I FORGOT I WAS BLACK: A QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF PARODY USED IN THE DAILY SHOW AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE PUBLIC SPHERE

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Katherine E. Robinson

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Department of Communication Studies
Abstract

of

I FORGOT I WAS BLACK: A QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF PARODY USED IN THE DAILY SHOW AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE PUBLIC SPHERE

by

Katherine E. Robinson

A vital public sphere is essential for a healthy democracy. Unfortunately, research has shown that the public’s engagement in politics and current events has been on the decline. The lack of engagement is partly due to the lack of critique and fact checking done by the mass media. In recent years, the public is increasingly watching infotainment shows such as The Daily Show. Some even report they obtain their news from these shows. This study used Berg’s process for qualitative content analysis to examine the parody used in The Daily Show. Four clips were analyzed for the four operations of parody. These operations must be present for parody to go beyond simply amusing the audience. When these operations are used, the parody also informs and provides critique. According to this study’s findings, the four operations of parody are present in The Daily Show. Therefore, it contributes to the public sphere by providing its own critique and by encouraging the audience to become engaged.

David Zuckerman, Ph.D.

Date
PREFACE

Citizen engagement in the public sphere has been on the decline for decades. One indication of this trend has been the change in media use. Newspapers have been declining since the 1940s especially among young readers (Huang, 2009). This trend has also been found in television news viewership, with a consistent drop in viewers over the years, according to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2002 (Huang, 2009). Scholars and leaders in the media have a great concern today over where citizens are getting their information, whether they are seeking out current events and political information, and whether they are civicly engaged (Huang, 2009).

Political and mass communication researchers agree that being informed encourages people to be active citizens or to participate in the public sphere (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). However, the information provided from the traditional news media has become less informative and critical over the past few decades. This change has occurred concurrently with the increasing conglomeration of media outlets (Himelboim & Limor, 2008). With the focus in traditional news sources turning to profits and ratings, their responsibilities to serve the public good and act as a watchdog have been ignored.

While these changes have been taking place in the traditional media, political infotainment shows such as *The Daily Show*, have been gaining popularity. It has not been determined as of yet if this is due to the lack of critical discourse and diversity in the mainstream news media or if viewers just enjoy the entertainment. However, given the growing popularity of this political infotainment show and the preference among young
viewers for entertaining news, it is important to examine it further (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). It is especially important to study whether the show is contributing to the public sphere by providing criticism and encouraging civic engagement. This study analyzes the parody used in The Daily Show to determine if it is contributing to the public sphere. More specifically, four operations must be present in humor for it to be considered true parody. While some humor simply amuses its audience, parody educates, critiques, and encourages its audience to become active members of society by questioning and engaging (Holbert, Hmielowski, Jain, Lather, & Morey, 2009). In other words, if the four operations of parody are present in The Daily Show then it may be contributing to the public sphere.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are two major requirements for completing a project of this magnitude: the first is an internal drive and dedication to see it to its completion and second a support system to encourage and assist you through the journey. In acknowledgement of the first requirement I would like to give thanks and recognition to my grandparents. To my grandpa who encouraged me from a young age to never stop learning and to my grandma who encouraged me to never put off till tomorrow what I can do today. Thank you for instilling in me the personal qualities, values, and skills required to accomplish this. In recognition of the second requirement, I thank all of my friends and family for your love, encouragement, and support throughout this amazing, yet sometimes trying journey. And lastly, a special thank you to my advisor, committee, and faculty who have inspired and supported me throughout my educational journey. Your passion and dedication to your field of study and students have been a true inspiration.
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Chapter 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

Humor

History

The host of *The Daily Show*, Jon Stewart, is a comedian; therefore, humor is a cornerstone of the show. From its mock newscast in the beginning of the show to the interviews at the end, humor is a continuous element throughout. This study analyzes how humor is used as a form of criticism on *The Daily Show*. Laughter is at the heart of humanity, according to Gatrell (2007). In discussing the history of humor, he states, “as the Aristotelean formula put it, man is the only animal that laughs because man alone can be surprised into laughter by the sudden perception that how things are differs from how they ought to be” (p. 70). This is largely what *The Daily Show* does through parody, which is explained and analyzed later on in this study.

Humor has been of interest to philosophers and researchers for a long time. Going as far back as Aristotle, scholars have tried to understand humor (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004). However, Plato and Aristotle did not think highly of it, instead considering it to be a lowly form of human behavior (Vasile, 2009). This human behavior was also viewed as dark and pessimistic. Plato thought humor was a representation of evil and a dark side of humanity. Later, the neurologist, Freud, would agree (Wagg, 2002). However, the entertainer and social commentator, Shakespeare, often used exaggeration of the truth to make a point as satirists often do (Dorrell, 1999).
More recently, philosophers such as Theodor Adorno have suggested humor can be used to critique the culture industry. A Frankfurt School sociologist and philosopher from the beginning of the 20th century, Adorno, argued humor can expose truth and encourage reflection of society. In this argument, he clearly differentiated between humor purely for entertainment and humor for critique (Schuhard, 2008). Adorno considered the humor of Charlie Chaplin to be critical, because he was not the victim of laughter, but sought victims from the culture industry to critique (Coulson, 2007).

The argument between whether humor is merely entertaining or can provide more for an audience is still heavily debated, especially in the world of media research. This study argues that through parody, *The Daily Show* provides critique and encourages participation in the public sphere, therefore, arguing that the show is not merely entertainment.

During the 1950s and 1960s, there was an increase in humor especially in the form of satire in Great Britain. Comedy also had an increasingly important role during this time in the United States. Society was split into two different worlds during this time period. One world was diverse, urban, and rebellious against societal norms while the other was almost exclusively White and middle class. Humor was something that could reach between these two worlds and find common ground or allow each world to consider the current events from a different view. Comedic styles transcended the two worlds in an attempt to bring them closer together (Wagg, 2002). This made humor an
important social tool for connecting and finding common ground among diverse populations within society.

In more recent times, and specifically in reference to mass media, humor has been perceived with a sense of caution. Neil Postman (1985), in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, warns about replacing public discourse and our rights to be informed with entertainment. This concern lies in the belief that entertainment will only lull people into a state of disengagement and lack of concern about what is going on in society. A study by LaMarre, Landreville, and Beam (2009) also shows that satire (specifically on *The Colbert Show*) can lead to misunderstandings and confusion by the audience in regard to the true tone and message being conveyed.

However, historically, humor has been viewed as a powerful tool with which people can understand the current events of the day and be presented with critique and alternative views of the governing leaders. Political satire specifically has been banned during various times in history because it challenged and pushed the cultural norms and questioned political leaders (La Marre et al., 2009). Mascha (2008) discovered in a study about the rise of fascism that the higher the level of censorship in the media, the lower the level of satire and the higher the punishment for it. This illustrated the importance of humor in our society for social critique and engaged citizenship. If humor was nothing more than entertainment as critics such as Postman (1985) argue, then it would seem unnecessary for authorities to take such extreme measures to ban it.
Function

Humor does have a large emotional element to it. Infotainment such as *The Daily Show*, for example, relies on emotional persuasion (Vasile, 2009). Even though Freud criticized humor, he did note in his psychoanalysis that humor was more about irony than fun or entertainment (Wagg, 2002). This is a result of humor including emotions in its reality, which allows it to reveal other perceptions or views not normally considered. It can also present in the emotional form of tragedy, which may explain Shakespeare’s love of comedies. This tragedy is apparent when humor reveals the dark side of a situation or the wrongs of society. As Vasile (2009) explains, “humor embraces that tragic reality, and transforms it into a cultural product that is somewhat more manageable, friendlier, more approachable, more tolerable, milder” (p. 47). This largely defines the humor used in infotainment such as *The Daily Show*.

Emotion is one element of humor that can serve many functions. These functions include the retention of information and learning, including people in a group, a means of gaining social control, facilitating communication, and contributing to debate (Dreyfus, 2008; Graham, Papa, & Brooks, 1992). This illustrates the use of humor on *The Daily Show* in regard to the public sphere, as the humor used can help inform and bring everyone into the discussion, along with take some power back from those in authority such as the mainstream news media.

Vasile (2009) further explains in his research how humor can function as a critical tool: “humor has its own both intentional and unintentional facets that sketch a special
peculiar and extremely intriguing instance of cultural reality with infotainment” (p. 47). In other words, infotainment such as The Daily Show uses humor to portray our reality differently than may be found in mainstream news media. Meyer (2000) also points out that humor is largely created by violations of social and cultural norms.

While studying the role of humor in Tibetan debate, Dreyfus (2008) found “once a joke is made, a new situation is created in which discrepancies are exposed” (p. 53). This leads to the audience being motivated to question the subject of the joke and often feeling the need to respond. If we apply this situation to The Daily Show, the audience is motivated by the humor in the show to question and discuss the subject, which is part of contributing to the public sphere explained in greater depth later on. The subjects, often societal leaders such as government and mainstream news media, are then motivated to respond creating the checks and balances vital for a healthy democracy and a sign of an active public sphere.

The three most popular theories for the purpose of humor are relief, superiority, and incongruity. Relief theory states humor provides a release from tension (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004). This tension usually exists due to inhibitions within culture (Meyer, 2000) and can be an aversion to conflict with a neighbor or fear of consequences from the societal leaders. Superiority states humor allows those laughing to feel superior or power over those at which they are laughing. Therefore, it creates a safe place for critique and discussion where the public can feel as if they are on more equal ground with the societal leaders. Incongruity argues humor is a result of people being surprised by unexpected
patterns (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004). Humor essentially functions then by presenting irony or unexpected views and perceptions that make the audience laugh.

The above theories can be seen in the humor on The Daily Show and illustrate how it contributes to the public sphere. Specifically, The Daily Show provides release from the tensions and inhibitions people feel when trying to process stressful current event topics and political issues. The show also attempts to reduce the power of those in authority or who have superiority, such as the mainstream news media and political leaders, so alternative voices and attitudes can be considered. Lastly, it provides unexpected patterns by providing parodies of newscasts and presenting alternative ideas or patterns through those parodies.

Carnival

The theory of superiority is especially prevalent in carnival, studied in great depth by the philosopher Bakhtin. In Europe prior to the Protestant movement, a three-month carnival would take place annually where art and life came together and voices in conflict could come together to mock those in power (Bishop, 1990; Druick, 2009). Bakhtin saw carnival periods as a freedom from socially accepted truths and a way to break free from the societal restrictions and order normally present (Meddaugh, 2010).

During this period in history, hierarchies ruled with what was perceived to be divine will and social classes were strictly adhered to. However, during the carnival, common people could come together as a community and experience freedom from the rigid social order of the day. Carnival allowed hierarchies to be suspended for three
months out of the year and for ordinary people to have the freedom and equality to criticize and discuss their leaders through humor (Buijzen & Valenburg, 2004). This freezing of hierarchies and other social boundaries allowed the common people to challenge the dominant voice and accepted social norms of the day (Meddaugh, 2010). This largely mirrors the relief and superiority theories discussed earlier (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004).

The freezing of social boundaries occurred through a conflict of voices where those in unofficial positions such as the lower class were able to mock those in official positions without fear of retaliation and reprimand (Druick, 2009). The specific form of humor that took place in the Middle Ages was named carnivalesque by Bakhtin. It took place mainly in a marketplace and among common folk culture or what we would call the lower class today. More specifically, this type of comedy included three characteristics; it was ambivalent, grotesque, and universal. These characteristics mean it could be fun and mocking (extreme opposites), the imagery could be unpleasant, and it was for everyone (Bishop, 1990).

