should not be ignored and politainment in particular is commanding attention among diverse
audiences. Interestingly, Pew did not include any soft news item in this weekly news interest index from 2008, but includes several in this survey from 2010.

Comparison: Predictors of Awareness Levels for Chelsea Clinton’s Wedding vs. Obama’s Appearance on The View

In Pew’s July/August 2010 News Interest Index Survey, they included a question asking, “How much if anything have you heard about the wedding of Chelsea Clinton?” Clinton’s wedding falls in the realm of soft news and graced the cover of People and countless gossip blogs. I therefore wanted to use a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) model to see if those who paid attention to Obama’s appearance on The View were similar in terms of PID and gender to those who paid attention to Chelsea’s wedding. I hypothesized that:

Hₙ: Party ID and gender are significant indicators of awareness levels of Barack Obama’s appearance on The View and Chelsea Clinton’s wedding.

I used the following MANOVA model:

Barackₙ = a + PID + Sex + PID*Sex

Chelseaₙ = a + PID + Sex + PID*Sex

For the between subjects effects, I found that for Chelsea, the R Squared of .009 indicated that 9% of the variance in awareness to her wedding is explained by PID, sex, and PID*Sex. For Barack, the R Squared of .005 shows that only 5% of the variance in awareness levels is explained by PID, sex, and PID*Sex. Neither PID nor PID*Sex are significant predictors for
Chelsea (.965) or Barack (.125). Yet, sex is a significant predictor for Chelsea (.007), but not for Barack (.903). When examining the means for the group comparisons, I found that female Democrats (2.25) and female Republicans (2.21) were more aware of Chelsea’s wedding than male Democrats (2.06) and male Republicans (2.07). Whereas for Obama, female Democrats (2.13) and male Democrats (2.15) were equally aware of his appearance on *The View* as were female Republicans (2.18) and male Republicans (2.19).

These findings suggest that across parties, females paid more attention to Clinton’s wedding than males, as has often been the case with tabloid and feature-style reporting. Presidential soft news items apparently garner interest across gender and party. We cannot necessarily collapse Obama’s appearance on *The View* with other soft news stories and assume a predominantly female audience, as sex was not a significant predictor of awareness levels.

**Conclusion**

By appearing on *The View*, President Obama reached 5.5 million households and captured the attention of 6.6 million viewers. While the show’s audience is predominantly female, the special occasion of having President Obama visit helped *The View* nearly double the size of its average audience. The publicity generated by ABC before the show aired coupled with the outcry from conservatives and their like-minded media outlets generated interest and awareness beyond those who tuned into the show. The most educated Americans from the highest income brackets possessed the most awareness of President Obama’s appearance on *The View*. Differences in political party identification did not affect awareness levels despite the prevalence of Republican critics of his appearance in the media. Similarly, awareness levels among men and women were not significantly different even though *The View*’s audience is
predominantly female. In contrast, sex was a significant predictor for awareness levels of Chelsea Clinton’s wedding. These findings suggest that the perceived democratizing effect of the White House’s politainment media strategy might be overstated as heightened awareness of Obama’s entertainment media appearances exists predominantly among the same people who read about his policies in The New York Times. Further, these findings help dismantle dominant understandings of the soft news audience as one that is less educated and less wealthy.
In this chapter, I address the final component of the Laswell communications model and examine the audience effects of President Obama’s appearance on *The View*. Drawing support from past studies on selective perception and selective exposure (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948; Klapper, 1960), I believed that preconceptions about Obama and his administration would greatly influence attitudes of the focus group participants. I hypothesized the following in relation to these audience effects:

**Perceptions of Personality**

H1: After watching clips of Obama’s appearance on *The View*, people changed their feelings about his personality.

H1a: Those who have negative attitudes concerning President Obama’s personality will not think more positively of him after watching his appearance on *The View*.

H1b: Those who have positive attitudes concerning President Obama’s personality will think even more positively of his personality after watching his appearance on *The View*.

**Perceptions of Policy**

H2: After watching clips of Obama’s appearance on *The View*, people’s feelings toward his Administration’s policies changed.
H$_{2a}$: Those who have negative preconceptions of President Obama’s policies will not hold more favorable opinions of these policies after watching his appearance on *The View*.

H$_{2b}$: Those who have positive preconceptions of President Obama’s policies will maintain the same policy positions after watching his appearance on *The View*.

A core component of this research involves two focus groups that I designed and implemented on February 16, 2011 and February 19, 2011 on Georgetown University’s main campus. The focus groups provided the following information, which I will discuss and analyze in detail throughout the chapter:

- Survey data that showed shifts in perceptions of the Obama Administration’s policies on the economy and Afghanistan
- Survey data that showed shifts in opinions regarding President Obama’s personality/likeability
- Insight from the discussions as to the appropriateness and effectiveness of a presidential media strategy that includes entertainment media
- Feedback from the discussions regarding the dynamic between *The View* co-hosts and President Obama and how each side handled specific topics

After outlining the focus group design, I will present the findings using anecdotes from the discussions that I will support or refute with empirical evidence from the surveys.

*Focus Group Design: Surveys*

I began preparing for the focus groups in the fall of 2010 and drafted two different surveys to administer before participants viewed the clips from Obama’s *View* appearance and right afterwards. The pre-survey (see Methodological Appendix) asks basic questions about
media use, previous knowledge of his appearance, political orientation, and opinions on the policies regarding the war in Afghanistan and the economic crisis. In the pre-survey, I asked a battery of 18 questions, including three that I would include, verbatim, on the post-survey: the two questions regarding the Obama Administration’s policies on Afghanistan and the economy and a feeling thermometer question about President Obama. I designed the survey so that it took about six to seven minutes to complete. The post-viewing survey consisted of nine questions, including the three from the previous survey (see Methodological Appendix). The additional questions gauged general feelings about the clips, the appropriateness of Obama’s choice of media venue, and if the participant felt that their position on his policies and his personality changed in any way after viewing the clips. The post-viewing survey took roughly four minutes to complete. I pre-tested both surveys on colleagues in my thesis research group and revised some questions to more directly gauge opinions, positive or negative, regarding President Obama and his policies.

Focus Group Design: Semi-Structured Group Discussion

The semi-structured discussion that concluded the focus groups was meant to provide insight into perceived motivations as to why Obama would appear on an entertainment show. The list of discussion questions is available in the Methodological Appendix, but I formulated the questions to gauge how and why watching clips of the show influenced or did not influence perceptions of Obama’s policies and his personality. After preparing these questions, I vetted them with my thesis advisor before giving them to Rebecca Chalif, my peer in the Communication, Culture & Technology Program, who I asked to lead the discussions. I decided not to act as the discussion leader, for I feared that I might prime the participants or lead the
discussion in a direction I preferred. Rebecca and I met twice to discuss and revise some of the questions, but she also had the flexibility to ask additional questions if necessary. I also arranged to have Scott Willey, another CCT graduate student and professional videographer, film the discussions.

