“Focus Your Indiscriminate Rage in a Useful Direction”: Understanding Audience Engagement and Participation in the News Satire Genre

By

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Abstract

This project aims to study the generic characteristics of current news satire on television, focusing on how audiences interact with this genre in order to learn more about audiences' expectations and responses to these programs and how that influences the shows, and thus the genre itself. I hypothesize that this interaction of programs and audiences plays an essential role in the genre's rhetorical shaping and success. In order to reveal this, I will look at the history of news satire in the United States from a rhetorical perspective, building to focus on some of the televised news satire programs airing today. Looking to *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* as programs with audience-centered conventions, I will argue that these shows in particular influenced subsequent iterations of the genre that hold a significant focus on engaging active audience uptake, taking the genre beyond a hybrid of comedy and news. Through a study of hashtags on Twitter associated with *Last Week Tonight*, I will then think about the ways in which these generic changes to news satire have manifested impact and effect on the world, reinforcing calls to action as a developing convention of the news satire genre. Finally, I will examine a controversial incident from *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee* to examine how audiences emerge through media coverage of the show that presents a limited view not only of the show, but of its genre; the intent of this case study is to complicate the notion of audience interaction with news satire, considering what happens when additional audiences emerge. Overall, it is my goal in this project to examine how the news satire genre has evolved to encourage audience action, what kinds of action might be possible through the genre, and how audiences' genre expectations influence the genre itself.

This project combines work from rhetoric and composition in genre and audience to the genre of news satire, which is most commonly viewed through the lens of media studies or

communications. Scholars in these fields have taken up the study of news satire to examine its effects on audience knowledge and civic participation, but little has been done from a rhetorical standpoint to understand how audiences engage with news satire and how the genre has changed over time as a result of creator and audience interactions. This project contributes to knowledge in rhetoric and composition about activist audiences formed around a media genre that has not yet been thoroughly examined within the field.

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Chapter 1 – The Audience Wants to Laugh: Situating Ourselves in Current US News Satire

News satire as a genre would not exist without news, and news plays an important role in America's democracy. Journalists work to report news as it happens, keeping people informed about events occurring in the world around them. The existence and success of news satire suggests, though, that Americans' relationship with news is a complicated one. Satire, broadly, can take many forms, but critique is always at its heart; in the case of *news* satire, this includes critique of current events, politics, politicians, and the news and journalism in itself. Laura Basu writes, "While news is in theory supposed to serve a democratic function, informing citizens of what is happening in the world and thereby enabling them to make informed political decisions, in practice mainstream news is confusing, slippery and disorienting" (241). The increasing commercialization of news and relentless 24-hour news cycle compound with phenomena like the current administration's use of the phrase "fake news" to discredit journalists and the increasing spread of genuinely false news online and across social media platforms to create an atmosphere of news fatigue and distrust. From a rhetorical perspective, Bruce McComiskey has connected this with the use of "unethical rhetorical strategies," led most visibly by President Donald Trump and spreading into the public discourse, changing the way that people (particularly those in positions of power) communicate in order to achieve their goals as well as how the public consumes this messaging (3). McComiskey describes this dishonest and unethical rhetoric as "post-truth" rhetoric, attaching it to the Oxford Dictionary's 2016 word of the year (5). "Post-truth," is an adjective "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" ("Oxford Word"); in other words, observable truth and reality are rejected in favor of content

that aligns with one's own conception of and feelings about the world around them. McComiskey reasons that the disintegration of the very concept of truth is important for post-truth rhetoric to flourish:

> Lies, fallacies, and doublespeak are recognized as false and unethical rhetorical strategies because they can be compared unfavorably to reasoned opinions and universal truths. Rhetors must *know the facts* in order to mislead through lies; they must *recognize the truth* in order to deceive through fallacies; and they must *understand reality* in order to manipulate through doublespeak. . . . In a post-truth world (without truth *or* lies), language becomes purely strategic, without reference to anything other than itself. (8)

As post-truth rhetoric seemingly holds truths and lies to be equal in value, it becomes easier for people in power to continue to use language as strategy without regard for accuracy. This instability makes it more important now than ever that people look critically at information and its sources; unfortunately, as McComiskey acknowledges, the rise of post-truth rhetoric also makes the practice of teaching how to critically evaluate sources (and why this evaluation matters) even more difficult.