Carnival also included critiques of the status quo (Sobchak, 1996). Despite the criticism that the critiques are just “venting” Bakhtin believed they allowed liberation of the average human and led to social change. In carnival, the normal conventions and constraints of social etiquette are absent. Social positions are switched, the master and servant trade places, and people laugh at the social norms. Therefore, its goal is social change and understanding that the difference between king and servant is only an
accepted social constraint. British comedies of the 1940s and 1950s are often recognized as carnivalesque as they discussed political concerns using humor that turned the world upside down. *The Daily Show* also uses this technique by presenting alternate perceptions of social norms and discussing political issues through parody so the world can be perceived differently than the widely accepted perception offered by societal leaders such as the government and mass media. Druick (2009) points out that this is achieved when humor makes the predictable unpredictable and everyday unfamiliar.

According to Meddaugh (2010), satire, specifically parody, is the primary agent of carnival through the use of role reversals and mimicking. If we consider news parodies, such as *The Daily Show*, the set appears to be a predictable news show and it is expected the anchor will deliver the norm, but then he subverts expectations through the use of humor. This provides a recreation of the carnivalesque humor that has been used in the past to encourage the common folk or public to have a voice. Since carnival makes audiences the insiders on official discourse and points out the faults of the leaders, it allows for a mode of critique.

Sloterdijk (1987) argues carnival is largely missing in today’s society. In its place, we seek outlets providing anesthesia from the daily world rather than the more daring inverted critique carnival provides. Sloterdijk named the later form of critique “kynicism” which is discussed further. This lack of carnivalesque critique, according to Sorgner (2003) is a result of society becoming too serious and respectable. Parody provided by outlets such as *The Daily Show* may be the solution.
Satire and parody

Satire, and especially parody, have historically focused on the subjects of politics and religion and are cornerstones of the humor used on *The Daily Show* (Feinberg, 1967). Satire has been considered a literary artistic mode that goes beyond humor and entertainment but also educates and persuades (Holbert, Hmielowski, Jain, Lather, & Morey, 2009). Sloterdijk (1987) even speaks of the need to unite truth, satire, and art with scholarly intelligent discourse. This is accomplished through the criticism of follies, vices, and stupidity (Colletta, 2009). Satire is also often associated with political narratives and satirists often use parody as a vehicle for their satire (Druick, 2009; Palmeri, 2006). As Feinberg (1967) notes, “men have long considered satire a significant social force” (p. 253). While comedy can encourage laughter for the sake of amusement, satire can contribute significantly to social and political situations (Colletta, 2009).

The name satire comes from the Latin word satura, which means full or mixture full of different things. The essence of the word seems to be variety, along with coarseness or unsophisticated heartiness. Romans enjoyed satire in the form of variety shows where skits and comical dialogue imitated real life and were written to appeal to the common person. These shows would have been similar to the more recent vaudeville or Saturday evening comedy shows such as *Saturday Night Live* (Highet, 1962). While satire was found in the Greek and Roman times, it really flourished during the Enlightenment. A popular idea during this time was that art could be used as a reflection of the flaws in society. The goal was for people to see the reflections, to recognize the
flaws, and to work toward correcting them. In other words, satire encourages progress and improvement in society going beyond mere amusement (Colletta, 2009).

During the 18th century, history and satire were often combined in narrative. These narrative satires had two principal features. The first feature was leveling of vertical relations (Palmeri, 2006). In other words, they brought different classes in society to even ground, therefore removing authority. This accomplished the leveling function of humor discussed previously making it acceptable to critique societal leaders. It also allowed common people to violate rules of society or to take part in discourse challenging the leadership’s discourse (Mascha, 2008).

The second feature was allowing distance from opposite sides of an ideological conflict. This allows alternative views to be considered on important issues such as current events. First, one extreme side is parodied and then the opposite side (Palmeri, 2006); satire takes the leading discourse and turns it upside down (Mascha, 2008). The purpose of this distancing is not to resolve conflicts and issues, but simply to offer alternative views and perceptions. This also provides critique and encourages analysis and consideration (Palmeri, 2006). This study analyzes to what extent The Daily Show achieves this.

There are two popular types of satire, juvenalian, named after a satirist who focused on the corruption of Rome in 60-140 AD, and horatian, named for a Roman poet and satirist (Holbert et al., 2009). The horatian satirist feels positively toward mankind, but wants to cure them of their worst fault, which he considers to be ignorance. The
juvenal satirist, on the other hand, dislikes mankind and his goal is to wound or punish (Bogel, 2001). If we examined classic tragedy and comedy then juvenalian would be tragedy and horatian would be comedy. Both can use humor and aggressiveness; however, horatian uses everyday activities and generally comments on those in charge along with social norms of behavior. Oftentimes, this form of satire will use humor that entertains and points out human faults. Juvenalian is considered to be a heavier form of satire producing a result or effect on its audience’s attitude or perception (Holbert et al., 2009). The Simpsons are often recognized as horatian satire, while Steven Colbert’s performance at the 2006 White House Correspondent’s dinner is considered juvenalian. It is important to recognize that both types of satire strive to improve humans and social institutions (Colletta, 2009).

Parody is prevalent on The Daily Show, which, as mentioned earlier, is a specific vehicle or way of delivering satire. If satire is critique, then parody is the tool used to make it comedic (Colletta, 2009). Highet (1962) describes parody as follows: “parody is one of the most delightful forms of satire, one of the most natural, perhaps the most, satisfying, and often the most effective” (p. 67). Parody makes usually unacceptable communication legitimate allowing for things such as critique of sacred texts or discourse. Parody allows for an alternate reality where it is okay to question and critique in a way that would not be otherwise (Meddaugh, 2010).

Evidence of parody can be found as far back as ancient Greece where parodos referred to imitating singers. There is also a long history of parody in human speech
(Hariman, 2008). Parody is the form of satire that takes an existing work intended to be serious and makes it look ridiculous by including incongruous ideas or exaggerations. It can also put the original idea into an inappropriate form making it look foolish. The two other main forms of satire include directly addressing an audience with the intention of imposing specific views on it and using narrative through a story or drama (Highet, 1962). All intend on evoking amusement and contempt in some way, but parody achieves this through altered mimicking.

It is important to be able to identify what is parody and what is not. Scornful laughter, imitation, and distortion are not necessarily parody. Only if the imitation includes distortion and exaggeration and evokes amusement, derision, and possibly scorn can it be called parody. Parody must lead the audience to see something new and to feel differently in a negative sense toward the subject being parodied. One of the downfalls to parody is that oftentimes the imitation can seem so real, it is hard to tell if it is parody or not (Highet, 1962). Hence, parody is more effective when the audience is familiar with the subject or original act being parodied. This works well for *The Daily Show* since Jon Stewart parodies news coverage the audience has usually already been exposed to. Some other characteristics of parody include elaboration, grandeur, ridicule, vulgarity, distortion, and contempt. Most importantly, it must suggest that the subject is ridiculous. A combination of jest and earnest is important for satire to function (Highet, 1962).

Parody involves two worlds for its execution. The first world is the typical one with social norms and social levels in place. The second world is the carnival discussed
earlier. This is the world where alternate ideas and understandings are considered.

Where grotesqueness can serve as a way to bring the societal leaders down to a level where they can be criticized and questioned. Achter (2008) noted in a study about *The Onion* that using qualities from traditional news shows or mimicking them allows the satirist to borrow their authority. Jon Stewart also accomplishes this borrowing of authority by mimicking mainstream news media leaders on *The Daily Show*.

As Schuhard points out (2008b) “devices like irony and satire, are effective critical tools that can bring ideological absurdities to light and reveal truth about our social situation, causing us to stop and question what we have previously accepted” (p. 6). Schuhard even specifically identifies *The Daily Show* as an example of this type of critical humor proposed by Adorno who is addressed further in a following section.

This act of creating and presenting a counter discourse can raise political awareness and move toward a social change or revolution where new discourse is accepted and considered. This is because humor is an escape from confinement, repression, and censorship. The laughter from the satire is seen as the release from oppression power systems have put on society. This allows humor to be an escape giving the public a sense of displacement so it is okay to ridicule social norms and leaders. The parody provides an unrealistic characterization that is a safe zone in a sense where the people are distanced from the actual subject or issue under scrutiny (Mascha, 2008). This is when comedy can create community and help society examine things that are hard to comprehend. News parody, such as *The Daily Show*, allows this community to form by
addressing taboo questions and raising awareness through humor directed at the mainstream news media (Achter, 2008).

Power systems and organized societies are also essential for satire in general to exist. There must be prohibited spaces, discourse, and ideas for satire to counter (Mascha, 2008). Since mainstream news media newscasts include people in official, hierarchal positions discussing social and political topics, they are perfect recipients of satire and especially parody (Druick, 2009). If satire ridicules the public’s unquestioning acceptance of discourse provided by individuals and institutions, then media is a perfect subject for it. Parody distorts this discourse through incongruity and offers new views of the already existing information or message. This reminds people that mainstream news media tend to show only a slight resemblance to reality. It is also meant to remind people the world in which we live is imperfect and could be improved (Feinberg, 1967).

In Media

In Druick’s (2009) examination of the news as a genre, she suggests news parody causes the audience to reflect on the production of television news and to question its authority. These parodies use humor to disturb the normal and in many cases lead the audience to critique and confirm an alternative version of reality. In the case of The Daily Show, this occurs through parodies of reporters and political talking heads in the news. These parodies critique the importance of these news representatives and their levels of knowledge (Druick, 2009).
Satire came under attack after 9/11 (Jones, 2009). This happened previously in the Elizabethan era during a particularly unstable summer when the goal was to control the populous imagination and media that stimulated it. Even Italy has a law “par condicio” where all political views must have equal time. This prevents comedians and satirist from focusing criticism on one administration. This leads to the question of if satire is not effective and powerful, then why have governments felt the need to control it? After 9/11, comedians such as Jon Stewart struggled with how to continue being funny without offending. However, some, including the mayor of New York City, Giuliani, felt comedy was necessary for audiences, artists, and comedians to address difficult topics and questions about the attacks during the time of crisis (Achter, 2008).

Achter (2008) argues the news is not just information, it is a process where social problems are made and remade, it is a “discourse of values.” “The imitators of the major news media – the parodies and parodists – are becoming more powerful in the process of defining and constructing U.S. political culture” (p. 278). The news is supposed to be above subjectivity in a state of reverence. The news parodies allow this position to be questioned, therefore keeping them in check and questioning the dominant meanings and understandings in society which can lead to new ideas. Achter calls for further research to understand the role of parody in citizenship.

According to Quart (2009), “sarcasm news” is on the rise. What would be considered traditional news programs, such as The Rachel Maddow Show are now embracing satire and sarcasm in their newscasts. Quart (2009) suggests this trend is a
result of today’s culture intertwining parody and information. Saturday Night Live provided one of the first modern versions of news parody with “Weekend Update.” Warner (2007) points out that parody is also a predominant form of humor used in The Daily Show.

Parody is a form of criticism, according to Bush, Bush, and Boller (1994). It allows for satire and ridicule by creating critical reenactments of communication acts. This is done by replacing semantic intentions, where the new one is ridiculous and deconstructs the original act by illustrating how the original ideas presented can be altered (Bush et al., 1994). In other words, it makes the public aware of alternative views and encourages them to question the messages presented by those in power. Thus, parody uses controversy to encourage diverse voices and discussion.

Given this definition, examples of parody are examined in this study since The Daily Show imitates that which it criticizes, especially in the case of mainstream news media. Hariman argues in his 2008 study, “political humor and particularly its core modality of parody are essential for an engaged, sustainable, democratic, public culture” (p. 248). Modern laughter, according to him, contributes to the public sphere of today. Therefore, the humor used in The Daily Show could contribute to the public sphere.

Parody is a duplication of a communicative act. By this duplication, attention is brought to the technique of the original communicative act and self-consciousness is raised (Hariman, 2008). Therefore, The Daily Show’s parody of mainstream news may
serve two purposes: encouraging engagement in the public sphere and making the mainstream news media it parodies self-reflect.