Recruitment

I confined my recruitment efforts to the general Georgetown community and friends or spouses of community members, particularly since I could not offer a monetary incentive. Beginning on February 7, I circulated a flyer (see Exhibit 6.1 below) on various listservs within the Georgetown community that included basic information about the two focus groups under the heading “When Politics + Entertainment Collide.” It advertised 1) the nature of the research 2) that it was for a graduate student’s thesis and 3) that food and drink would be served. The flyer was posted by my co-facilitator, Rebecca Chalif, on Facebook and posted in the hallways of the Car Barn, the home of CCT and American Studies. I listed my Georgetown University email address and first name on the recruitment notice and encouraged those who were interested to contact me. Apart from the flyer, I spoke with many of my peers in the CCT program personally, asking them to attend and enlisted help from American Studies majors in the College. I asked that several peers who possessed a detailed understanding of my research and hypotheses to abstain from participating. I recruited a total of 24 participants.
Exhibit 6.1: Focus Group Advertisement

Content of the Focus Group

Excluding commercial breaks, the entire episode in which Obama appeared onscreen totaled 33 minutes. I chose to show two different segments. These segments show two distinct elements of the content of the episode, which I analyzed in Chapter Four. The first clip focuses entirely on policy while pop culture and Obama’s daughters dominate the second clip with no mention of policy. The first segment began after the second commercial break and ran for nine minutes and 23 seconds. In this clip, Elisabeth Hasselbeck begins with questions regarding the economic crisis and the Obama Administration’s response to staggering unemployment figures and job losses. The discussion of the economic crisis accounts for roughly half of the clip. The second part of the clip begins when Barbara Walters asks Obama about the war in Afghanistan and why the U.S. continues to maintain a military presence in the region. Obama’s response to her questions takes up the remaining time before the commercial break. I chose this particular
clip because of its policy-driven focus and attention to serious issues. It highlights a growing trend in *The View*’s programming shift toward topics that reach beyond popular culture and celebrity gossip. The clip also reflects the tone for the majority of Obama’s appearance on *The View* because the co-hosts spent much of the time with the President discussing policy-oriented issues including the BP oil spill in the Gulf and the state of race relations in the country.

The second clip I showed the focus group participants occurred on the program right after the first clip, interrupted only by a commercial break. This segment was shorter in length as it totaled just four minutes and eight seconds. In this second clip, Obama answers a series of rapid-fire pop culture questions concerning actress Lindsey Lohan, Snooki from MTV’s *The Jersey Shore*, actor Mel Gibson and the music on Obama’s iPod. He also discusses his daughters briefly and their life in the White House. While this was the shortest segment of the episode, it received the most attention in the media, particularly his responses to the questions about Lohan and Snooki. I therefore felt it was essential to include this in the focus group to see if the policy segment might offset the pop culture segment in any way or if hearing the President speak about *The Jersey Shore* inevitably overshadows any discussion of the economy or foreign policy.

**Administering the Focus Group**

I held the first focus group at 5:30 PM on February 16, 2011 in Room 494B of the Edmund Walsh Building on Georgetown’s campus. As participants entered the room, they were handed an Informed Consent document to review and sign as well as a bright yellow envelope with a number inside. Each survey asked the participant to list their number and these numbers

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7 I was originally told that there were individual computers stationed in the room in addition to the main computer and large screen. Yet when I entered the room, there were no computers so I was forced to use paper copies of both surveys and have participants fill them out by hand with pens provided.
allowed me to link the pre-survey with the post-survey to check for any shifts in opinion. The bright yellow envelope played a dual purpose of shielding the number from my sight and protecting the privacy of the individuals as well as being bright enough that they would not misplace it when it came time to take the post-viewing survey. I laid out a spread of cookies, chips, pretzels and soda for the participants to enjoy while they filled out their first forms with pen or pencil and waited for the rest of the group to arrive. I wanted the participants to feel relaxed as if they were watching the show at home on their television.

After collecting the Informed Consent documents and pre-surveys from each participant, I briefly introduced the episode, providing the date it aired and noted that I would be showing two clips in the order in which they appeared. Participants viewed both clips on a large projector screen. I distributed the post-viewing survey to all participants immediately after watching the clips. After they completed and handed in both their survey and their envelope, I introduced Rebecca and explained that she would lead the discussion. I also introduced Scott Willey and reminded the participants that he would be filming the discussion. We asked everyone to arrange their chairs in a semi-circle before beginning the discussion. The discussion lasted roughly 30 minutes and two people left after 5 minutes because of previous commitments.

The second focus group took place at 11 AM on February 19, 2011 in Room 201 of the Intercultural Center on Georgetown’s main campus. I administered the focus group in an identical fashion except I served bagels and juice this time. The discussion lasted five minutes longer than the discussion in the first focus group. That afternoon, I input the data from all of the surveys into Survey Monkey, an online survey tool, and scanned in the Informed Consent documents so I could email each participant a copy. On Tuesday, February 22, Scott transferred the footage from both discussions onto my password-protected computer.
The Participants

I recruited heavily within the Georgetown community. Of the 24 participants, 21 of them fell into the age category of 19-29 and two participants were in the 30-39 age category. The first focus group contained one older participant who is 61 years old. There were 12 males participants and 12 female participants. The majority of the participants identified themselves as Democrats (66.7%) as opposed to Republican (8.3%), Independent (8.3%) or Other (12.5%). In terms of political ideology, 62.5% of the participants described their political views as liberal, 29.2% described their political views as middle of the road while just 8.3% self-identified as conservative. In the 2008 presidential election, 75% of the participants voted for Barack Obama and 8.3% voted for John McCain. The remaining participants did not vote in the election either because they were not old enough to vote or they are not U.S. citizens.

The pre-viewing survey contained questions regarding participants’ consumption of political news. The subjects were heavy news consumers and 62.5% of the group frequently follows politics in the news. To gather information about politics, participants most frequently turn to online newspapers (75%), television news (41.7%), and blogs (37.5%). Entertainment news was least likely to provide information on politics since 41.7% of participants rarely or never turn to entertainment news outlets for such information.

The focus group participants were not regular viewers of The View as only 16.7% watch the show sometimes while 37.5% rarely watch it and 45.8% never watch The View. In light of the media hype surrounding Obama’s appearance on The View, it is not surprising that 83.3% of participants were at least aware of his appearance prior to the focus group. Three participants learned of his appearance through entertainment media that included Entertainment Weekly.com, People magazine and the gossip blog, Perez Hilton. One person noted that they first heard about
President Obama’s appearance while watching The O’Reilly Factor on Fox News while another person learned of The View appearance from The Daily Show. Despite knowledge of Obama’s stint on The View, only one person watched the episode when it originally aired. However, 50% of the focus group participants watched clips of it on other television shows or online.