One side effect of post-truth rhetoric may be a growing desire for sources that actively critique and question the world around us; it can be difficult to sift through the noise of a 24-hour news cycle and the countless news sources that have emerged on the internet. This function of critique is central to new satire, which interrogates not only current events, but also journalism itself. Working as a kind of "fifth estate" (Sotos 34), news satire "keeps in check the 'fourth estate' – journalism – which is failing in its democratic duties to hold the powerful to account and inform the citizenry" (Basu 242). Sophia A. McClennen and Remy M. Maisel argue that

'satire has become one of the major sources – if not *the* major source – of social critique in the United States" and that it works as a kind of public educator, encouraging people to think differently and "play[ing] a significant role in shaping public perception about major social issues" (23). Further, in McClennen's work, *America According to Stephen Colbert: Satire as Public Pedagogy*, she makes the case that satire is "uniquely suited to provoking critical reflection" and "underscor[ing] the absurdity, ignorance, and prejudice of commonly accepted behavior" (1). In these ways, scholars have made the case that news satire is a genre that can generate meaningful public thought and conversation and even presents a model for what reasoned political debate should look like. Geoffrey Baym posits that shows like *The Daily Show* offer a kind of "alternative journalism, one that uses satire to interrogate power, parody to critique contemporary news, and dialogue to enact a model of deliberative democracy" (261). Baym argues that *The Daily Show* in particular advocates for a political system based on a foundation of people in conversation or reasoned debate (272-273), something that often seems difficult to do in our very charged political climate; if we consider the models that we are given for political debate to be those reflected on 24-hour news networks, in which individuals with polarized beliefs often speak or yell over one another, it is easy to see that we need new models for productive political conversations. Baym argues that Stewart's *Daily Show* is a good example of this model because "[t]he goal of the discussions is not the tearing down of the 'other' side (although Stewart never hides his own political preferences) or some banal prediction of the shape of things to come, but rather an effort to gain greater understanding of national problems and their potential solutions" (271).

While I fully agree with Baym's argument, I want to take it a step further: what do audiences, then, do with the information and the model of political critique and conversation

provided by news satire like *The Daily Show*? John T. Gilmore writes, "Satire is only effective if it is perceived by persons other than its author to be such" (3). In other words, the success of satire is dependent on audience response; thus, it seems important to look further into how audiences engage with news satire and the kinds of interactions that the audience has with one another and with the shows themselves. Further, in this project, I want to explore the ways that news satire has created space for audiences to respond and take real, meaningful action; how are news satire shows not only encouraging conversation, but active political engagement? How do the actions of audiences influence creators and thus, the genre itself? How do multiple audiences, particularly thinking about those that encounter the genre through secondary media like news coverage, engage with the genre, and what impact do they have on it?

Exploring these questions will aid in understanding the role that the audience has played in shaping the news satire genre and taking up the genre as action. Work by scholars like Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Carolyn Miller, and Amy Devitt, have established that genres are more than a means of classifying texts; genres are "stylistic and substantive responses to perceived situational demands" (Campbell and Jamieson 19) that are used to accomplish certain actions in the world (Miller 151). Genres respond to situations in the world but also help to construct and define those situations (Devitt, "Generalizing" 575-76). "Genres operate not just *as* social action but also *for* social action" (Devitt, "Genres *for* Social Action" 2), meaning that our critical awareness of a genre's effects can assist in creating more deliberate debate and meaningful action, which I argue is a clear goal of news satire. Genres are certainly shaped by the composers who create them, but they are also subject to the audiences who receive and use them, and the participants in this relationship must be responsive to one another in order for the genre to successfully accomplish the desired action. It is this strategic, reciprocal relationship

that, I will argue, can be seen and understood in the news satire genre, as it has been reshaped by multiple audiences. Thus, in order to answer my research questions, I will use a genre analysis approach, drawing on scholarship in rhetorical genre theory and audience. These concepts and scholarship will be defined and explored further later in this chapter.