Studies such as Holbert et al.’s (2009) have found the ability of the audience to understand satire can determine its effectiveness. Different types of satire can produce different effects depending on this ability. They also call for more studies focusing on the humorous content itself rather than the social psychological effects, stating: “not all satire is created equal, and it is up to the political communication community of scholarship to begin to better understand where various equalities/inequalities exist when it comes to the study of unique forms of satire” (p. 25). This study defines and explores good parody and to what extent it is present in The Daily Show. This is important to determine because humor must meet certain criteria to be considered true parody. The criteria is outlined later. As discussed earlier, parody allows critique and analysis where other types of humor fall short and only accomplish amusement. Therefore, if The Daily Show uses true parody, it can be argued that it encourages critique and contributes to the public sphere.

The Daily Show uses parodies of news media to interrupt their dominance over the messages presented to the public. This allows a dissenting voice to enter and disrupt their streamlined views. Democracy relies on the public sphere having many varying voices and the voices being rational. What The Daily Show does to the original message is called culture jamming. By interrupting the endless and unquestioned transmission of
mainstream news media’s message, it allows other voices to be heard. It also encourages criticism of the messages and system usually so passively accepted (Warner, 2007).

Parody may include exaggerations of the original communication act and also causes a power shift. According to the philosopher Hariman (2008), the act of parody takes what was a natural or organic act and reveals the mechanisms behind it. Therefore, the parody in *The Daily Show* may reveal the mechanisms or motivations behind mainstream news often not revealed to the public. The techniques of parody include “various combinations of imitation and alteration: direct quotation, alternation of words, textual rearrangement, substitution of subjects or characters, shifts in diction, shifts in class, shifts in magnitude, etc.” (Hariman, 2008, p. 251).

The philosopher Hariman (2008) provides four basic operations of parody covering many of the characteristics discussed throughout this literature review. He notes the operations were largely developed as an extension of Bakhtin’s work on the novel. Hariman states his goal was to extend this work from the literary genre to the broader field of the public sphere.

These four operations can be used to identify whether a humorous act qualifies as true parody rather than as another form of humor. Making this differentiation is important because as previously mentioned, parody can provide critique rather than just pure amusement. These operations are applied to *The Daily Show* to determine if it is true parody and therefore a form of criticism. The four operations include “doubling, carnivalesque spectatorship, leveling, and transforming the world of speech into an
agonistic field of proliferating voices” (Hariman, 2008, p. 253). Analyzing clips of The Daily Show for these four operations of parody will determine if The Daily Show includes true parody. If it does, then it is providing and encouraging critique of public leaders and social norms since that is a vital function of parody. This is also an essential part of contributing to the public sphere, discussed in further detail later.

The first operation is the doubling operation, or simply an imitation of the original object. The imitator may even place the parody and target discourse side by side to illustrate that doubling is occurring. For example, The Daily Show regularly shows clips from mainstream news media and then parodies them through imitation. This imitation can also make the original object the focus rather than its message (Hariman, 2008). In other words, doubling or imitation on The Daily Show of mainstream news media and political talking heads changes the focus to the vehicles of the message rather than the message itself. When political talking heads and mainstream news media present messages, it is rare that the public examines or critiques the source. But, this is a vital part of being engaged and participating in the public sphere.

Parodic transformation can occur during doubling where the original communicative act is unchanged, but the duplication questions the system of the original act and illustrates an alternative response and view of it. Doubling can also free viewers of the authority of the original creator of the message allowing for more criticism and resistance. This freedom is discovered through laughter, which diminishes fears of the authority figure (Hariman, 2008).
RQ1: To what extent is doubling present in *The Daily Show*'s parodies of mainstream news media?

The second operation is carnivalesque spectatorship. This is where the “parodied object is held up to be seen, exposed, and ridiculed” (Hariman, 2008, p. 9). The original communicative act may be designed for a specific audience and not accessible to everyone. Parody assumes the audience is a diverse and general public. This is done by making the object interesting to anyone who wants a laugh. To make the object this widely accessible, it must be assumed the audience comes from all ranges of education, status, and civic engagement (Hariman, 2008).

By assuming carnivalesque spectatorship, the parody opens it to discussion by all members of the public sphere by providing meanings and messages that can be understood by all. This also takes away the authority of the original creator of the medium, as the message has now been presented to an audience it may not have been designed for or directed to. This illustrates how public and, especially, political discourse can be transformed beyond the originator’s control. Once it is doubled as an image, the spectators or public can truly determine whether it represents them.

There are always characters in public discourse, but parody strips those characters of their personas so the public can see the true actors or agents behind them (Hariman, 2008). This illustrates to the carnivalesque spectatorship how institutions such as mainstream news media use the audience’s passiveness to their advantage, thereby revealing their power is often an illusion created by clever agenda setting.
RQ2: To what extent is carnivalesque spectatorship present in *The Daily Show’s* parodies of mainstream news media?

The third operation of leveling refers to comedy’s main goal to bring the object down to the level of basic bodily functions and desires. This can also be referred to as “reduction.” This can take the form of jokes about bodily functions or metaphoric references about organs. It can also include word play, altering photos, and adding voiceovers all for the purpose of encouraging laughter. The main result of this leveling is silliness. Silliness leads to the most basic laughter, essential for parody. Laughter, as previously mentioned, frees the viewer from the authority of the creator of the original communicative act. However, to encourage such a basic level of laughter and, thus the resulting freedom to critique, the object must be leveled to absurdity (Hariman, 2008). This operation is essential for critique to occur in comedy.

RQ3: To what extent is leveling present in *The Daily Show’s* parodies of mainstream news media?

The fourth and final operation is where parody nurtures public culture by portraying public life in a certain way. According to Hariman (2008), public address always has an alter ego that is daft, deformed, and artificial. Parody portrays this alter ego to show an arena of public debate and views. This portrayal of public life reveals competing voices in the public sphere that are always commenting. Parody promotes this model of the public realm where there is continuous debate; i.e., parody encourages the idea of an active and vibrant public sphere (Hariman, 2008). While the mainstream news
media may not reveal that there are dissenting voices, the parodies reveal exactly what they are. In other words, the original communicative act attempts to make culture reflect its single message, but the parody circumvents this by providing examples of dissonant voices. Parody therefore, keeps other voices in the game of public discourse and keeps the public sphere alive. This function is vital to the role of parody in the public sphere.

RQ4: To what extent are competing voices present in *The Daily Show*’s parodies of mainstream news media?

While Hariman (2008) mentions that infotainment shows such as *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* include parody, he does not illustrate how the different operations are put to use. This study analyzes specific clips where political heads from the mainstream news media are the topic to determine how the four different operations of parody are used. This is essential for confirming parody is in use and understanding how *The Daily Show* operates and contributes to the public sphere.

**Mainstream Media**

Since the United States was founded, the media have been expected to represent the nation by serving the public’s best interest (Bagdikian, 2004). “Democratic societies were largely built on the idea that the average citizen should have an awareness of the mechanics of government and take an active role in the political process” (Sharma, 2008, p. 96). Following this idea, the mass media were also expected to inform people about current events and their society in general. However, with the large and diverse United States population, it is possible the current conglomerate structure of the media is unable
to represent the large range of views. It may also be difficult for the media to present any views that contradict their business interests as the media are currently large business conglomerates. While the ideal role of the media is to serve the public’s interest by informing and representing the many views of the nation, this is not always the reality.

Research has shown the public is becoming increasingly dissatisfied with their broadcast options. According to a Pew Research Center study in 2004, between 2000 and 2004 viewers were turning away from mainstream broadcast news sources. An especially telling statistic from this study is that only 23% of 18- to 29-year-olds stated they learn something from network news. In 2000, this number was 39%. While the numbers were not as profound among other age groups, the trend was still there. This illustrates viewers do not feel they are being informed as well as they used to be by the network news. Since 2002, viewership for television network news has decreased by 46% (Baym, 2005).

The American media is primarily at a national level and general in its coverage. This is due to the fact that five major media conglomerates own most of the media outlets in the United States. As a result, the programming and content from all of these outlets tend to be very similar. It is also general enough to be broadcast to people anywhere in the country (Bagdikian, 2004). While creating a smaller amount of widely applicable content may serve the business interests of the media companies, it does not necessarily serve the best interests of the people or contribute to the public sphere. Adorno, Perrin, and Jarkko (2005) point out that the current commercial media system threatens
democracy by making profits instead of representation of the people the priority. This is what Habermas called the disintegration of publicness.

The media are public’s primary window to the issues and events in society (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006). Surveys have shown the public is becoming increasingly dissatisfied specifically with the coverage of political issues provided by the media. One of the largest complaints is that the coverage does not relate to people’s lives (Davis & Owen, 1998). This is most likely due to there not being a strong connection between the issues covered by the media and the issues that are a top concern for people in their everyday lives. The media and its political talking heads have their own agenda that is put first above the public’s best interest.

According to Bagdikian (2004), the most concerning part of this trend toward general national coverage is that the attempt to make coverage neutral overlooks any views not widely accepted and that cannot be mass marketed. Therefore, dissenting and outlying views have no outlet to be heard. This is a major shift from the media found in this country several centuries ago. During the middle of the 19th century, 80% of American newspapers were partisan ranging from the left to the far right and every American city had half a dozen newspapers or more (Bagdikian, 2004).

This partisan and diverse nature of media in the 19th century promoted a healthy public sphere, democracy, and sense of national identity (Powers, 2005). Even Supreme Court Justice, Hugo Black stated, “dissemination of information from diverse and
antagonistic sources is essential to the welfare of the public, that a free press is a condition of a free society” (McChesney, 2004, p. 31).

By the early 21st century, 99.9% of contemporary daily newspapers were the only newspaper in their city (Bagdikian, 2004). Unfortunately, this shift in the media has led to the presentation of one authoritative view and voice that has lulled the public into a sense of complacency. This complacency has resulted in a lack of debate and critique of those in power.

According to the philosopher Adorno, modern mass culture is controlled by the interests of capitalism. This is evident in the current mass media system described previously. In this mass culture, the citizens are lulled into a false sense of contentment and security where they lose the drive to question and critique the culture they live in and its leaders. In this culture, problems are often ignored and forgotten, while those in power profit (Schuchard, 2008). This is clearly not in the best interest of the public and goes against the very idea of the public sphere.

The development of professional unbiased journalism and the 1996 Telecommunications Act that encouraged deregulation have led to the few powerful media conglomerates and neutral news content we see today (Bagdikian, 2004; McChesney, 2004). When you remove any bias and values from journalism and allow a few entities to control all the media content, you no longer need many media sources with partisan and dissenting views. Sloterdijk (1987) criticizes this format because it leads to the media talking about a wide range of subjects without really providing anything of
substance to the conversation. This is due to the fact they do not need to analyze or understand the issues completely.

This leads to a far less informed and active electorate and does not serve the best interests of a democratic society. *The Daily Show’s* use of humor provides an alternative view to the mainstream news media’s message. Its critique of the media through humor also encourages the public to question the information given to them and to recognize the weaknesses in the current media system.

Pfetsch (2008) recognizes the media as political actors in the public sphere in Europe. He specifically puts the media in the same category as government and political parties. He also argues the media do contribute to the public debate and, therefore, are a large part of the public sphere. The media in the United States act very similarly as contributors and facilitators of the public sphere. By having their own voice, they contribute. What raises concern is when their voice starts to drown out everyone else’s, resulting in the public passively accepting the messages given to them by the mainstream news media. As Sharma (2008) points out for the mass media to serve the people, the people must also think critically about the information presented to them. When the public becomes passive, the public sphere is in serious danger of collapse.