**Difference in Dynamics Between Focus Groups**

There were some important differences in the dynamics of the focus groups. I held the first focus group in an unusually narrow classroom with little distance between the chairs and the screen. The majority of the participants were just finishing a day of work and classes when they arrived for this mid-week session. Interestingly, much of the discussion focused on Barack Obama’s physical appearance as well as his likeability on an entertainment show. The participants spoke at length about his appeal to the female demographic and his comfort level with women since he is a father and a husband. They spoke sparingly about the policy issues raised in the first clip yet spoke a great deal about the pop culture segment and how it was reported in the media. There was little dissent in the first focus group and many of the participants seemed distracted—two departed immediately after finishing the post-survey and two left before the discussion ended.

I worried about gathering enough participants for a focus group on a Saturday morning and almost started the session with just six people. An additional six people appeared five minutes late, and immediately, the atmosphere seemed more relaxed. People talked more and ate more of the food provided. I had to nicely ask them to settle down so we could begin watching the clips, as they were all engaged in lively discussions. The room provided significantly more space and plenty of chairs for people to sit in and rest their feet on during the viewing. This time,
the participants spoke sparingly about the pop culture segment and Obama’s physical appearance. Instead, they discussed his policy responses, how the co-hosts handled their interview questions, and potential reasons why Obama appeared on an entertainment talk show. Despite the more relaxed atmosphere, there were several points of contention and disagreements among the participants. Several people remarked that they would love to talk more in-depth about issues raised in the discussion.

First Impressions

After the clips and before the discussion, the respondents completed the post-viewing survey. Demonstrated by the results of the post-survey, the initial reaction to the clips from Obama’s appearance on *The View* was generally favorable—37.5% felt very positive about it and 54.2% felt somewhat positive about the clips. Once the discussions began, it became clear that the favorable impression stemmed largely from the content of the second clip in which Obama answers questions about pop culture and his family. In the clip, Obama makes a humorous remark about keeping young boys out of the White House, which garnered laughs from *The View* audience and from both focus groups. Several people cited this moment as that in which even a conservative or Republican viewer would find him likeable and appealing. The references to his children act as a reminder that in addition to being president, he is also a parent. One participant noted his reputation as being detached and professorial, but credited the round of pop culture questions between the co-hosts and Obama in the second clip for “bringing him down to earth with the rest of us.”

8 You can contact the author at kchouse@gmail.com for a full transcript of both focus groups.
particularly when compared to past presidents. She cited his “great smile” and “interesting level of control over the hosts” as reasons why she found Obama appealing in this context.

Understanding the Strategy

At the onset of both conversations, each group noted past incidents in which a presidential figure appeared on some form of entertainment programming. They cited Clinton’s appearances on Arsenio Hall and MTV as well as President Nixon’s brief turn on Laugh-In during his presidency. The first group talked at length about Obama’s possible motivations for using a now familiar campaign tactic while president. They identified several demographics that they felt an appearance on The View would reach: women, but particularly stay-at-home mothers and retired women, and unemployed Americans of both genders. One participant noted that Obama would reach a different female demographic than if he appeared on Oprah because of the variety of viewpoints on the show, specifically Elisabeth Hasselbeck’s conservative ideology. Another participant said that Obama effectively reaches the nonpolitical audience members of The View as well as the politically aware who will see segments of his appearance in other media outlets. The first group also discussed how Obama’s direct appeal to women through his View appearance allows him to appropriate that role formerly reserved for First Ladies, a “refreshing” change.

As the discussions progressed and more time lapsed after the second clip, the conversations shifted in a more cynical direction. One participant essentially described Obama’s stint on The View as part of the permanent campaign all presidents must wage. He said, “It’s almost like he’s running for office and there’s now so much of him all the time on TV.” In the second group, many of the participants agreed that promoting policies in the media is part of the
modern day presidency. “Not only is it important for you to explain to the American public what your initiatives are doing, but it’s also important that they feel as if they’re getting the information firsthand. These people don’t necessarily want to watch the State of the Union to get that information.” Another participant took issue with this perspective and felt strongly that Obama will not appear on entertainment programs once he’s reached his second term and campaigning is no longer part of his job.

The Co-Hosts Use Kid Gloves

Soft news media are often criticized for delicate and easy questioning when it comes to a political figure as notable as the president. When asked how they felt about the line of questioning from The View co-hosts, the first group launched a lengthy critique. They were surprised at how “relatively soft” Hasselbeck seemed when she asked about the economy and job growth given her past confrontations with the more liberal co-hosts and campaign support for McCain. In the first group, a participant called veteran newswoman Barbara Walters’ Afghanistan question, “a softball” and chided her for not asking any substantive follow-up questions. However, one participant defended the co-hosts, underscoring the importance of contextualizing the appearance in terms of its audience, he said, “You have to view the questions they chose in relation to the audience they’re trying to represent. If you have jargon heavy or statistically heavy questions, you’re going to push your audience away.”

The second group thought it was no accident that Hasselbeck had the opportunity to ask Obama the first serious question so producers might show The View’s range of belief sets among its co-hosts. As noted in Chapter 3, the show came under fire for fawning over Obama during the 2008 campaign while skewering McCain. Several participants felt that Hasselbeck’s
conservative ideology provided the logical reason why she would ask one of the serious questions. Similarly, Barbara Walters asked the other big policy question because “people trust her to ask the questions.” Yet everyone felt that the questioning set-up seemed rehearsed and their failure to interrupt him was because of their respect for his office.

*The Policy Takeaway (or Lack Thereof)*

Many of the focus group participants either studied or worked directly in media or politics. Most of the participants also demonstrated considerable political knowledge. The focus groups therefore noted that participants with more diversity in terms of educational background and geographic location might learn more about the Obama Administration’s policies from his *View* appearance than they did. Some participants felt that Obama simply delivered catch phrases and canned responses when asked first about job losses and then about Afghanistan. One participant noted that Obama’s response to Joy Behar’s question regarding the draw down of troops in Afghanistan elicited a response that simply reinforced a campaign promise of removing troops on a given timetable and was not necessarily new information as one participant believed. Yet Obama’s responses to the Afghanistan questions drew more favorable reactions from the focus groups than his responses to questions about the economy. One participant felt that what she learned was simple, but important, noting “I learned [regarding Afghanistan] that he’s still thinking about it and he’s still worried about it.” While another participant believed that Obama’s response shed a more favorable light on the Administration’s policy on Afghanistan. He said: “I don’t really know how I feel about Afghanistan and I don’t totally agree with his
policies, but after hearing him talk about it, I was almost going to check a higher number. “9

Many felt neutral about the Afghanistan issue, but no one spoke negatively about how Obama handled the topic. The harshest criticism, as noted above, was reserved for the softball questions regarding the war from Walters and Behar.