In order to introduce this study, I will first provide a brief overview of the history of news satire in the United States; this overview is not intended to be exhaustive, but it allows for a look at how the genre has evolved over time, providing important framing for this study. I will then review genre and audience scholarship that will inform my argument before overviewing the next four chapters.

A Brief History of Televised News Satire in the United States

In this project, I argue that American televised news satire has evolved over time to increasingly rely on and respond to audience engagement; thus, it is important to understand the history of the genre. Recognizing a genre's antecedents and evolution is helpful in understanding how current forms of the genre emerged and the contextual "baggage" that they carry with them. In her article, "Antecedent Genres as Rhetorical Constraint," Kathleen Jamieson argues that in unprecedented rhetorical situations, rhetors draw on past experiences and on genres formed by others in response to similar situations (408). The antecedent genre may not be appropriate to the new situation, though, and it may be broken with varying degrees of difficulty. Still, she argues, through this process, emerging genres will still hold the "chromosomal imprint" of its ancestral genres (406). Considering antecedents helps understand genre features and functions as well as why they might exist in the way that they do; Carolyn R. Miller and Dawn Shepherd's study of blogs found that the ship's log, commonplace books, anthologies, editorials, diaries all shared features with blogs, a genre that emerged as a result of technological advancement and recurring

personal exigence of self-expression and self-disclosure (1464-66). News satire emerges with many characteristics of comedic genres such as stand-up and observational comedy, but it shares much of its DNA with journalistic genres. In this way, news satire is a hybrid genre, combining the conventions of two component genres, comedy and news. These conventions have evolved over time, however, from satire that commented on real world occurrences or even fabricated fake, though somewhat feasible, situations to currently holding a focus on content that offers in-depth information and pointed critiques on current events, creating a new, third genre. This tracing of the history of televised news satire will offer a strong foundation for understanding how this evolution took place and how both creators and audiences participated in shaping the genre that we see today. I argue that current iterations, particularly as they increasingly call for viewer action and engagement, make news satire more than a simple hybrid, but a distinct genre of its own.

I am focusing primarily on televised news satire that aired in the United States; thus, I will not cover written news satire (such as *The Onion*) or news satire originating in other countries (such as Canada's *The Rick Mercer Report*) unless necessary due to their crossover with relevant programs. My focus here is primarily on shows using current events and political figures in their humor; there are a host of comedy shows that are *political* in their content (ex. *Veep*, *The Dave Chappelle Show*, *Key and Peele*, etc.) but are not necessarily engaging with current news and politics as it happens or using journalistic forms to frame their comedy. I am also not including late night monologues such as those on *The Tonight Show* or *Late Night*; my focus is instead on self-contained programs and recurring segments like "Weekend Update" on *Saturday Night Live*.

The first iteration of televised news satire in the United States was *That Was the Week That Was* (*TW3*), airing on NBC from 1965-66. Developing out of a program from the British Broadcasting Network (BBC), both programs featured David Frost, the English talk-show host and journalist; Frost is well-known for his later work interviewing politicians, most notably his interview with Richard Nixon that later became the subject of the 2008 film *Frost/Nixon*. The show was filmed in front of a live studio audience and featured songs and sketches focused on current events. In an interview with *The New York Times* prior to the show's premiere in the US, Frost suggested that he hoped the show would follow the same model as the British version, relying on sketches "'contributed freelance by clever journalists who were always up on the news'" ("ORIGINATOR HERE TO ASSIST"). Frost noted, "'Humor must come from a current event and then make a comment on it. . . . People are tired of hearing a lot of moraleboosting [sic] nonsense. They want to hear the truth.'" The US edition of *TW3* is now considered mostly lost, with much of what remains of the show being housed in the Library of Congress and the Paley Center for Media's Library; thus, access to viewing the show is quite limited. Ramsey Ess writes that the structure of the show began with a theme song "sung by folk singer Nancy Ames who would sing new lyrics each week to summarize the week's events in a flippant way, only to be interrupted by a quick sketch or joke on the topic she was just singing about." After the theme music,