**Infotainment**

In many cases, the blending of entertainment and news results in poor quality journalism. It can be informative; however, it seems the network news programs are simply not being successful at blending these two elements. The entertainment portion
becomes the priority in an attempt to increase ratings, and the basics of good quality journalism are forsaken. In other words, the priority is no longer to inform, but to catch viewers’ attention and, therefore higher ratings. Many infotainment shows do fall more under this category than actually producing a critical, informative, program (Baym, 2005). However, this study attempts to show that The Daily Show is making a contribution beyond just entertainment by using true parody.

According to data from the Pew Research Center (as cited in Moy, Xenos, & Hess, 2005) from 1994 to 2004, 18- to 24-year-olds spent 16 fewer minutes daily watching news than before. Twenty-five percent of this demographic also reported paying no attention to traditional news at all. At the same time, 15% of Americans over 45 years of age reported gaining most of their political knowledge from these traditional news sources. While research has shown that television is the biggest source of political information for most Americans, recent research has also revealed information about the specific programs they are using (Moy, Xenos et al., 2005). Television viewers today not only use traditional news programs to become informed, they also turn to political infotainment (Verstraeten, 2004).

This indicates news, political, and entertainment discourses are becoming integrated and led Baym (2005) to suggest The Daily Show is providing an experiment in a new definition of news and journalism where entertainment can be informative and engaging. This would support the argument that humor matters and is essential to a
healthy democracy (Compton, 2008). It is also supported by the argument that humor can convey information that would not be brought to light in other forms.

According to Meddaugh (2010), the lines between news and entertainment continue to blur, and new technology has made it even easier to push the boundaries of journalism. These new technologies also allow media to be created and spread without gatekeepers. This challenges the power and structure of the media industry and gives a voice to the minority. The increasing selection of channels has also increased the variety of shows and increased competition so entertainment that attracts consumers is more appealing. In turn, this has decreased the watchdog role of the press. Infotainment also has the ability to engage audience members who may not be prone to engaging in public discourse because it requires less cognitive effort. The benefit to this is that it attracts larger audiences and a demographic that traditional media does not, such as young and disengaged citizens.

The big question is whether they can also encourage critical awareness of the media and politics within society. For this to be true, humor would need to encourage critical thinking. Hoffman and Thomson (2009) examined young Americans’ political efficacy, and results showed that both viewing traditional and non-traditional late night comedy sources increased political efficacy. Other studies have also shown that infotainment programs may not be a great detriment to society. A study by Cao (2008) indicated The Daily Show may increase political knowledge in viewers who do not watch
traditional news programs. This may lead to a positive contribution to the public sphere by encouraging engagement and critique.

*The Daily Show* is a late-night talk show hosted by Jon Stewart. It is not a network news program and it airs on the Comedy Central channel on cable television Monday through Thursday. Its increasing popularity is apparent since ratings for the show rose 22% from 2003 to 2004 (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006). *The Daily Show* has won many awards over the years including a Television Critics Association Award for Outstanding Achievement in News & Information, an Emmy for Outstanding Writing for a Variety, Music or Comedy Program, and a Peabody Award (The Internet Movie Database [IMDb], 2010). According to Baumgartner and Morris (2006), “*The Daily Show* is styled as a fake news program and regularly pokes fun at mainstream news makers, especially politicians” (p. 3).

More than one million people watch *The Daily Show* regularly, and it often uses the same news feeds as traditional news outlets. Stewart shows a newscaster persona sitting in front of a live audience discussing news items with field reporters and commenting on video clips that often come from news feeds of traditional network news shows. Guests are also brought on for interviews and discussion. In general, the show highlights the absurdity of traditional news shows and content (Druick, 2009). It uses mainstream news footage and then uses parody to entertain and present perceptions not presented in the mainstream news media (Sharma, 2008).

Young and Vishak (2008) assert:
Stewart has critiqued the state of contemporary journalism and outlined what emerging models of journalism should look like. Once assembled, his words describe precisely what The Daily Show is: a program that rejects the problematic norms of objectivity, drama, personalized and fragmented news, reacts to the game of politicians rather than embraces it, and stands outside the media pack commenting on the spectacle that the symbiotic relationship between media and politics has become. (p. 342)

Researchers such as Waisanen (2009) argue that Stewart and Colbert are “comic rhetorical critics” and they both contribute to public discourse and society (p. 119). They both engage in criticism where public issues are the focus, and the fallacies pertaining to them are pointed out. This is accomplished by bringing attention to the absurdities and contradictions in the information presented through mainstream news media. Once these contradictions are pointed out, the incongruity causes the audience to see new perceptions and constructions of reality.

This follows the suggestion that media such as The Daily Show act as a fifth estate in society. Jon Stewart acts as comedian, character, and critic on the show allowing him to suggest alternative interpretations and understandings of modern culture. If we consider carnival, discussed earlier, Stewart is much like a jester facilitating humorous critique among a culture of many kings, including the mainstream news media and political leaders (Meddaugh, 2010).
Burke believed comic approaches help people see from more than one perspective at a time. They analyze and dissect public discourse while reminding audiences about moral democratic possibilities. “These comic strategies encourage the critique and innovation of perspectives in public life. They set in motion pluralistic communication and awareness and summon accountability toward politics and media” (p. 134). This encourages the objects of their comedy and audience to reflect on themselves and society and their fallacies or mistakes. They teach about a healthy public sphere and the importance of engagement in debate and critique to keeping it healthy (Waisanen, 2009).

According to Baym (2007), The Daily Show has become part of the national political conversation. Baym focuses on the interview portion of The Daily Show where Jon Stewart interviews people of interest ranging from politicians to intellectuals. Where network news only allows for short, heavily edited sound bites of interviews, The Daily Show dedicates a significant part of every show to interviewing people of interest. Noting Jon Stewart states regularly that the purpose of The Daily Show is to entertain, it is clear it has also become a voice in the national media conversation.

Baym’s (2007) study finds The Daily Show interviews are entertaining and promote a democratic dialogue “that seeks to find mutual solutions to collective problems” (p. 112). This study supports the argument that important discourse can use humor and that it is possibly more effective than the serious note of other news programs.

Despite research illustrating the ability of political infotainment to provide typically disengaged citizens with information about politics, some scholars have viewed
political infotainment as a negative influence on society (Moy, Xenos et al., 2005). Some arguments claimed soft news programs are a threat to our society’s democratic process because they emphasize trivial events and oversimplify complex current public affairs issues (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006). Critics such as Blumler and Gurevitch (as cited in Brants & Neijens, 1998) stated, “it (infotainment) collides with the ideal of democracy and the ideas of democratic theory” (p. 149).

These critics are primarily concerned that political infotainment will decrease the amount of political discourse on television. This would then lead to a shift from political programs in the best interest of the public to programs the public is interested in (Brants & Neijens, 1998). This study reveals the humor used in infotainment such as The Daily Show does in fact contribute to the public sphere and therefore, could possibly encourage civic engagement because it is parody.

One concern about infotainment is the prevalence of negative characterizations and jokes on political infotainment. It is important to note that late-night talk shows, including The Daily Show, tend to include many jokes and negative characterizations of political candidates (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006). When comparing election coverage on The Daily Show with CBS Evening News, Baumgartner and Morris (2006) found “the primary difference between them is that The Daily Show focuses on generating humor and sarcasm, whereas CBS Evening News focuses on presenting serious television news” (p. 7).
Colletta (2009) questions whether shows such as *The Daily Show* can really be more than entertainment or do they simply undermine political engagement by creating a viewer with no interest in critique and meaningful involvement in the democratic process? There must be a set of values for satire to work. There also must be a motivation by the satirist and the audience for something to change or then it is just satire for the sake of amusement. As discussed earlier, certain criteria must be present for humor to be more than entertainment. This study examines *The Daily Show* to find that criteria to prove it can offer information and critique through parody and not just entertain.

Others have rejected the idea of infotainment by arguing it negatively impacts democracy and serious discussion. Neil Postman in particular warned against presenting education in an entertainment format, arguing it would be the end of critical discourse in our society (Postman, 1985). Ted Koppel also stated he is concerned with the amount of people who got their news from the Comedy Channel (Cao, 2008). However, many studies have revealed that infotainment is reaching citizens mainstream news media does not. Therefore, it may also be contributing to the public sphere. Humor’s ability to encourage criticism and discourse is also well documented by philosophers such as Adorno (2005) and researchers such as Buijzen and Valkenburg (2004) who provide theories for the purpose of humor as discussed earlier.

According to communication scholars, citizens have already accepted political entertainment programs as an important part of politics. Many research studies have
examined the relationship between exposure to these programs and the amount of political knowledge gained. Other research has shown that young adults are using *The Daily Show* as a supplement to traditional news rather than a replacement. Many media effects theories such as uses and gratifications and elaboration likelihood have been used to examine the connection between media and audience engagement. These studies illustrate how infotainment leads the audience to engage in discourse and civic activities (Sharma, 2008).

Important political information can be packaged into entertaining content appealing to less engaged citizens. This exposure to the humorous version of the issue motivates the less motivated individual to seek out more information from other news sources. One explanation for this is that there is motivation to understand why a joke is funny. A study also found that less motivated individuals were better able to understand information from traditional news sources after first hearing about the issue in a comedic format (Xenos & Becker, 2009).

Given the growing popularity of political infotainment, political figures have been appearing on these programs for some time. Ross Perot announced he would be a presidential candidate on *Larry King Live*, Al Gore appeared on the *Late Show with David Letterman* in 2000, and Bill Clinton played the saxophone on *Arsenio Hall* in 1992 (Brants & Neijens, 1998; Moy, Xenos et al., 2005). Parodies on SNL of presidential elections have also been credited with influencing the political process (Smith & Voth, 2002). Infotainment has been a popular medium for politics because it reaches viewers
who are less likely to use traditional news programs and are less politically engaged (Brants & Neijens, 1998). Fifty-four percent of *The Daily Show* viewers report getting at least some information about the 2004 presidential campaign from various comedy or soft news programs (Moy, Xenos et al., 2005).

Political leaders will put on an act and mainstream news media will take that act as reality and present it to the public without question. *The Daily Show*, on the other hand, is outside the political realm and mainstream news media (Young & Vishak, 2008). Therefore, it is not responsible to the interests of either. Stewart uses this position to push both sides of issues beyond the talking points and accepted perceptions, therefore, providing critique of the norms. The show challenges the assumed norms. This study argues that this is accomplished through the use of parody.

One study (Fox, Koloen, & Sahin, 2007) examined whether humorous political news sources could inform like traditional news sources. This study compared the coverage on *The Daily Show* to coverage on broadcast television network newscasts. It focused on political campaign information covered by the sources (Fox et al., 2007). Results revealed *The Daily Show* included a greater amount of humorous content while the broadcast network news shows included more hype content. The researchers then chose to only compare the substantive content from both sources that did not involve humor or hype. After controlling for these elements, the results showed that the content was very similar. There were also indications that viewers may remember more
information from *The Daily Show* because the humorous content is viewed as more positive (Fox et al., 2007).

LaMarre et al. (2009) note many studies have focused on the effects of infotainment but not on the process and mechanisms present in the content that lead to the effects. This study examines the function of parody on *The Daily Show* and whether it presents the opportunity for insight, understanding, and encouraging critical thinking about society. If this occurs, then infotainment can contribute to the public sphere.

Other studies have examined media usage, behavior, and media effects using theories like elaboration likelihood and uses and gratifications (Sharma, 2008). This study, however, examines the function of parody and whether it has the potential to provide what is needed to result in behaviors and effects such as engagement in the public sphere by encouraging critical thinking and debate. Therefore, it examines the cause rather than the effect and offers new insight into the role of infotainment in the public sphere. It has been noted *The Daily Show* takes existing news footage from traditional media sources and uses humor to create opposite meanings for the clips, which is a typical function of parody. This is not only entertaining, but serves to expose the strategies behind the government and media, therefore encouraging critical thinking through inquiry and analysis (Sharma, 2008).