The first focus group reacted somewhat dismissively about how Obama and the co-hosts handled the discussion of job losses and the state of the economy. The second focus group, however, devoted more time and energy to this portion of the clips they viewed. On one side, several participants felt that Obama reacted very defensively to Hasselbeck’s line of questioning and spoke “in generalities” without specific statistics and neglected to “point out several other measures they’d [The Obama Administration] taken other than stimulus funding.” Another participant responded that he felt Obama brought as much “nuance” as possible to the job losses and had no choice but to omit numbers given how dismal they were at the time. Still, other participants felt that the perceived defensiveness on Obama’s part did not shed a favorable light on his economic agenda and he should have reacted “more positively and been less condescending” even if Hasselbeck intended for the question to put him on the defensive.

The Likeability Factor

In the past, presidential candidates used entertainment media settings like late-night talk shows to sell themselves as regular guys instead of stiff politicos—a doting husband, a concerned dad, or a buddy with whom you might share a beer or a plate of pulled pork in the case of Bill Clinton on the ’92 campaign trail. At the time of his appearance on The View, Obama

9 The participant is referring to a question on the post-survey that was also asked on the pre-survey. The question reads, “How strongly do you agree with the following statement, ‘The Obama Administration is right to continue the war effort in Afghanistan.’”
had a vested interest in making himself more likeable given falling approval ratings and widespread disenchantment among many of his campaign supporters. Obama, like no previous president, uses entertainment media in an innovative capacity: to sell and defend policy, whether it’s health care on *Letterman* or Afghanistan on *The View*. Yet the lighter moments of the show, particularly when he discussed his family and pop culture with the co-hosts, indicate that Obama wasn’t blazing an entirely new trail in his use of politainment.

To gauge Obama’s success at increasing his likeability through this appearance, the discussion leader asked both focus groups if they liked Obama more after watching the clips from *The View*. The responses varied, but the majority of participants who responded felt as favorable, if not more favorable, about him after watching the clips. Many felt that the second clip humanized Obama significantly, particularly when he discussed his children and when he joked about Snooki. One participant noted that he liked Obama a lot before, but “was struck by how much more I liked him [after viewing the clips].” Several others felt similarly that Obama’s appearance reinforced their positive view of him as a person and one participant believed that it’s “easy” to like Obama after watching him on *The View* regardless of your political views. A member of the second focus group cited Obama’s relaxed rapport and playful banter with the co-hosts as the driving force behind his charm in this particular media setting. Yet echoing media critics of Obama’s politainment strategy, one participant found it hard to like him since he was so clearly selling himself and “branding himself as a celebrity.”

*Survey Findings: Learning Effects*

The data gleaned from the post-survey offers a slightly different picture than that presented by the participants during the focus group discussions. At no point in either focus
group did anyone admit to learning anything about the Obama Administration’s policies on Afghanistan and the economy after watching the clips. There was a small window of time between surveys, which I feel precluded any large shifts in perceptions. In the post-survey, I asked the same questions about Afghanistan and the economy that I did in the pre-survey with a scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” In regards to the Obama Administration’s economic policies, two people shifted out of the “strongly agree” category. Five people moved out of the “somewhat agree” category. The “strongly disagree” category gained two people, and the “unsure” category gained five people. Table 6.1 below shows this breakdown of responses in each category for both surveys and indicates that 14 shifts occurred between the pre-viewing and post-viewing surveys.

Table 6.1: Opinions About the Obama Administration’s Economic Agenda

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How strongly do you agree with the following statement: “The Obama Administration’s economic policies have had a positive impact on the economic recovery”?</th>
<th>Pre-Survey</th>
<th>Post-Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Agree</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The overall shift toward a less positive outlook on the Obama Administration’s economic agenda is not surprising since the participants focused more on Obama’s defensiveness to Hasselbeck’s questioning than the substance of his response. One person admitted to feeling that Obama’s talk of jobs that were saved could be reassuring to some Americans, but no one else indicated that he provided new or enlightening information about the economic agenda. This supports the hypothesis that those who previously held negative opinions about Obama’s policies would not feel more favorably after watching The View clips. The overwhelmingly negative shift in opinion on this issue also suggests that the policy discussion in this episode led even those who initially looked favorably on Obama’s economic policies to feel less favorably after watching his exchange with Hasselbeck.

On the Afghanistan question, there were fewer shifts in opinions. Two people left the “strongly agree” category. The “somewhat agree” category gained two additional people, and the “strongly disagree” category added one more person. The responses clustered in the different categories as shown in Table 6.2 below, but only 5 shifts occurred as opposed to 14 for the economic policy question.
Table 6.2: Opinions About the Obama Administration’s Policy on Afghanistan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How strongly do you agree with the following statement: “The Obama Administration is right to continue the war in Afghanistan”?</th>
<th>Pre-Survey</th>
<th>Post-Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Agree</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The discussion shed some light on this finding since the little that was said about the treatment of Afghanistan was favorable of Obama and critical of the co-hosts for being too soft on him and not asking follow-up questions. In addition, most people recognized that Obama’s discussion of the troop withdrawal timetable was not new information, but a campaign promise. The topic in this question is also slightly different than asking about the economy and does not necessarily require that you lean one way politically to agree with the continuation of the Afghanistan war effort. When talking about Afghanistan, Obama showed more compassion and indicated that the death of U.S. soldiers weighed heavily on him. Unlike his treatment of the economic issues, Obama showed no signs of being condescending or defensive when discussing Afghanistan.

The more pronounced learning effects occurred in regards to the respondents’ feelings towards Obama as a person (see Table 6.3 below). On both the pre-viewing survey and the post-
viewing survey, I asked the participants to rank how they felt on a 10-point scale with 1 as “strongly dislike” and 10 as “strongly like.” The results show that two people moved two points toward “strongly dislike” and three people also moved one point in that direction. Yet six people moved one point toward “strongly like.” Twelve people did not change their opinion after watching the clips. Table 6.3 illustrates that although a lot of movement occurred, the 7-10 ranks maintained 19 people between the pre- and post-viewing survey, but they clustered differently. Overall, there was more movement on this likeability measure in a positive direction. Even with after showing a much longer clip that dealt solely with policy, the biggest takeaway from Obama’s appearance on The View remains tied to his personality as it has with past presidents. Participants in each focus group were explicit in the positive influence the second clip had over their feelings about Obama as a person. In support of my hypothesis, these people also said that they liked him before the show.
Table 6.3: Feeling Thermometer - Opinions About Obama as a Person

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likeability</th>
<th>Pre-Survey</th>
<th>Post-Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Dislike (1)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Like (10)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The willingness to acknowledge greater attitudinal shifts regarding Obama’s personality instead of his policies might also occur because people are embarrassed to admit that they would learn about policy from *The View* as opposed to *The New York Times* or a State of the Union address. In support of this, when asked how influential the clips were on their perceptions of Obama as a person, the respondents admitted to more of an influence than on the same question regarding his policies (see Table 6.4 below). In regards to Obama as a person, one person felt the clips influenced their perceptions “a lot,” six people felt they influenced their perceptions “some,” and 12 people felt they influenced their perceptions “very little.” In contrast to the nine people who felt the clips did not in any way influence their perception of policy issues, only four people felt that clips from Obama’s appearance on *The View* did not influence their perceptions.
of him at all. Despite the policy-related attitudinal shifts in Table 6.1 and Table 6.2 above, the participants perceived the clips to have little to no influence on their policy opinions.