> Henry Fonda serves as the anchor of the show, and talks about an item in the news or a particular social trend which then bridges into a sketch about that idea. For example, he talks about the general slide in morals in America, then throws it to a correspondent in Treeville, NY who interviews the reverend of that town,

> played by a young Gene Hackman who talks about how big sin in his town has fallen off, but they're having a record year for little sin. (Ess)

Thus, content for *TW3* was based in current events, but often branched into mining more general topics for humor that could connect with a wide audience. *TW3* did not air for long, but its commitment to pushing the envelope with political humor made space for other programs in the same vein to emerge.

One of the first programs to fill the void of *TW3* was *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*, premiering in 1967 on CBS. Arguably, this program paved the way for the news satire we have today and the content they are able to cover. Similar to *TW3*, *Smothers Brothers* consisted of songs and sketches, featuring a variety of celebrity guest stars and musicians. Notably, CBS' first press release for the show noted that the show contained "'a unique feature in television comedy, an editorial. The premiere editorial deals with the war on poverty'" (Bianculli 78). This detail was removed in a correction issued before the premiere of the show, but the "editorial" aspect of the show was eventually introduced in the fourth episode, which David Bianculli notes is where the political content was much more amplified (83). These segments always ended with an address where viewers could write in and request a transcript of the evening's editorial, importantly representing one of the first invitations for audiences to interact directly with the genre. During the show's run, "more than fifteen thousand letters arrived each week" requesting these transcripts (85). Editorial segments were hosted by Pat Paulsen and covered a range of topics; while the first editorial segment covered the somewhat benign topic of automobile safety, the segments quickly took on more controversial issues. The third editorial asked the question, "Should the Use of Firearms Be Restricted?", a topic that continues to inspire fervor today. Mason Williams, musician and friend of the Smothers brothers noted, "'The first one is making

fun of the concept of editorials. But later on, they became a vehicle for comments on social issues . . . First, it was about the form; then it got to be about content" (85). The show even ran a candidate for president in 1968, a topic I will cover in more detail in Chapter 2. These interactive elements of *Smothers Brothers* make it the early iteration of the genre that has the most in common with today's news satire shows that seek to legitimately criticize politicians and policy and engage audiences outside of simply viewing the show. *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* continued to flirt with controversy throughout its run, consistently running into trouble with CBS censors from the beginning; a sketch directly satirizing the censors was cut from the show in season one (Bianculli 283). Eventually, in April 1969, the brothers were fired from CBS, ostensibly for submitting a tape of the show late (305). In reality, many at the network, including CBS' new president, Robert Wood, simply wanted to end the ever-continuing controversy and strife over content. The show was formally cancelled, and news of it appeared on Walter Cronkite and in the *New York Times* (309).