**Public Sphere**

Civic engagement is necessary for a strong democracy. This also means civic engagement is not only every citizen’s right, but their duty. As Moy, Xenos et al. (2005)
stated, “a civically engaged electorate participating in a vibrant public sphere is the mainstay of any democratic system” (p. 111). Taking into consideration that democratic attitudes and behaviors that are formed during early adulthood usually become habits that continue throughout a person’s life, the lack of engagement by our youth is concerning (Lammie, 2005). If the current young adult demographic continues the same level of apathy toward political engagement, it could have a detrimental effect on the political process. These attitudes could be passed down to future generations, and as the older engaged generations pass away, the lack of politically engaged citizens could have a crippling effect on the democratic electoral process in this country.

It is important to note the public sphere goes beyond just voting. The public sphere encompasses communication, especially citizen interaction in relation to politics (Dahlgren, 1995). The public sphere includes participating as an engaged citizen in debates about social issues, attending political events, and taking an active interest in learning about current politics and issues (Habermas, 1989).

There is also a cultural public sphere encompassing literature and the arts, but for the purposes of this study the focus is on the political public sphere of which Habermas speaks. “In ideal terms, Habermas conceptualizes the public sphere as that realm of social life where the exchange of information and views on questions of common concern can take place so that public opinion can be formed” (Dahlgren, 1995, p. 7). Adorno et al. (2005) suggested the concept of democracy assumes a responsible citizen is well informed about issues affecting the society in which they live. This directly ties
publicness and democracy together, because without a public forum of communication, the citizens would not be adequately informed.

In Habermas’s *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989), he discusses an ideal public sphere. The bourgeois public sphere during the 18th century was specific to Europe (Dahlgren, 1995). This sphere typically takes place in coffee houses of the day where the working class could meet and discuss issues and events important to society (Habermas, 1989).

This marked a transition from feudalism to capitalism, which could be seen in the press and other forms of public communication (Habermas, 1989). In the Middle Ages, there was no public versus private, but after transitioning from feudalism to capitalism, the middle class emerged. This middle class created media such as newspapers and gathered in coffee houses to discuss and share information and to debate issues. The space where the common person could discuss issues of the day and question social norms or leaders became known as the public sphere (Dahlgren, 1995). In other words, it played a vital part in allowing the common person to be heard and to inspire social changes.

Today, this public sphere no longer occurs in coffee houses, but largely in the realm of the mainstream news media. Modern society is so large and spread out that physically gathering in large groups is unrealistic. The media is where voices are heard and discussions over important public issues take place. While maybe not Habermas’s definition of ideal, this modern public sphere still includes an institution (the media in
this case) that provides information and a public or audience involved to some degree in processing the information.

Therefore, the media have become central to the public sphere. Of course, the ideal of a free press is not always the actuality and today, the people frequently have a low level of interest in social issues. The public must go beyond being an audience by discussing and critiquing the information presented to them in order to engage in a public sphere. In other words, they must interact as citizens (Dahlgren, 1995). Some infotainment programs, such as The Daily Show are trying to encourage this by pointing out the failings of the mainstream news media.

Baynes (1994) states Habermas is concerned with how our society can take part in a critical process of public communication using the mediating organizations. Societal communication takes place to a great extent in the mass media. This leads some to ask, how can modern societies have an active public sphere? Having examined how Habermas’s idea of the public sphere holds up today, Baynes argues Habermas’s public sphere and the ideology behind it does not require face-to-face interaction. This is a good sign for the public sphere today as this type of interaction is far less prevalent in modern society than it was during bourgeois society.

In addition, Baynes (1994) believes the public sphere must consist of many institutions and discourses. These institutions can include anything from mass media to parliament. In the case of mass media, it can include everything from network news to weblogs (Steffek, 2010). Plaisance (2005) also agrees the media play a vital role in the
public sphere by encouraging democratic activity and not allowing political interests to take over. This means the media must have enough independence and power to hold those in power accountable. This raises concerns about the amount of power private corporations have over mass media, which was discussed earlier.

This lack of critique can occur when decision makers and governmental leaders are not held accountable by the public (Steffek, 2010). This is a vital part of the public sphere along with a functioning media infrastructure. It is necessary for the public to be informed and up-to-date on current events and the actions of their leaders in order to effectively hold them accountable. Lingenberg (2010) explains that media reception is where citizenship and the public sphere come together. When the public is not adequately informed, it cannot actively discuss and critique its leaders or current events of the day. Therefore, the public sphere must have a functioning media that informs and allows for public communication to be used to review the happenings in the government. In the end, the mass media are responsible for determining what the public gets to know and see.

McGuigan (2005) argues entertainment such as soap operas can even contribute to the public sphere because emotions can provide education along with more serious critical content. However, he recognizes Habermas may object to this since his focus was on rational and critical debate and infotainment may be especially disheartening to him. Yet, Habermas questions the divide between cognitive communication and entertainment communication. The argument is that while critical and rational communication is
needed, not going beyond that leaves us incomplete. There is also the argument that not even television news is completely cognitive and rational (McGuigan, 2005). After all, passion and emotion is required to act and engage in response to the information. This study argues humor used to entertain on *The Daily Show* can, in fact, provide rational, critical debate and is an important contributor to the public sphere.

Engagement in civic life impacts society as a whole, according to Moy, Manosevitch, Stamm, and Dunsmore (2005). This impact can include solving communal problems and addressing public interest. Researchers like Putnam (Kim & Han, 2005; Moy, Manosevitch et al., 2005) and Postman (1985) blamed television for the decreasing level of civic engagement in our society. This blame has now been directed toward the internet. The arguments are twofold in that not only do these new media create a less informed public, but the time spent with them takes away from the time spent actively engaging as citizens. Research, however, has revealed that time spent on the internet may complement civic engagement (Moy, Manosevitch et al., 2005). This is also true of television. Television news programs encouraging critique and debate can also encourage citizens to become engaged rather than passive viewers.

Lingenberg (2010) agrees the media represent and organize a large amount of the space called the public sphere in his study on citizen participation in the public sphere in Europe. He even went as far as to state, “modern public spheres are primarily organized by the mass media” (p. 54). The citizen’s role is essential to the public sphere; however, this role largely includes what the public does with the information presented by the
media. If it is the medias’ job to determine what the public gets to know and see, it is the public’s job to do something about what they know and see.

The above concept is backed by Lingenberg’s (2010) argument that the creation and distribution of political issues along with the audience’s communicative actions in response to the reporting are both essential parts of the modern public sphere. Feeling affected and connecting information with personal ideas, experiences, beliefs, or consequences are vital for taking part in public discussion. Therefore, the media is a key element to the public sphere in today’s society. If the audience’s reaction is key (engaging in thoughtful critique and debate) then the media presented to them is also vital and should encourage audience participation. The citizens must gain the information somewhere to be able to discuss and debate it.

Dahlgren (1995) notes television is prominent in his study about the public sphere because it has become a major institution. Television is a sociocultural experience connecting people with many issues of today such as race, gender, politics, and religion. It is also a part of daily reality, its content is observed and interpreted by the audience and then spread through social interaction. Another way to look at it is as a connection between the everyday individual world and larger social and political world. If we are concerned about the quality of democracy, then television must be critiqued. This critique of television is necessary because the larger mass media must not be detached from the interests of the citizens they are supposed to be informing and serving.
Participation in the public sphere, from writing letters to those in power to voting, is essential because it makes elected officials listen to the general public’s needs and opinions (Kim & Han, 2005). The public sphere is meant to allow many voices into the discussion regarding what is best for the people. Without this, special interests and those in power will take over at the detriment of society. The news media are responsible for informing the public and there is a causal relationship between political knowledge and civic participation. Therefore, the media are vital to participation in the public sphere.

Habermas’s public sphere was where discourse made the state aware of society’s needs. According to Klumpp, Riley, and Hollihan (1999), the public sphere in a democracy should include discussion, debate, and community interaction. A true, active, democracy goes beyond single acts such as voting. Citizens must participate in public discussion and debate where the citizens come together outside their private lives, engage for the public good, and create a sense of community (Klumpp et al., 1999).

When speaking of the public sphere and its connection to critique, it is necessary to examine the philosopher Peter Sloterdijk’s thoughts on cynicism in our society. Sloterdijk (1987) notes critique was historically linked to laughter and satiric tradition. This satirical tradition can even be traced as far back as Diogenes. After the enlightenment, critique transitioned into something that was pessimistic and generally depressing. This is what Sloterdijk calls cynicism and argues it is far too prevalent in our society.
Cynicism can primarily be found in western industrial countries where people take part in institutions in which they do not believe due to social expectations (Sorgner, 2003). Sloterdijk (1987) argues it is the result of the enlightenment encouraging a lack of absolute belief and meaning in life. He argues the new technological advances that were a result of the enlightenment were not enough to make up for this loss in society.

Here enters Sloterdijk’s argument for what he calls kynicism as an alternative to cynicism (Sorgner, 2003). Sloterdijk speaks of cheekiness present in Greek philosophy and feels it should return in the form of kynicism (Sorgner, 2003). In today’s society cheekiness is often considered to be a negative thing, but this was not always the case. In Old High German, cheekiness was defined as productive aggressiveness toward the enemy. It was mainly used to break conventions and critique social norms (Sloterdijk, 1987). This is much like what happens in carnival when conventions of class, authority, and respect are reversed.

Kynicism’s place, according to Sloterdijk (1987), is in the public sphere where it can challenge the higher elements of authority and commonly accepted ideologies. He posits that kynicism dwells in public spaces to challenge established morality (Zizek, 1989). The very definition of cynicism is when the powerful know the truth about themselves but continue as before. If these authoritative figures are the representatives of the avoidance of truth and cynicism, then The Daily Show is the representative of kynicism where truth is exposed.
Kynics can be provocative but cheerful and can use their whole bodies to argue. This technique could be compared to the parody operation of leveling. A kynic can reject official culture using irony and sarcasm and will ridicule and refuse respect of authority. In ancient times, this could be gods or heroes, but today could be other authoritative figures such as the media or political leaders (Sorgner, 2003). This is often accomplished by looking at official ideology and holding it up to ridicule to expose individual interests (Zizek, 1989). This study illustrates how *The Daily Show*'s parodies of mainstream news media are an example of this type of kynicism. As Sloterdijk (1987) points out, critique has always had an element of satire.

The cynical parody is used to show a clear reflection of the reality rather than the commonly accepted ideologies presented by authority figures. As Sloterdijk (1987) states, “those who rule lose their self confidence to the fools, clowns, and kynics” (p. 102). Kynics are in a unique position to put forward reasons against idealism because their place is outside the ordered system or institution they are critiquing. However, they also recognize kynicism results in a loss of innocence because once consciousness is raised, it cannot be reversed (Sloterdijk, 1987).

While there has been criticism of kynics saying this form of criticism cannot be taken seriously, Sloterdijk (1987) points out three instances where kynicism has been successful in society: carnival, universities, and Bohemians. The success of kynicism in carnival is relevant to this study as the connection between it and *The Daily Show* was discussed earlier. Sloterdijk’s kynicism is the aspect of carnival providing a safety valve
to critique authority and ideology. As he puts it, “it is the schooling in reality” (Sloterdijk, 1987, p. 6). This study shows that through the use of parody, *The Daily Show* encourages its audience to no longer be miserable, apathetic cynics, but to become kynics who participate in the public sphere of critique.

Baym (2007) posits the interview section of *The Daily Show* encourages rational discourse and scrutiny by the public, even stating, “the news interview can be considered a central element of a public sphere in the Habermasian sense” (p. 95). However, some argue television cannot serve the ideal rational discourse encouraged by Habermas. Postman (1985) in particular resisted the idea that television could serve this public sphere. Other researchers have argued television encourages overdramatized spectacles and appearance and, therefore, is unable to encourage rational objective discussion. This tends to over generalize the programming on television, though. While there are programs such as tabloid news shows where spectacle and entertainment is the purpose, *The Daily Show’s* use of humor and format is significantly different.