Table 6.4: Perceived Influence of Obama’s Appearance on The View

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extend do you think Obama’s appearance on The View influenced your perceptions of…</th>
<th>…him as a person</th>
<th>…his policies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A lot</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very little</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Degrading or Updating the Presidency?

My desire to hold discussions regarding Obama’s stop on The View evolved from questions that arose in the media regarding what it means to act presidential in light of changing patterns of media consumption. Critics of Obama’s integration of politainment into his media strategy often ground their condemnation in how it degrades the Oval Office. The chorus of disapproval that accompanied Obama’s appearances on late-night talk shows and The View deemed such media venues inappropriate. When asked if they felt Obama’s appearance on The View was inappropriate, the focus group responses generally did not align with Obama’s critics, for the participants contextualized his media strategy in light of audience fragmentation. Only one person felt vehemently that Obama should never appear on a show like The View. He dubbed
himself “a traditionalist” and felt that there “was a clear tiptoeing that line between he office and the person and for me, the office dominates the person.”

The majority of the focus group members viewed entertainment media as an acceptable venue for a presidential appearance. One person felt that the inclusion of a policy discussion on *The View* keeps Obama presidential despite the brief foray into Snooki and Lindsay Lohan. Another person felt that we have continuously redefined what it means to be presidential as technology evolved, citing Roosevelt’s fireside chats as a means to sell policy much like Obama does on *The View*. Echoing the White House’s defense of this media strategy, others felt that speeches and press conferences have their rightful place in presidential communication, but by appearing on shows like *The View*, Obama “brings information about his policies firsthand [to] people who don’t necessarily watch the State of the Union to get that information.” On the post-viewing survey, the majority (18 of 24) of the focus group participants felt it was appropriate for Obama to appear on *The View* while two people felt it was not appropriate and three people were not sure how they felt.

**Conclusion**

The content of the focus group discussions and the survey results support my central hypotheses about the audience effects: that attitudinal shifts occurred regarding Obama’s personality and his Administration’s policies after watching clips from his appearance on *The View* (see Table 6.1 and 6.2). This evidence of attitudinal learning effects supports the need for this type of research that explores the audience takeaways from instances of presidential politainment, especially if they continue to play a role in the White House media strategy. The findings in this chapter attest to the possibilities of politainment as a vehicle for political learning.
about policy and a candidate or president’s personality. In the final chapter, I will make the case for and assess the problems with politainment as a political media strategy.
Overview of the Study and Its Findings

The central goal of my study was to understand what President Obama communicated to audiences through his appearance on The View and how it affected the audience. To understand these audience effects, I established what constituted the actual content of Obama’s interview with The View co-hosts. I conducted a formal content analysis of the entire episode and examined the thematic composition of the show as well as the breakdown of speaking turns among the co-hosts and Obama. I found that the episode featured discussion of popular culture and family as well as discussion of current events and policy. While more speaking turns fell under the category of popular culture/human interest, both Obama and the co-hosts took significantly longer turns when talking about policies involving the economy and Afghanistan. The other substantial component of his appearance involved the discussion of hardships Obama faced in his first few years as president and frustration with the polarized media. With the exception of Elisabeth Hasselbeck, the co-hosts offered many attempts at talk therapy throughout the show. Hasselbeck did not offer sympathy, but she did offer criticism of the Obama’s Administration’s economic recovery tactics during the show.

To understand the audience Obama reached through his appearance on The View, I next looked at the show’s demographics and Pew Research Center survey data, which polled Americans on their awareness of his View appearance as part of the Weekly News Interest Index. The statistical analysis of the Pew data complicates the White House’s reasoning of using nontraditional media to reach different audiences than reached by traditional media. The episode attracted 6.6 million viewers, but the highest levels of awareness of Obama’s stop on The View
existed among the most educated Americans in the highest income brackets. This suggests that aside from those who actually watched, news of Obama’s appearance attracted demographics which suggest a more traditional news consumer who likely reads the New York Times and watches network or cable news. In this chapter, I also found statistical support to dismantle the preconception that women pay more attention than men to soft news or infotainment. In this instance of politainment, sex was not a significant predictor of awareness.

After establishing an understanding of what was said on The View in Chapter 4 and who was watching or paying attention to the episode in Chapter 5, I reached the core component of this study in Chapter 6. This chapter explored the audience effects of Obama’s appearance on The View through the analysis of two semi-experimental focus groups that I designed and held in February 2011. In these focus groups, I showed two different clips from the episode and 24 participants took a pre-viewing survey and a post-viewing survey. I gleaned several perceived learning effects from the survey data despite limitations of the study. There were shifts, both positive and negative, in opinions about the Obama Administration’s stance on Afghanistan and the economy after viewing the clips. Five people admitted on their post-survey that the clips influenced their perceptions of policy at least “some.” The more dramatic learning effect was not related to Obama’s policies, but to his personality. Five people felt less positive about Obama as a person after watching the clips, and six people felt more positive. In the discussions, the participants revealed that watching the clips reinforced how they felt about Obama previously, and the survey data support these sentiments.
Limitations of the Study

The biggest obstacle in conducting this research occurred because of time and funding constraints. For the focus groups, I was limited to people who reside in Washington, D.C. and its surrounding suburbs. Many of the participants study or work in fields affiliated with media and politics, and they are avid consumers of political news. I am satisfied with the results from these focus groups, but I do wish they included participants from other regions of the country working in a larger variety of occupations. In addition, I think I would have seen bigger shifts in perceptions of policy and personality on the post-survey if more time had elapsed between the surveys. There were three questions that appeared on both the pre- and post-viewing surveys. Unfortunately, many of the focus group participants indicated that they remembered their answers from the pre-survey and based their responses for the post-survey on that and not on the clips they viewed.

The Case for Politainment

This study makes several contributions to the political communication field and builds on previous research from scholars investigating soft news trends and political appearances on entertainment shows. Much has been written on soft news and how presidential candidates use soft news venues to show a more appealing side of themselves to voters (Baum, 2005; Niven et al., 2003). In this study, I build on this research by investigating the content and audience effects of a presidential appearance on a soft news program instead of presidential candidate appearances. President Obama’s appearance on The View is a specific example of a media strategy growing in popularity and executed with frequency by the Obama White House—the use of politainment. Scholars and journalists haphazardly use the phrase politainment to describe
the general erosion of boundaries between politics and entertainment as well as the phenomenon of entertainment personas turned politicians such as Jesse Ventura and Arnold Schwarzenegger who campaign based on their fictional counterparts (Conley and Schultz, 2000).