As *Smothers Brothers* pushed the envelope on critical commentary and audience engagement, *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In* was also airing on NBC, beginning in 1968 and running into 1973, and was groundbreaking for its quick, 30 second sketches and snappy humor. The show's humor covered a wide variety of topics and did not always directly engage in news and politics; notably, though, the show did host Republican presidential candidate Richard Nixon to begin its second season. In an interview, the creator, George Schlatter, expressed some regret over this choice:

> After the episode, I thought, what did I do? I made him into a nice guy. We decided to ask [Hubert Humphrey, Nixon's opponent in the 1968 election] to say, "Yes, please do sock it to me," but he wouldn't do it. We followed him all over

> trying to get him. He often said afterward that he thinks not doing it may have cost him the election. Sometimes people say I helped get Nixon elected. I've had to live with that. (Freeman)

Like the Smothers Brothers, the writers of *Laugh-In* often challenged the censors in regard to what could be said on air, particularly in regard to the Vietnam War, which helped push boundaries for subsequent programs, especially in the 1990s and 2000s, when a focus on real world events and politics would become prevalent.

One of the most well-known and long-running news satire segments on TV is *Saturday Night Live*'s "Weekend Update," which began on the first SNL broadcast in October 11, 1975 (Day and Thompson 173). This differs from the previous examples in that "Weekend Update" is a short segment airing weekly as part of the longer *SNL* broadcast. The segment was initially hosted by Chevy Chase and has since seen Dan Aykroyd, Jane Curtin, Dennis Miller, Norm Macdonald, Jimmy Fallon, Tina Fey, Amy Poehler, and Seth Meyers, among others take on anchor duties. The segment is currently hosted by *SNL* co-head writers, Colin Jost and Michael Che ("Weekend Update"). Chase's initial turn in the host spot formed the blueprint for "Weekend Update":

> Rather than focusing on trenchant political commentary, it became more of a vehicle for developing comic personalities, while taking the self-seriousness of public figures down a notch. In this template, the anchor quickly jumped from story to story, creating a rapid-fire succession of one-liner jokes, most of which began with a true-to-life premise or picture but were followed by a comically fictional twist. So, for instance, in the opening joke of the first "Update," Chase announced that "dedication ceremonies for the new Teamsters Union building

> headquarters took place today in Detroit," a real headline of the day, but he continued, "where union president Fitzsimmons is reported to have said that former president Jimmy Hoffa will always be a cornerstone in the organization" (October 11, 1975). (Day and Thompson 173)

"Weekend Update," then, serves as an early example of news satire turning away from political commentary and criticism and toward simply using current events and politics as subject matter that provides a foundation for jokes, a trend that would dominate through the 1980s. While most "Weekend Update" jokes pull from real headlines, these vary from national news to specific local stories that lend themselves to humorous punchlines. The hosts often welcome guests as well, who vary from caricatures of actual political figures and celebrities to fictional characters developed by the writers and cast members. "Weekend Update" also did not shy away from making fun of journalists themselves; visually, the "Weekend Update" anchor sits behind a news desk with a stack of papers and presents the news in much the same way as any other anchor might, representing the first attempt to directly satirize the look and feel of a nightly news report. This model was established from the segment's beginning: "Chase played the part of a newscaster with conviction, rarely if ever breaking to giggle at his own jokes or otherwise acknowledge that he was not really a newscaster" (173). This "comic lack of professionalism stood in stark contrast to the posturing of network news anchors at the time," a trend that continued and adapted throughout the years as various hosts took over hosting duties (174). As Amber Day and Ethan Thompson point out, the personalities of hosts have been allowed to shine through and play off of one another; for example, during Jimmy Fallon and Tina Fey's joint hosting stint, Fallon's demeanor is silly and he appears less interested in current events while Fey, "more than any of the other 'Update' anchors, periodically spoke her mind about larger

political debate and public life, similar to the more politically invested *Daily Show* and *Colbert Report*" (177-178). More currently, Jost and Che often begin their "Weekend Update" segments by commenting on national news before transitioning into more absurd and silly segments, balancing the two approaches.