While the host of *The Daily Show* Jon Stewart and the show’s producers insist the show is simply meant to make people laugh, this argument ignores the show’s many accomplishments. The show has won a Peabody Award, Jon Stewart has been named the most important newscaster in the country, and important politicians value the show enough to make appearances and important announcements on it. One of the producers has suggested the show’s goal “is to connect to an ongoing national conversation, to make the show’s content relevant to a wider political discussion” (as cited in Baym,
2005, p. 272). This is the very essence of participation in the public sphere and reflects Habermas’s idea of a deliberative democracy where critique and diverse conversation is prominent.

Some public sphere theorists argue *The Daily Show* works against the idea of the public sphere due to its lack of rational argumentation and use of parodies when it comes to the serious news. This argument is based on the premise that Habermas called for a public sphere populated with many engaged voices and that their conversations be rational (Warner, 2007). These arguments assert humor and entertainment cannot be rational. This study illustrates *The Daily Show* provides good parody that can be informative and critical.

In response to the critics, Warner (2007) argues *The Daily Show* allows for an alternative voice to the already emotion-heavy content out there that often relies on fear. *The Daily Show* culture jams these messages with humor and laughter subverting the main political brand message from mainstream news media and allows other points of view to be heard and considered. Perhaps Wahl-Jorgensen (2008) explains the validity of infotainment in the public sphere best when stating, “acts of citizenship do not arise solely from rational, detached observation, but from a set of strong emotions, including disgust, anger, love, hate, and a sense of injustice” (p. 158).

According to Klumpp et al. (1999), “a healthy democracy requires an involved public accessible through reasoned discourse” (p. 42). Manosevitch (2005) cites citizen engagement and participation as important elements for democracy to be healthy.
Manosevitch (2005) also recognizes knowledge of public affairs as an important factor for political deliberation and the media as a vital source of that knowledge. Klumpp et al. (1999) go on to cite several reasons for the loss of democratic argument including a lack of community values, decreased influence by the mass media, the political sphere no longer being committed to serving the community, and a more global economic system. To those who do not value argument and do not believe in the public’s ability to reason, they argue that humans’ ability to reason and argue is not only essential to humanity, but to democracy.

Discourse between people with different views is considered a necessary component of democracy. It has even been argued, “participation in public deliberation is necessary for individuals to develop morally as citizens” (p. 413). Further, it helps them become part of an articulate and knowledgeable public and enhances their “civic literacy” by enabling them to gain more in-depth knowledge of policy issues” (Guttman, 2007, p. 413).

Wyatt, Kim, and Katz (2000) posit political conversation promotes civic participation and news is responsible for encouraging that political conversation. This leads to a circular process where news media encourage conversations lead to opinions and civic engagement such as joining a protest, and then the actions provide content for the next cycle of news coverage. This illustrates the importance of analyzing whether The Daily Show is providing good parody that can provide critique and different views.
This is especially important since the show’s largest demographic is young adults, who as explained earlier are largely apathetic toward engagement in the public sphere.

Conversation in the public sphere can be affected by many factors, including fear of being in the minority, level of intelligence, and level of comfort with other participants, in addition to media use. Willingness to disagree in discourse does not affect participation unlike political conversation, which does affect participation. Therefore, political conversation does not need to involve citizens who understand every political issue fully and forcefully debate them, but the public sphere can benefit from political discussion that is more informal and congenial (Wyatt et al., 2000). *The Daily Show* may fit this description well by providing parody that makes important topics accessible to citizens who are not politically savvy.

Research Questions

The five research questions used for this study are listed below:

RQ1: To what extent is doubling present in *The Daily Show*’s parodies of mainstream news media?

RQ2: To what extent is carnivalesque spectatorship present in *The Daily Show*’s parodies of mainstream news media?

RQ3: To what extent is leveling present in *The Daily Show*’s parodies of mainstream news media?

RQ4: To what extent are competing voices present in *The Daily Show*’s parodies of mainstream news media?
RQ5: To what extent does *The Daily Show* contribute to the public sphere?
Chapter 2

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative content analysis was used to answer the research questions. Four specific clips from *The Daily Show* were chosen for the analysis. Content analysis has been defined as “any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying specified characteristics or messages” (Twycross & Shields, 2008, p. 38). Content analysis was chosen as the preferred method because it lends itself well to assessing communicative events documented in public space (Berg, 2007). Content analysis is also a preferred method for analyzing mass media data because it allows the researcher to obtain knowledge about the content and messages portrayed by the programming and its influence (Meng & Berger, 2008; Walfall, 2011). The rationale for specifically using qualitative content analysis follows.

Siegfried Kracauer, a German sociologist, cultural critic, and follower of the Frankfurt School in the 1940s and 1950s, is often credited for writing the first manifesto of qualitative content analysis called *The Challenge of Qualitative Content Analysis* (as cited in Jensen & Jankowski, 1991).

Today, qualitative content analysis is considered an effective method for analyzing the data and literal words in the text in which they originally appear (Berg, 2007). One thing missing from Kracauer’s work on qualitative content analysis is a systematic methodology or approach to apply it (Jensen & Jankowski). Altheide (as cited in Fontenot, Boyle, & Gallagher, 2008) suggested a method that called for theoretical
sampling, emerging categories as data are being collected, and combining textual (narrative) and statistical analysis. These steps are used for the analysis in this study.

To explain further, when conducting a qualitative analysis, the researcher will openly analyze the content first and look for prevalent themes and categories that emerge. From there, the researcher will determine the categories that should be used to analyze the content. This approach allows for themes and categories to be created without prior expectations limiting the study’s focus. The themes and messages themselves are broken down and analyzed to answer the research questions.

The third research question asking how The Daily Show uses leveling will be used as an example. In qualitative content analysis, the entire text structure around the mentioned body parts would be examined for themes and to better answer how the leveling is occurring.

Qualitative content analysis was also selected because several other studies examining mass media communication have used the method with success. In 2008, Meng and Berger analyzed the media coverage of the 2003 SARS epidemic in China. Pickle, Quinn, and Brown (2002) used the method to examine agenda setting in media coverage of HIV/AIDS in African American newspapers and found agenda setting attributes. Anderson (2009) recently used qualitative content analysis to examine how a news story is diffused over multiple mass media outlets. Mitra (2009) examined the occurrence of social change on the interactive medium of blogs by using this method. Television ads were analyzed using qualitative content analysis for a study by Beccaria...
(2001) on the effects of alcohol advertising. Atkinson (2005) qualitatively analyzed how corporate power is presented and discussed in alternative mass media outlets while Fontenot et al. (2008) compared newspaper coverage and government press releases on Hurricane Katrina and Rita to determine information sources. These studies illustrate that this method is successful when used to analyze data from the mass media in many formats including television.

Berg (2007) provides a functional, systematic approach for using qualitative content analysis that was applied for this study. Berg suggests including some quantitative data in the analysis as a supplement to the qualitative data. The use of quantitative data along with a qualitative content analysis was also utilized by Roberts and Pettigrew (2007) in their study on food advertising for children. They noted that this allowed for a “descriptive statistics of incidence and a thematic analysis of messages” (p. 358). Therefore, this study includes some quantitative data used to illustrate frequencies and magnitudes in the data.

The quantitative data are only included when the quantitative data assists in the analysis and answering of the research questions. For example, the length of time spent on a specific topic or frequencies in which specific topics are mentioned can assist with illustrating an argument in the analysis. When a topic is joked about or criticized through parody several times versus once or twice, that frequency is important to the analysis and understanding the full picture. The ideological mind-set, themes, and categories are illustrated through qualitative analysis.
The study examines themes and concepts in the data as the units of analysis. These units of analysis are then developed into set categories. The concepts used as a starting point and led the initial analysis were based on the functions of parody covered in the research questions. As noted by White and Marsh (2006), in qualitative content analysis, the initial questions the researcher aims to answer (research questions) are initially used to help focus the analysis. This initial analysis looked for themes in the text that are examples of doubling, carnivalesque spectatorship, leveling, and competing views as defined previously in the literature review. A theme is considered a string of words or sentences containing a specific cluster of ideas or concepts (Berg, 2007). These themes were then sorted into categories. Any theme occurring more than three times was considered a pattern and therefore organized into a category. According to Berg (2007), “the rationale for this is as follows: once is an accident, twice is a coincidence, and three times moves beyond mere chance to a pattern” (p. 327). The specific steps presented by Berg (2007) for conducting a qualitative content analysis and followed in this study were: identify a research question, determine initial categories, read through the data and establish final categories, sort the data into these categories, count the number of entries in each category to demonstrate magnitude, review data in each category for patterns, and offer analysis for your findings.

Now that the basics of qualitative content analysis have been discussed, specifics for this study are explained further. Four clips from The Daily Show were selected for analysis. These clips are from a five-month time period from October 2009 to March
2010. Many clips were watched during the selection process and a variety of clips could have been chosen. Since parody is included in every episode of *The Daily Show* the conclusions would have been the same. These specific clips were selected because they cover a substantial amount of time, which allowed for a thorough analysis. The lengths range from four minutes to 13 minutes. Since four research questions are looking for specific functions of parody, it was important the clips be several minutes long to increase the chances the four functions were included. This provided more data for the analysis and, therefore, a richer and more complete analysis for the study.

The clips were also selected because the topics of the clips are specific to a variety of news anchors and mainstream news media. This is necessary to ask the previously stated research questions. One last criterion used to select the clips was the use of parody. All four clips seemed to provide an example of parody being used on *The Daily Show*. However, the analysis of these clips determined if the operations of parody were actually at work. Following is a description and details about the selected clips.

The first clip is from October 12, 2009 and is titled “CNN Leaves it There” (*The Daily Show*, 2009). The clip runs for 11 minutes and 33 seconds. The topic of this clip is fact checking by political talking heads on CNN. A combination of CNN clips and humorous reenactments of the CNN message by Jon Stewart and correspondents Aasif Mandvi and Jon Oliver are included.

The second clip is from March 18, 2010. The title is “Conservative Libertarian” and it runs for 13 minutes and 5 seconds (*The Daily Show*, 2010c). In this clip, Jon
Stewart mimicked Glenn Beck and replicated his show. A large portion of the clip is dedicated to Stewart analyzing Glenn Beck’s term “conservative libertarian,” which Beck uses to describe himself.

The third clip is titled “Temple of Hume” and is from January 5, 2010 (The Daily Show, 2010a). The length of the clip is 4 minutes and 41 seconds. The feature of this clip is Brit Hume’s comment about Christianity along with his discussion with Bill O’Reilly about the backlash he received from it. A Daily Show correspondent, Aasif Mandvi, comments on the situation.

The fourth and final clip is from January 28, 2010 and titled “Speech Therapy – Post-Racial” (The Daily Show, 2010b). The length of the clip is seven minutes and 23 seconds. The topic of this clip is Chris Matthews’s commentary after the State of the Union. A Daily Show correspondent, Wyatt Cenac, provides a humorous reenactment of Chris Matthews’s comment.

All four clips were analyzed for the operations of parody using qualitative content analysis to answer the previously listed research questions. First, the clips were analyzed for doubling. Any examples of The Daily Show imitating a communicative act from a political leader or mainstream news media were sorted into categories and analyzed.

Second, the clips were analyzed for carnivalesque spectatorship. This was determined by examples of The Daily Show taking the original communicative act and making it more accessible to a general public. Examples of this may include more accessible metaphors or the use of more frequently used words or jargon.
Third, the clips were analyzed for examples of leveling. For example, a topic not originally considered absurd or silly in its original communicative act may become so in The Daily Show’s parody. Jokes about bodily functions or other silly references indicated the operation of leveling was occurring.