At the onset of my study, I succinctly defined what I mean by politainment and where politainment falls within the different spheres of news, including soft news and infotainment. I first parsed out different definitions for soft news and infotainment since previous studies often confuse and fail to make any distinction between the two. Scholars have also provided examples of soft news and infotainment, but they have not provided usable definitions or explained the relationship between soft news and infotainment. I defined soft news as information about government and politics conveyed through feature and personality reports that may or may not be timely or based on fact. Soft news subsumes infotainment, which is soft news reported in a tabloid-style that is entertainment-based. I define politainment as soft news or infotainment featuring a political figure and this includes print as well as television media (see Figure 2.1).

Politainment is therefore not an abstract understanding of the overlapping and colliding worlds of politics and entertainment illustrated by Donald Trump entering the 2012 presidential campaign or a celebrity like Matt Damon stumping for the Obama/Biden ticket during the 2008 campaign. It is instead an identifiable media event such as President Obama’s appearance on The View. Politainment is a relatively new component of political media strategies that has only become a regular part of the presidential media repertoire during the Obama Administration. Politainment is no longer relegated to the campaign trail as evidenced by President Obama who appeared on Leno 59 days into his presidency. Presidents and other politicians are not waiting for their election to come in sight before they grace late-night and daytime talk shows. Politainment, especially when it involves the president, must be extricated from research and studies that deal
generally with the content and audience of soft news. My audience analysis shows heightened levels of awareness of Obama’s *View* appearance among high-income and well-educated portions of the population that one would classify as more likely to follow hard news. Similarly, the audience for presidential politainment is not necessarily the apolitical one suggested in previous research on candidate appearances in soft news venues (Baum, 2005). Presidential politainment is unlike other soft news stories as it becomes a media event and garners significant interest, if not viewers, beyond those who avidly consume soft news.

My study builds on and gains legitimacy from what those such as Baum and Jamison (2006) have argued: that with technological innovations which allow people to self-select their exposure to presidential media appearances, soft news venues are important and provide a serious avenue of communication for politicians. The prevalence of presidential politainment in the Obama Administration further attests to why we must consider politainment as a unique form of political communication, especially when it occurs off the campaign trail.

One of the biggest misconceptions about politainment perpetuated by the media coverage is that it is devoid of any serious discussion or consideration of policy issues. In my content analysis, I demonstrate that even during an appearance on an entertainment show like *The View*, the president speaks on policy and the political climate in Washington just as he does on *Meet the Press* or *60 Minutes*. As Baum (2005) suggests, candidates avoid substantial discussion of policy on entertainment appearance during the campaign or repackage policy to make it more attractive. But Obama’s *View* appearance shows that the politainment strategy is evolving in the Oval Office because not only does he talk about policy, he frequently tries to steer the conversation back to the economy and Afghanistan and away from talk of Snooki and Mel Gibson.
Farnsworth (2009) notes how the White House often puts presidents in controlled situations where the discussion topics and questions are pre-selected and crafted to appeal emotionally to voters, often involving visits to military bases. He argues that these types of emotional appeals hinder citizens from taking an opposing policy position. This type of spin is apparent during the View appearance when Obama speaks about the difficulties of writing letters home to the families of fallen soldiers adding a pre-emptive spin on the Afghanistan issue before the co-hosts even ask about it. Yet during the discussion about the economy led by Hasselbeck, Obama’s response feels neither polished nor appealing on an emotional level. When Hasselbeck counters with a follow-up question, Obama falters before going further in-depth about job creation. I note this exchange because it shows how politainment has the potential to skirt the spin that often dominates presidential communication even for just a few moments of an hour-long segment. The confrontational moments between Obama and Hasselbeck sparked discussion in the focus groups and muddled pre-conceived attitudes about economic policy, supported by the survey results. Hasselbeck’s critical follow-up forced Obama to veer off any scripted answer he prepared, and this provided more material for deliberation.

The substantial policy component of Obama’s appearance on The View demonstrated in this study highlights the different motivations for presidential politainment than for politainment on the campaign trail. Obama doesn’t need to dance with the women of The View to show the lighter side of himself as he did with Ellen DeGeneres during the 2008 campaign. Instead, he takes the opportunity to defend his Administration’s efforts on the economic recovery and remind the View’s audience why the United States remains in Afghanistan. The co-hosts are also more reserved and even-handed toward Obama in contrast to his campaign appearances when they fawned over him. The rapport between Obama and the hosts offers plenty of light moments,
but they also ask, listen, and question the policy talk. The president is taking a message to *The View* audience that is very similar to the one he would deliver in an interview with *The New York Times*, but delivering it in a nontraditional venue in hopes of reaching a different audience. The venue makes for a more relaxed atmosphere, but while appearing on *The View* as president, Obama has a greater need to persuade and reassure Americans instead of simply making himself a likeable, competent candidate. The stakes are higher for presidential appearances on entertainment shows like in *The View* case study because Obama must embody a certain typology onscreen to reap the greatest benefits from politainment as suggested by Liesbet Van Zoonen (2005). Obama needed to show that he is at once a regular guy and therefore in touch with the needs of the average American while simultaneously proving that he is a cut above of the average American and thereby worthy of the presidency.

The format of *The View* espouses a central benefit of presidential politainment, for it can inform and entertain audiences simultaneously, even if audience members do not perceive any learning effects. Through the focus group survey analysis in Chapter 5, my study shows that there were greater shifts in attitudes concerning the policies Obama discussed after viewing clips from the show than reported by the respondents. Scholars like Prior (2003) are skeptical of soft news’ ability to actually inform the electorate through the incidental exposure offered by soft news programs. I argue that in the case of politainment, the shifts in perceptions of the Obama Administration’s policy and President Obama’s personality demonstrated through the focus group data are attitudinal shifts and not indicators of the type of political knowledge espoused by Prior. Nevertheless, these attitudinal shifts are important in their own right and occur because more policy information was provided or policy positions were clarified or found more persuasive during the appearance. This information might not lead to new or greater knowledge
of domestic or world affairs for most viewers, but these discussions influence, favorably and unfavorably, the policy-related attitudes of viewers.