While the 1980s saw news satire that generally did not provide critical commentary on the news, the decade still saw experimentation in the news satire genre, pulling away from the live sketch show format that had been so popular in the 1960s and 70s. HBO premiered *Not Necessarily the News* as a special in 1982 and continued it as a series in 1983. The show relied on quick cuts between short segments, many which used actual news footage recut to create satirical news stories, but segments also included "commercial parodies and fake interviews with famous people, in which a *Not Necessarily the News* actor asks his or her own questions to edited sound bites from a real news interview" (Weinstein). The regular series premiere, airing on January 3, 1983, featured a segment with sports commentators and footage of a football game, a charity commercial for "The Distress Center for Children Named by Celebrity Parents," a film review segment called "Talking Pictures," a sketch focusing on the president's Oval Office secretary, and the introduction of "Sniglets," a recurring segment about words that are not in the dictionary, but should be. In another example of audience participation, Sniglets was an interactive segment, encouraging viewers to send in their own unrecognized words to a PO Box. "Sniglets," then, did offer one way for audiences to participate in the show's content. *Not Necessarily the News* used a laugh track rather than filming in front of a live audience. John Moffitt, the show's executive producer, also worked as a director on *Saturday Night Live* and was the creator and producer of ABC's late night sketch comedy effort, *Fridays* (Weinstein). He based his idea for the show on a British news satire program, *Not the Nine O'Clock News*, which

also relied on using real news footage to create comedy. In 1989, the format of the show changed to a more traditional news broadcast appearance, with "two anchors sitting at a news desk." According to a *Los Angeles Times* article written at the time, though, the content of the show otherwise stayed largely the same. The anchors read news stories, similar to the style of *SNL*'s "Weekend Update," but were also used to transition between segments.

More innovations to the genre came in 1987, when FOX premiered the *Wilton North Report*, a show that one of its writers, Nell Scoville, describes as "a program that had many similarities to *The Daily Show With Jon Stewart*" and "shortest lived late night show of all time." The show represented an attempt to pull the younger demographic away from *The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson* and hired a stable of young, up and coming writers, including Conan O'Brien, now well known for his hosting work in late night television, and Greg Daniels, who went on to co-create *The Office* and many other comedy shows. The show aimed to have a more political bent than the late night monologues of the 1980s, more resembling "Weekend Update" in its focus. Content included field correspondent pieces, sketches, interviews, and a musical guest each night. One recurring segment was called "The Random Report," which sounded like a hard news story at first, but "then descended into useless, tangential facts" (Scoville). One such segment began, "Always by the president's side, a faithful companion and, some say, a major voice in policy-making decisions, but how much is really known about…Rex Reagan?" At that, the camera zoomed in on President Reagan's dog. Impressively, *The Wilton North Report* was an hour-long program that aired four days a week with a writing staff of about 10, made up of people who wrote for print and those with experience on shows like *Not Necessarily the News*, which the show's content mirrored in some ways. The show proved to be unsustainable, however, and only aired 21 episodes before being cancelled. Still, *The Wilton North Report* was

innovative in its attempt to create a daily news satire program, a model which would become the norm into the 1990s and 2000s.

The 1990s continued a trend of experimentation in the news satire genre with several shows trying out different formats. There was also more of a turn back toward critical commentary on news and current events rather than simply using it as subject matter. These shows were often led by fairly well-known public figures, usually comedians. *Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher* began on Comedy Central in 1993 before moving to ABC in 1997; the show aired four nights a week and relied on a roundtable format to discuss current events with a rotation of guests, from politicians and commentators to celebrities. Like other late night talk shows, *Politically Incorrect* began with a monologue from Maher before transitioning to the larger conversation. While the format was a refreshing contrast to other late night network shows, "it always hindered the show's ability to get A-list celebrity guests – stars who were more than willing to discuss their new movie but less so their feelings about, say, abortion" (Brownfield). The show often courted controversy, and Maher's statements six days after the September 11th attacks, arguing with the idea that the terrorists were cowards, may have led to the show's ultimate end. *Politically Incorrect* was cancelled by ABC in 2002, though Maher quickly landed another show at HBO with his *Real Time* series in 2003, which still airs today. *Real Time* took a similar format to *Politically Incorrect*, with a monologue early in the show and multiple guests to discuss current topics. The show found increased freedom in its home on a paid-subscription channel rather than a network, with "guest bookings trend[ing] less toward Hollywood actors and more toward political wonks, authors and public intellectuals" (Weiss). The show still opens with a monologue and features both one-on-one interviews and larger panel discussions. HBO airs the show live on Friday nights. Maher's personal "willingness to breach