Lastly, the clips were analyzed for the transforming world of speech or nurturing of public culture by specific portrayals of public life. In other words, the clips were analyzed for examples of The Daily Show presenting dissenting voices. The clips were also analyzed for critiques of the original message presented by the political leaders or mainstream news media and alternative views offered.

Once the clips were analyzed for these various examples of the operations of parody, the themes were organized into categories. These categories revealed whether The Daily Show was using the operations of parody and if it was, how. This study specifically revealed examples of how The Daily Show was using the specific form of humor, parody, to criticize those in power, more specifically, how it critiques the political leaders and mainstream news media. After answering the first four research questions, which determined if true parody was taking place, it was possible to answer the final research question about the show’s contribution to the public sphere.
Chapter 3

FINDINGS

As mentioned earlier, the four operations of parody were used as a guide to begin the qualitative analysis for this study. Each clip was analyzed to determine whether it met each of the four operations. An example of the coding sheet used can be found in Appendix A. This initial analysis revealed the primary categories for the study. These categories represented different characteristics of the four different operations of parody, which were revealed when the clips were analyzed for themes. A coding abbreviation was used to determine which category each example fit into. Some met more than one category and were coded accordingly. The coding abbreviations can be found in Appendix B.

The categories identified for each operation are as follows:

Doubling

- Imitation
- Original Object Focus
- Parodic Transformation

Carnivalesque Spectatorship

- Ridicule
- Exposure
- Make Accessible
Leveling

- Reduction
- Metaphors
- Word Play
- Alter Photos
- Silliness
- Encourage Laughter
- Absurdity

Transform World of Speech

- Dissenting Voices
- Alternative Views
- Alter Ego

The first operation of parody was doubling and the first research question was how does *The Daily Show* use doubling? Through the analysis, it became clear there were three prevalent characteristics of doubling: imitation, original object focus, and parodic transformation. Doubling allows Jon Stewart to provide context for his humor. It is likely the audience is not familiar with the specific object to which he is referring and this allows the audience to understand. It also allows a point of reference for comparison.

Doubling replicates the message and allows it to become the focus of ridicule. The duplication often occurs through the process of imitation. This illustrates that an
imitation is occurring. *The Daily Show* regularly shows a clip of the object of the parody. Therefore, it was determined that imitation was occurring when clips were shown side by side with Stewart’s commentary. It is also necessary in doubling to make sure the audience understands what object, in this case network or news anchor, is the focus of the parody. This was termed as “original object focus” for the study. It was determined this was occurring when network or anchor names were mentioned or pictures of them were shown during the parody. Parodic transformation was the last characteristic coded for in the doubling operation. This refers to a duplication of the questions or system of the original act. It was determined this was occurring when Stewart repeated questions or statements given by the original act or created a replica of the system such as a mock interview.

When analyzing the four clips for doubling, the following findings were revealed. Imitation was used to a large extent by Stewart. He regularly showed a clip from a mainstream news media network and then switched back to himself to parody it using the other operations of parody. There were 35 instances of imitation throughout the four clips. This characteristic provides the audience with a reference for Stewart’s act.

When Stewart said twitter was not interesting, imitation then allowed him to show why it was not. Stemming from imitation is the original object focus piece. If Stewart were to simply present the clip, the audience may think he was providing a parody of the person being interviewed, but most of the time it was the network or news anchor he was criticizing since they tended to have an influence on the public’s views and knowledge.
By showing a logo for the network or a picture of the anchor, it clarified the object of the parody for the audience.

The original object focus was also prevalent, occurring 21 times during the four clips. Stewart accomplished this largely by mentioning the network or anchor’s name specifically before showing a clip or by showing pictures of the anchor or the network name while he was talking. This helps the audience understand what the focus of the parody is. Stewart was typically focusing his parody on the actual network or anchor rather than the subject of the message. For example, in “CNN Leaves It There,” even though many clips were shown of politicians talking about healthcare, it is CNN that is the focus of the parody for not fact checking the politicians or questioning them adequately. If there was no original object focus taking place, then the audience may determine the politician is the object of Stewart’s parody.

The flip side of showing the clips is the parodic transformation. This is where Stewart was able to respond to the clip in a sense. He mimicked it and responded to it so he could encourage alternative views of the information being presented.

Parodic transformation is essential for the audience to understand why the clips are being shown in the first place. This characteristic occurred 17 times throughout the four clips. Parodic transformation is the primary act of parody. Stewart often accomplished this by acting or behaving like the object of focus or by replicating the system that was the object of focus. For example in “Conservative Libertarian,” he wore glasses that look like those worn by Glenn Beck and he replicated Beck’s show by using
a chalkboard. He also replicated network shows with mock interviews, which can be seen in “CNN Leaves it There” when Aasif Mandvi and Jon Oliver stated random and outrageous facts in a mock interview and Stewart ended the interview with “unfortunately we’re going to have to leave it right there.”

How does The Daily Show use carnivalesque spectatorship was the next research question and operation analyzed. This operation gives purpose to the parody, allows the audience to relate to it and understand it, and raises their awareness that the original object needs to be examined further. Making the object accessible is essential for the audience to be able to relate to it.

Carnivalesque spectatorship is when the object is actually presented to the audience as something to laugh at or consider in a different way than it was originally presented. The first category that emerged for this operation was ridicule. The parodied object was ridiculed by the person presenting the parody. It was determined this was occurring when Stewart presented a negative comment passing judgment about the object. The next characteristic was exposing the object. This occurred when Stewart offered an explanation or description of the object illustrating why the object should be examined further and focused on. The last characteristic was making the object accessible. Many times the networks or news anchors offer information that is technical or use jargon that is not common knowledge. It was determined Stewart was making an object accessible when he parodied the original message or content using a commonly understood topic or term.
The first characteristic, ridicule, occurred 28 times. This usually occurred in the form of mocking or specifically criticizing the object of the parody. In “Speech Therapy – Post-Racial,” Stewart stated Chris Matthews was one scotch away from being Ron Burgundy and that watching CNN’s coverage of the State of the Union helped him understand less. This characteristic allows for the comedian presenting the parody to not only present the alternative views, but to inform the audience the parody is critiquing the object.

The next characteristic is exposure and it occurred 18 times during the four clips. Exposure in a sense is a less direct version of ridicule. It lets the audience know there is something more they should be looking at and makes them view the parodied object with a more critical eye but does not directly offer ridicule or negative commentary. Stewart accomplished this when he told the audience in “Speech Therapy – Post-Racial” that if they found the State of the Union too straightforward, they should tune into CNN, and if they wanted to have their mind blown, they should tune into Chris Matthews. Both comments raised the audience’s awareness that there was something they should be looking or watching for in the coverage that was then shown, but it did not directly tell them what.

The exposure raises the audience’s awareness that there is even anything to question or examine and the ridicule guides it toward what the problem is. When Stewart responded to a clip of CNN by saying “don’t leave it there, why would you leave it there? You have 24 hours in a day. How much time do you need?”, it made the audience also
start questioning why they left it there. It also encourages critique of the quality of the coverage provided if the network is not able to thoroughly cover a story with 24 hours of on-air time. The analysis showed many examples of carnivalesque spectatorship and how it furthers the process of parody and encourages the beginnings of critique and awareness.

The last characteristic for carnivalesque spectatorship is making the object accessible. This was found 12 times while analyzing the clips. This is typically accomplished when the object is compared to a commonly understood reference or character. Stewart also replicated the system being parodied and used the same style or line or argument but with content that was more readily understood by the audience. For example, in “Temple of Hume,” Stewart presented a mock interview with Aasif Mandvi who sympathized with Brit Hume’s assertion that Christians are unfairly treated and went on to explain how he could not possibly understand because it was so easy being Muslim. Many of the examples given, such as trying to walk through airport security, were common current event knowledge so the audience could relate to the parody.

The next research question and corresponding operation is how does The Daily Show use leveling in its parody? Going back to Bakhtin’s carnivale, leveling is necessary if the original object is going to be critiqued at all by the audience. The object of parody is usually a public figure or power figure in some way in society. People are hesitant to criticize these agents because they fear negative consequences or that it is inappropriate and going against the social norm. Leveling allows for the audience to feel it is okay to
question and critique the object in question. This is the beauty of humor and has been since the times of Bakhtin’s carnivale.

Carnivale allows for analysis and critique that would not normally be acceptable. It gives the common person power to question the information given to them and have a dissenting voice. This is the very essence and purpose of a public sphere, to allow the common voice to question authority in the hopes of improving society and securing a better future. When Stewart uses reduction and refers to bodily functions such as sexual behavior, it makes the object, such as a news anchor human, just like the audience. It makes them feel the object is just like them and, therefore, they have permission to disagree with and critique it.

Leveling is the operation largely attempting to make people find the humor in the parody and allowing them to feel okay laughing at and examining the original message. This operation is accomplished by employing several characteristics. The first is reduction. This is when references to bodily functions are used, including references to the body’s organs. Absurdity can also be used to accomplish leveling. Lastly, leveling will have the characteristic of silliness and ultimately encourage laughter. Examples of other characteristics that emerged are word play, adding voiceover, and the altering of photos. However, these characteristics were found less than three times and, therefore, were not included in the final analysis following Berg’s (2007) criteria for a pattern.

Reduction is when the parody involves bodily functions or references to organs and occurred eight times. Stewart made a reference to a body part or sexual references
were also frequently used. In “Conservative Libertarian,” Stewart declared that “in my America no one tells people when they can masturbate” while doing a parody of Beck’s opinion of progressives.

Many of these characteristics were self-explanatory. When references were made to organs or sexual behavior, it was reduction. Photos of the original object were altered and terms used by the original object were subjected to wordplay. Silliness and absurdity were determined when it was clear that actions or comments were being exaggerated or taken to an extreme to parody the original object. Many times, it was clear Stewart was ultimately looking to get a laugh out of the audience usually by utilizing silliness or absurdity and most of the time it worked and laughter could be heard on the clip.

In “CNN Leaves it There,” Stewart explained the range of numbers presented by Tony Perkins who was discussing the number of Americans who cannot afford healthcare was similar to him stating that he weighed between 150 and 300 lbs, which, Stewart added, would make sense if he was 6 to 12 feet tall. The average person would be able to relate to height and weight more easily than large numbers that are in the millions related to population and the healthcare system.

Word play was also found four times. This could occur when Stewart used word play to title a clip such as “Temple of Hume.” The clip was about Brit Hume’s comments about religion, therefore relating to the “Temple” portion, and Hume rhymes with Doom, the word used in the original Indiana Jones title. Word play is also used to
make fun of the object. This occurred when Hume used the word “thus” in a clip and Stewart stated “thus I ask thee will though appear on Fox and Friends upon the marrow?”

Word play also makes the object seem less serious; it can provide an example of how a message provided by the object is silly like when he said the term conservative libertarian contains two great things that taste great together. It can also relate the object to a common item in society such as the word play of calling the clip “Temple of Hume” after the movie “Temple of Doom.” This is a popular movie with which most would at least be familiar and movies are fun and entertaining; therefore, the object is given a less intimidating and more light-hearted feel.

Silliness is yet another characteristic of leveling. Silliness was frequently used on *The Daily Show* and was discovered 21 times throughout the clips. Oftentimes, the silliness was acted out by Stewart. In “CNN Leaves it There,” Stewart picked up a pretend phone and talks into it, then stated, “I’m being told no one is talking to me now.” It is obvious Stewart’s hand is not a phone and, thus, no one could be talking to him in the first place making it silly from the start.

Silliness, the encouragement of laughter, and absurdity all work together to further the operation of leveling. Silliness and absurdity alone can encourage laughter. The act of laughter allows for a physical release from concern or stress and creates a relaxed atmosphere for the audience to feel safe. Silliness also shows the object is not always to be taken seriously or without consideration, that there may be another side to it that should be examined and wondered about. When Stewart implied Hume was
suggesting Woods needed a time machine when he really meant he needed a better religion, he raised awareness that the object’s message may be silly or inaccurate itself.