In the context of The View, a Wall Street Journal-declared “must stop” for politicians, it could be the case that with the increase in political programming on the show since 2008, people are actively tuning into The View for political information or to shape their views of a certain politician. Hollander (2005) studied the recall and recognition among viewers watching candidate appearances on late-night shows during the 2000 presidential election and demonstrated that these shows have the potential to influence political attitudes. Younger people sought out programs like The Daily Show and Leno for political information although the recall effects of campaign issues were minimal. Brewer and Cao’s study (2006) showed a positive relationship between candidate appearances on late-night shows during the 2004 Democratic primary and knowledge of the primary campaign, but primarily through incidental exposure among viewers chiefly seeking to be entertained. Yet politainment in the context of The View differs from politainment on late-night talk shows and complicates the incidental byproduct model. Since its inception, The View has not shied away from serious discussions either through frank talk about the co-hosts’ personal experiences or instigated by a hot topic in the news or a controversial guest like Bill O’Reilly. The show, similar to Oprah, is a tastemaker for its viewers and often an agenda-setter for its followers in the media. It is unlikely that viewers of Leno and Letterman take political cues from the hosts because they do not espouse personal stances on politics—they are comedians in the vein of Johnny Carson not Jon Stewart. Moy, Xenox and Hess (2005) urge researchers to examine daytime and late-night talk shows as distinct formats when hosting politicians because their study showed different effects for Oprah and Leno/Letterman. A daytime talk show like The View actively seeks to inform whether it be on
cellulite reduction, a starlet’s experience in rehab or Mitt Romney’s likelihood of running for president in 2012. The regular audience for *The View* might ultimately be seeking amusement by tuning in, but they are willing participants in the show’s mission to inform even if it is packaged in an entertaining way. Delli Carpini (2001) was not inaccurate when he noted the shifts in media gatekeepers and *The View* is leading the pack for daytime talk shows in the political arena as the co-hosts embrace their self-professed roles as “fundits.”

*The Problem with Politainment*

The very reason I embarked on this project was because of the media controversy surrounding politainment in the Obama presidency. In my study, I backed away from the media hype to examine the effects of this instance of politainment on audiences. I have studied the intersection of politics and entertainment for the last two years so when Obama decided to go on *The View*, I paid attention. My past research into the content of Bill Clinton’s appearance on *Arsenio* yielded a surprising finding in relation to my own memory of the media event and the ensuing news coverage: Clinton talked about his infidelity scandals and pop culture, but also spoke at length about race relations and education. Eighteen years later when Obama went on *The View*, the media coverage mimicked that of Clinton’s stop on *Arsenio*.

Judging from the news coverage, Obama spent an hour on *The View* discussing the state of pop culture with some conversation devoted to his family. A sample headline from CBS News underscores the gist of his appearance as reported in the media: “‘The View’: Obama talks about his iPod, Lindsay Lohan, and His Daughters.” His quip about not knowing who Snooki from *The Jersey Shore* was attracted the greatest amount of attention in the media. Media outlets interviewed Snooki herself who provided evidence that President Obama did, in fact, know who
she was. *The New York Times* was one of the few news outlets to report on a different component of *The View* appearance—the Rose and the Thorn discussion between Walters and Obama (Itzkoff, 2010). Yet even in the *Times* piece, Obama’s acknowledgement of the BP oil spill and Afghanistan as examples of recent thorns was omitted while the article reported his rose example of a family trip to Maine and his failure to receive an invitation to Chelsea Clinton’s wedding.

When I finally watched Obama’s appearance on *The View* in its entirety, I listened to a discussion grounded largely in talks of the economic recovery, the war in Afghanistan, and partisanship in the press and in Congress. What I watched did not reflect what I read and heard in the media in the week leading up to and following Obama’s appearance. Through this study, I have provided empirical evidence that shows how little content of the episode was spent discussing popular culture. Obama frequently steered the conversation back to policy and offered short answers to the pop culture questions.

My study underscores the potential value in Obama spending an hour with the women of *The View* and undermines the tone of the media coverage in the show’s aftermath. Will the angle of politainment media coverage evolve to focus more on policy and less on pop culture? If so, will critics stop labeling politainment “unpresidential”? My instinct is that the media coverage will maintain the same hooks for its audiences as seen in the similarities between coverage of Obama on *The View* and Clinton on *Arsenio*. Given the burgeoning audience fragmentation and polarization in cable news, Obama should appear on shows like *The View* to reach as much of the American public as possible and discuss policy and reflect on criticism in a more approachable format. Unfortunately, the potential democratizing effect of politainment is often overshadowed by how the media interprets it. The media spin on politainment is a factor to consider since many people will not watch the episode when it originally airs, but will catch highlights and clips.
through other media channels or social media sites. As Sabato (1993) suggests and as this study, in respect to the media coverage, reinforces, the media will report the personal and scandalous elements of a political media event. In addition, the porous boundaries between hard news and soft news encourage all news outlets to find the most sensational angle or sound byte in the post-Starr Report era (Delli Carpini 2001).

President Obama has appeared on numerous entertainment shows during his presidency, yet his engagement in politainment remains novel. The real news angle for any politainment appearance is a quip or comment that seems entirely unpresidential. This is why talking about Lindsay Lohan or Snooki garners the most attention. In an era of the ever-shrinking sound byte, the minute-long policy clips are not going to make it on the evening news whereas the five-second Snooki comment will. The dominant criticism of politainment—what’s a sitting president doing talking about [insert pop culture reference] on an entertainment show when the country is facing [insert domestic or international crisis]?—will not disappear no matter how integral it becomes in the White House media strategy. In addition, presidential politainment during a first term creates suspicion of permanent campaigning among many Americans. Obama declared on The View that he was not campaigning at that time, but governing, which could be reassuring or insincere depending on the audience.

Moving Forward: Recommendations for the White House

To temper the media backlash to politainment, the White House might consider some recommendations for executing presidential politainment in the future:
• Address gaffes in politainment appearances like candidate Obama did on *Leno* when he explained why he wasn’t calling Sarah Palin a pig with regards to the “lipstick-on-a-pig” comment. Avoid making gaffes on entertainment shows like President Obama did when he made an off-color remark about the Special Olympics on *Leno*. Such a gaffe will draw further attention to the unpresidential nature of appearing on late-night television.

• Do not assume that all soft news is good news. There is an entertainment media hierarchy that exists in the minds of many Americans. For example, sit with your family for an interview and photo session with *People*, but not for *Us Magazine*. The former has a long history with past presidents and is generally viewed as less scandalous than the latter publication. *People* self-identifies as a reporter of human interest stories whereas *Us Magazine* brands itself as the leading publication in celebrity gossip.

• First and Second Spouses and candidate wives make for good politainment that remains relatively free from the controversy that plagues presidential politainment. There is clear sexism in this suggestion, but it is indisputable that when First Lady Michelle Obama appeared with Jill Biden on *The View* on April 18, 2011 to support military families, the media coverage was favorable, even glowing. Their policy issue remained at the forefront of the discussion and earned attention in the media. Media reported endearingly on their wardrobes and the professed bond between the two women.
Despite its failure to gain media traction, continue to push policy when appearing on entertainment shows because it encourages the next soft news venue to address you as a president and not a celebrity. But do not shy away from mentioning your family or an anecdote about life in the White House, for it makes you relatable in a way that isn’t possible during a State of the Union address or a Rose Garden speech.