lockstep left-wing politics" and speak in favor of "issues such as gay marriage, religion, marijuana legalization and the environment" before they found widespread support have led some journalists, like *The Washington Post*'s Jeff Weiss, to state "that he laid the groundwork for *The Daily Show,*" creating the important antecedent of news satire to interrogate power and dominant ideologies.

News satire programs took yet another form in the 1990s into early 2000, when Michael Moore hosted two news satire programs that took on more of a news-magazine style similar to CBS's *60 Minutes*. *TV Nation* began on NBC in 1994 (Schneider). *Entertainment Weekly* described the program as "endless variations on David Letterman's outside-the-studio stunts" but with the goal of more political bite (Tucker). Segments included Moore "try[ing] to purchase slaves in the last days before [Mississippi's] belated ratification of the 13th Amendment takes effect," "show[ing] how much easier it is for a white ex-con to get a New York taxi than a black, award-winning actor" and attempting to "hug all 50 governors" (Johnson). In 1999, Moore's second news satire program, *The Awful Truth*, premiered in 1999 on Bravo. The program was fairly similar to *TV Nation*, featuring "Moore's trademark 'guerrilla video' style" (*The Awful Truth)* and described by the *LA Times* as "a hybrid of staged mischief, ambush journalism and tenacious muckraking" (Rosenberg). Segments often included Moore going directly to people in the news; for example, the first episode features a segment where Moore greets Ken Starr on Starr's front lawn with a cast of people dressed as colonial settlers, the argument being that the *Starr Report* and prosecuting Clinton for his affair was a witch hunt. Segments were broken up by Moore onstage talking directly to a live studio audience. Both shows worked to take news satire directly into the world, and whether those interactions ended in humor or uncomfortable

confrontation, they represented a different spin on the genre that was also taken up by *The Daily Show* correspondents and their taped field pieces.

Notably, the 1990s also saw the beginning of *The Daily Show*, which was initially hosted by Craig Kilborn. The show premiered on July 22, 1996 and followed the format of a traditional newscast, with headlines from the anchor desk "followed by 'Other News,' then usually a pretaped 'field piece' with one of the correspondents, and finishing up with Kilborn interviewing an actor or musician promoting their new movie or TV show or album" (Smith xvii). Topics ranged from hard hitting news to more "pop-culture-and-lifestyle" segments, and the show could often be "mean-spirited," harshly targeting figures like Monica Lewinsky and focusing field pieces on outsider figures like "true believers in UFOs and aliens." In 1998, CBS offered hosting duties for *The Late Late Show* to Kilborn, signaling his exit (xviii). Stewart was hired to take over *The Daily Show* later that year, after many auditions; Kent Jones, a writer for the show noted, "He was a name, and he had a good reputation. Hiring Jon is Comedy Central saying this is an important show to them" (3). Stewart quickly indicated a desire to change the show, making it more focused on social critique on significant topics rather than easy shots at pop culture; he drew inspiration from George Carlin, "who wove social commentary into his jokes and riffs about dirty words, organized religion, and hypocritical politicians" (6). As Mo Rocca, a correspondent for the show, said, "[Jon] had resolved that the show needed to have a point of view and couldn't just be the kid at the back of the classroom throwing spitballs in all directions" (7). Rather than relying on made up news stories or seeking wacky individuals for interviews, the show focused more on headlines of the day. "During the Kilborn era, it was about 'How can we seem like we've gone too far?' With Jon, we went from creating the news – creating funny spoof headlines – to making fun of the news. That was a big change," said Justin Melkmann, a