Encouraging laughter also emerged as a category for leveling and was found 30 times throughout the clips. Encouraging laughter is essential for parody since it is a form of humor and allows the audience to feel comfortable with the ridicule and criticism presented toward the object being parodied. Stewart accomplished this throughout the show. This characteristic was found in combination with some of the others, because the other characteristics often encourage laughter. For example, in “CNN Leaves it There,” Stewart got so frustrated he ripped his papers up and threw them behind him resulting in the audience laughing at his behavior. In “Speech Therapy – Post-Racial,” Stewart compared Chris Matthews to Ron Burgandy, which resulted in laughter since Ron Burgandy is a humorous character and not a typical comparison for a news anchor.

The last characteristic found in leveling is absurdity. There were eight instances of absurdity. This characteristic was also highly associated with encouraging laughter and silliness. Absurdity is often silly and the improbability of it often encourages laughter. The Daily Show presented absurdity in “CNN Leaves it There” when Jon Oliver claimed CNN was full of “goat fuckers.” It was completely irrelevant to any previous conversation or clip and an unlikely accusation. In “Temple of Hume,” Brit Hume was shown dressed up as Indiana Jones. This also represents a level of absurdity because it is clearly not true that Brit Hume is Indiana Jones.
Absurdity works similarly to silliness, but goes even further to illustrate the problems with the object’s message or views. By presenting an absurd idea or behavior in the setting of an imitation of the object, it makes the audience start to wonder about the validity of the original message and question whether it is also absurd, which often leads to critique. Leveling was prevalent in *The Daily Show*, according to the findings in the analysis, and is also an essential part to parody if it is going to contribute to the public sphere.

The fourth research question is how does *The Daily Show* offer competing voices for the public sphere? This relates to the transforming world speech operation. This is when the true critique is encouraged by portraying the original object or ideas it presents in a way outside the norm. The first characteristic of this operation was the use of dissenting voices. It was determined this was occurring when Stewart offered contradicting evidence or clearly stated disagreement. The second characteristic was alternative views. It was determined this was occurring when Stewart encouraged the audience to question the information being presented by the original object, but did not offer specific guidance on what to think or concrete proof of the original object’s information being wrong.

The final characteristic found for this operation is the alter ego of the original messages. This alter ego is largely at the heart of what parody is. When Stewart mimics the original object and offers a daft, silly, extreme version of it, it is an alter ego. This alter ego also represents the views and ideas the original object does not present and does
not want the audience to consider. It is the alternative to the norm presented by the original object.

Dissenting views were present when Stewart clearly stated opposing facts to those given by the network or anchor, or a negative comment was given toward the object of the parody and occurred 13 times. At many points, he offered a dissenting voice to the audience that often contradicted the parodied network or news anchor. Sometimes this was done directly. For example, CNN made a statement that twitter was interesting in “Speech Therapy – Post-Racial” and Stewart simply responded after showing the clip that no, it really was not.

However, sometimes the dissenting voice is more subtle. In the same clip, Wyatt Cenac takes part in a mock interview in which he was asked about the network’s coverage of the State of the Union. Wyatt Cenac offers this analysis “the State of the Union was rendered meaningless by rogue analysis from our media’s pompous punditry.” By presenting a mock interview, Wyatt is able to criticize the media’s coverage and offer a different view to the audience without directly saying that the coverage was bad.

Dissenting voices also occurred in “CNN Leaves it There” when Stewart responded to Senator Jon Kyl’s comment that malpractice reform would save the country $100-200 billion. Stewart stated, “that’s an impressively high, citation free, entirely made up number.” Then Stewart proceeded to show a Congressional Budget Office document that estimated the savings at only $11 billion for 2009 and $54 billion over a 10-year period. Stewart also more directly disagreed with the object of the parody at
times. For example, in “Speech Therapy – Post-Racial,” CNN stated that twitter was interesting and Stewart responded that it really was not, but he would let them prove it was not by showing a clip of their coverage rather than arguing with them.

The next characteristic the clips were analyzed for was alternative views, which occurred 12 times. Stewart often raised issues with the object of the parody, but did not give direction like he did in the dissenting voices characteristic. “Temple of Hume” offers a good example of how this is accomplished. After showing a clip of Hume stating he does not believe he was proselytizing, Stewart stated Hume made a simple suggestion that Wood’s faith is not adequate to save his soul. Stewart essentially re-worded what Hume said in a way that made the audience think about it differently or encouraged the audience to view it in an alternative way. He also accomplished this in “Conservative Libertarian” when he used Glenn Beck’s “rules” for argumentation and ended up arguing that if you believe faith is a good foundation for morality in society then you will end up with totalitarian theology.

Oftentimes, Stewart will simply plant the seed that the network or news anchor needs to be examined further. This encourages critique and ultimately alternative views from those presented by the mainstream news media. In “Temple of Hume,” Stewart explained Hume made a simple suggestion that the faith practiced by Woods and 385 million other people was not adequate to save his soul. Stewart presented this in a way that made it seem he was just restating information already given; however, his restatement presents facts left out and he reads between the lines. This gets the
audience’s attention through surprising them with new information and encourages them to start questioning the original message.

Stewart is also able to encourage the audience to consider alternative views in his impersonations of news anchors. In “Conservative Libertarian,” Stewart did a parody of Glenn Beck. In this parody he replicated many of the argument styles Beck uses. A clip is shown where Beck states he is a conservative and a libertarian. Stewart then analyzed what conservative libertarian means using Beck’s ideology. He determined the “serv” part of conservative refers to being a slave. Then he stated he did not want to be a slave (he was pretending to be Beck as part of the parody), but that it was his ideology so it must be true. This allowed the audience to make a connection between Beck’s ideology and the ridiculous assertion that conservative implies slave. This then leads the audience to question Beck’s ideology and to consider there may be alternative views to the information he presented and what those would be.

The alter ego characteristic was found nine times throughout the four clips. The alter ego is an act allowing for a replicated version of the original object that is humorous. This characteristic is prevalent in “Conservative Libertarian” in which Stewart mimicked Glenn Beck in appearance and behavior. However, the behaviors he exhibited were exaggerated. For example, at one point he used the chalkboard, a staple on Beck’s show, to explain how the term conservative libertarian leads to Bert from Sesame Street being a dictator just like Hitler. Clearly Beck would not argue this specific topic, but the alter ego allowed for a daft or ridiculous version of the original object and
message. In “CNN Leaves it There,” Aasif Mandvi, in a mock interview made to replicate the CNN network news shows, stated daft random numbers to prove CNN was a leader in offering the facts.

By explaining that Tony Perkins’s estimate for the population of America was off by a factor of Australia, the audience was given a way to understand how large the mistake was. It also illustrated how poor CNN’s fact checking and information gathering was, that they did not even question the numbers provided. Exposing the object allowed Stewart to plant the suggestion that the object needed further consideration and examination. When he asked open-ended questions like “what did you have to leave it there for?”, he made the audience start wondering also about the choice to not continue the interview. This also leads to questioning about the quality of the journalism provided by this network.

Using an alter ego is another way competitive voices are encouraged by The Daily Show. The alter ego is often the parody act used to suggest the dissenting or alternative views. The alter ego is a daft representation of the original object. This alter ego represents the network or news anchor, but offers a different interpretation or information than the original. This connects the original object with a competitive voice that can compete with the voice or message accepted as the norm. In “Temple of Hume,” Aasif Mandvi presented an alter ego of the Fox news anchors and discussed how he never realized how hard it was to be a Christian because it was so easy to be a Muslim. In this alter ego, he was able to raise questions about Fox’s coverage of Muslims and Hume’s
suggestion that Christians are treated unfairly. This offered an alternative voice to the one presented by Fox news.

After addressing the first four research questions, it is now possible to answer the fifth and last research question: Is *The Daily Show* contributing to the public sphere? By analyzing clips of the show for the four operations of parody, this study was able to determine whether *The Daily Show* presents good parody. This was defined earlier as parody that does not just represent a form of humor looking for a good laugh, but that raises awareness and critiques. *The Daily Show’s* use of doubling presents an object, in this case, a news network or anchor, to parody. Through doubling, the audience is able to determine what is being parodied. This allows *The Daily Show* to focus on the voices in our society that have authority to inform and establish social norms.

Once the audience is focused on the object, *The Daily Show* uses leveling to make the audience comfortable. Society is often uncomfortable criticizing and mocking figures of authority. This is where parody can use humor through word play and absurdity to bring the parodied object down to the same level as the common person or audience. Creating a sense of comfort and ability to relate then makes a safe zone where the audience is open to the criticisms the parody will present.

Then carnivalesque spectatorship can take place. This makes the content being parodied more accessible to an average audience and exposes the news network or anchor to ridicule. From this, the parody is able to present dissenting and alternative views. The parody taking place from the existence of all of these operations is one that can
encourage the audience to begin critiquing the figures of authority themselves and the information they present. This engaged sense of citizenry where people become involved and have alternative views to offer as a result of critique is essential to the existence in the public sphere.

*The Daily Show*'s ability to present parody that critiques and offers an alternative view itself is a contribution to the public sphere. *The Daily Show*, as part of a large television network, is able to reach a large portion of the public; therefore, its own critique is a contribution to the public sphere along with its ability to encourage a large section of the public to become engaged through criticism. Hence, the answer to research question five is yes, *The Daily Show* does contribute to the public sphere.
Chapter 4

CONCLUSION

This study allowed the researcher to examine parody within The Daily Show. As described earlier in the literature review, humor can take many forms, but parody can raise public awareness and encourage criticism and discussion. However, for parody to accomplish this, it must include the four operations analyzed: doubling, carnivalesque spectatorship, leveling, and transforming the world of speech. These operations set parody apart from humor used solely for a laugh and amusement.

With the above operations in place, parody is able to contribute to a public discussion and raise awareness and the level of debate on current events. These are classic characteristics of citizens in a healthy and active democracy’s public sphere. The Daily Show has the unique position of being part of the mass news media. This allows it to reach many people and, therefore, have the possibility to really make an impact. This study helped determine whether the operations of parody were in place and, hence, whether The Daily Show was contributing to the public sphere.

With infotainment rising in popularity and the viewership of mainstream news media falling The Daily Show plays an increasing role in keeping the public informed. Also, by using parody it is providing critique and alternative views that are missing from the mainstream news media. This will hopefully result in an increase in citizen engagement especially among young viewers. It will also fill the void that is present in
the current mainstream media since they no longer adequately fulfill the role of
“watchdog.”
Chapter 5

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Some limitations of this study stem from the nature of qualitative content analysis. Since the analysis was conducted by the individual researcher, there is no way to compare and cross check it against others. Also, while coding helps prevent bias from the researcher, the analysis is subject to the researcher’s interpretation of emergent patterns (Platt, 2010). This makes it difficult to replicate the study and generalize it. It is also important to note that since Jon Stewart’s show is part of a large media corporation it could be argued that he is actually part of the system. Whether he is truly part of the same mainstream news media system that he critiques and whether this affects his ability to critique remains elusive.

Now that it has been determined The Daily Show is contributing to the public sphere, it would be beneficial to examine what it is contributing. The arguments and ideologies presented in the parodies by The Daily Show should be examined as the next step to more specifically understand its impact. This study also presents a need for more research on the content of infotainment in general. The literature shows that to a large degree infotainment is either regarded as unimportant or the studies of infotainment focus on audience surveys. It is important to consider the actual content being presented to the audience in addition to their responses so there is a full understanding of the infotainment genre becoming increasingly popular.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Code Sheet

Name of Clip _____________________
Date of Clip _____________________
Length of Clip _____________________

Operation _____________________
Clip Title _____________________

Qualities of the Operation _____________________

________________________________________

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## APPENDIX B

### Codes and Definitions

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