Beyond what is actually learned from politainment, the mere exposure to politics in a context such as The View is healthy for our democracy. Some have warned President Obama that he risks overexposure (Carr, 2009) by engaging in politainment, but the fact that he is engaging with the electorate, even if it is through nontraditional channels, is a stronger impetus for political engagement and participation than a president like George W. Bush who remained relatively out of sight and retreated frequently to his Crawford ranch during his presidency. This is not to say that a more visible media presence garners greater favorability for the president, but it reminds people of who is at the helm of our democracy and humanizes him in a way that makes politics more accessible. Moreover, when entertainment shows host a guest as prominent as the president, they acknowledge his stature by ceding the majority of the talking time to him, demonstrated in my content analysis (see Table 4.1 and Table 4.2). In contrast, the Sunday news shows and cable news shows book the president with greater frequency and tend to interrupt him throughout appearances on these shows. One focus group participant said to a chorus of approvals from the entire group that it was refreshing to hear President Obama finish his sentences for once. Much of the current political commentary found in blogs, on talk radio and
cable news networks is fueled by outrage from all points on the political spectrum that manifests itself in words of anger and hate. Entering the fray and yelling louder won’t help the president move policy forward or make clear his agenda, but greater visibility in the media landscape will provide assurance to more people that he’s commanding the fight.
**METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX**

**A. Coding Sheet for Chapter 4**

Content Analysis Coding Sheet

1. **Turn:** Each speaking turn, which ends when a new person begins speaking. These do not include brief interruptions or segues into commercial breaks.

2. **Who:** Who is speaking—the View co-hosts or Barack Obama
   - 1 – Barack Obama
   - 2 – Barbara Walters
   - 3 – Elizabeth Hasselbeck
   - 4 – Joy Behar
   - 5 – Whoopi Goldberg
   - 6 – Sherri Shepard

3. **Time:** How long is the turn in seconds?

4. **Subject:** The topic being discussed during that turn
   - 1 – policy issue
   - 2 – human interest/pop culture
   - 3 – the Obama family

5. **Economy:** Does this turn contain a reference to the economy (jobs, financial reform)?
   - 0 – no
   - 1 – yes

6. **Oil Crisis:** Does this turn contain a reference to the Oil Crisis in the Gulf or BP?
   - 0 – no
   - 1 – yes

7. **Afghanistan:** Does this turn contain a reference to the War in Afghanistan?
   - 0 – no
   - 1 – yes

8. **Shirley Sherrod:** Does this turn contain a reference to the firing of Department of Agriculture employee, Shirley Sherrod?
   - 0 – no
   - 1 – yes

9. **Politics:** Does this turn contain a reference to politics, partisanship, Washington, campaigning or mid-term elections?
   - 0 – no
   - 1 – yes
10. Family: Does this turn contain a reference to the Obama Family (including Bo)?
   0 – no
   1 – yes

11. Pop Culture: Does this turn contain a reference to anything related to popular culture or celebrities?
   0 – no
   1 – yes

12. Race: Does this turn contain a reference to race?
   0 - no
   1 – yes

13. Media: Does this turn contain a reference to the news media?
   0 – no
   1 – yes

14. Hardship of the Office: Does this turn contain a reference to difficulties/criticism Obama has faced since becoming president?
   0 – no
   1 – yes

15. America: Does this turn contain a reference to America, the United States, or the American people?
   0 – no
   1 - yes
B. Conceptual Definitions for Chapter 5

Key conceptual definitions to this analysis include the following, several of which I defined in Chapter One:

- **Hard News**: fact-based coverage of breaking events involving top leaders, major issues, or significant disruptions in the routines of daily life (Patterson 1994).

- **Soft News**: information about government and politics conveyed through feature and personality reports that may or may not be timely or based on fact.

- **Politainment**: soft news or infotainment report featuring a political figure.

- **Gender**: the sex, male or female, of the respondent.

- **Age**: how old the respondent is with the minimum age being 18.

- **Race**: if the respondent identifies as White/Caucasian, Black/African-American, Asian/Asian-American, or some other race.

- **Education**: what the last grade in school the respondent completed with options beginning with 8th Grade or less and ending with postgraduate degree.

- **Political Party Identification**: the political party the respondent most closely identifies with given the options of Republican, Independent, and Democrat.

- **Income**: household earnings as indicative of socio-economic status.
C. Pre-Viewing Survey and Post-Viewing Survey for Chapter 6

Pre-Survey Questions

1. What political party do you most closely identify with?
   a. Democrat
   b. Republican
   c. Independent
   d. Other

2. Did you vote in the 2008 presidential election?
   a. Yes
   b. No

3. Who did you vote for in the 2008 presidential election?
   a. Obama
   b. McCain
   c. Other

4. How often do you follow politics in the news?
   a. Frequently
   b. Sometimes
   c. Rarely
   d. Never

5. What is your main source of news for political information?
   a. Newspaper
   b. Online News Sites
   c. Blogs
   d. Cable News Shows
   e. Entertainment-Based Shows

6. Has the Obama Administration’s economic policies had a positive impact on the economic recovery?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Unsure

7. How divided or partisan do you think the United States is since Obama took office?
   a. Very
   b. Somewhat
   c. Not at all
   d. Unsure

8. Do you ever watch The View?
a. Frequently
b. Sometimes
c. Rarely
d. Never

9. Did you watch Obama’s appearance (or portions of it) on The View prior to this focus group?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Unaware it occurred

10. Did you read or hear about his appearance on The View in the news?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Unsure

11. Please select your sex:
    a. Male
    b. Female

12. Please select your age range:
    a. 18-25
    b. 26-35
    c. 35-50
    d. 50-65

Post-Survey Questions

1. How do you feel about The View?
   a. Very positive
   b. Somewhat positive
   c. Not at all positive
   d. Unsure

2. Did you think it was appropriate for President Obama to appear on The View?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Unsure

3. Why or why not was it appropriate for President Obama to appear on The View?
   __________________________________________________________ (fill in)

4. To what extend do you think President Obama’s appearance on The View influenced your perception of him or his policies?
a. A lot
b. Some
c. Very little
d. Not at all

5. How strongly do you agree with the following statement: “The Obama Administration’s economic policies have had a positive impact on the economic recovery”?
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Somewhat agree
   c. Strongly disagree
   d. Unsure

6. How politically polarized do you think the United States has become since Obama took office?
   a. Very polarized
   b. Somewhat polarized
   c. Not at all polarized
   d. Unsure

7. Rank how you feel about President Obama using the scale below, where 1 indicated strongly dislike and 10 indicates strongly like.

8. Additional Comments?
Works Cited


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