producer for the show. For the writers of the show, this also meant spending more time with topics; according to researcher and senior producer Adam Radikoff, “They were longer and had more power and research to them, and more tape” (6). Stewart described his intent for the show as “pointed, purposeful, intentional, surgical,” calling audiences to think critically about the content being covered (8). This shift after Stewart’s takeover and *The Daily Show*’s impact on news satire will be explored with more depth in Chapter 2. Stewart’s approach would prove successful, and led to a spin-off program with *Daily Show* correspondent, Stephen Colbert, the first of several correspondents to lead their own news satire programs.

The Colbert Report, beginning on Comedy Central in 2005, offers the first example of a show formed completely around a parody of a specific type of news personality. Colbert’s character was an over-the-top parody of pundits like Fox News’ Bill O’Reilly. This character was developed years prior as Colbert did a version of him on *The Dana Carvey Show*: “a self-important, trench-coated reporter who does on-location stories in a way that suggests his own presence is the real scoop” (McGrath). This character later made some appearances on *The Daily Show* through short advertisements for a show that didn’t exist, “‘The Colbert Réport,’ which promised to drive ‘straight past the issues.’ These bits were mostly just a jab at O’Reilly” (McGrath). While “Weekend Update” represented the first direct parody of newscasters on television, *Colbert* offers the first impression of a specific person in this role. Once *The Colbert Report* became a 30-minute show on Comedy Central, its format was similar to that of a pundit’s show on a cable news network, focusing on headlines and pieces read by Colbert and guest interviews. The show also featured recurring segments such as “The Word,” where Colbert’s talking points were juxtaposed with satirical on-screen text; “Better Know a District” where Colbert interviews US representatives from various districts; and “Tip of the Hat/Wag of the

Finger," where Colbert approves or disapproves of current events or public figures. The show found great success airing after *The Daily Show* and the two shows crossed over often, with Colbert popping in to the end of the program to chat with Stewart before his own show began. *Colbert* participated in a number of unique endeavors, including starting its own Super PAC; Stewart and Colbert also collaborated on real life events such as the "Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear" in 2010. Both of these examples clearly illustrate the genre's shift into audience activism and action, and I will visit these topics in more depth in Chapter 2.

In contrast to *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*, many of the other news satire shows of the 2000s satirized more broad trends and ideologies in the world rather than current headlines, working more to reinforce viewer ideologies rather than question them or motivate transformative action. Additionally, there was experimentation with the genre's content and format. Both Fox News and CNN attempted launching news satire programs, with both lasting less than a year. Interestingly, though they were attached to news networks, both programs were criticized for their lack of depth. Fox News' *The ½ Hour News Hour* was the first news satire show to be produced by and air on a 24-hour news network, as well as the first to put a conservative spin on its content. TV critic Matt Schimkowitz points out that the show's "jokes celebrated the conservative view, but offered little commentary or insight as to why they think that way." While *The Daily Show* questioned and critiqued current events from a specific point of view, *The ½ Hour News Hour* mostly invested its time in reassuring viewers that their worldview was correct: "Afraid to attack or question anything the audience might disagree with, the show stuck to what will comfort viewers, even if it can't make them laugh" (Schimkowitz). CNN's *Not Just Another Cable News Show* was "inspired by 'Weekend Update'" (Zjawinski) and featured a variety of comedians, journalists, and pundits, using CNN's vast archive of news

footage “to take a look back at the biggest political blunders of all-time, as well as celebrity scandals, pop-culture fads and other things ripe for examination” (Weprin). Unlike the news satire programs preceding it, *Not Just Another Cable News Show* focused mostly on making jokes about long-past events. Premiering around the same time as *The ½ Hour News Hour* and *Not Just Another Cable News Show* was *Infomania*, executive produced by *The Daily Show* creator and writer Madeleine Smithberg. *Infomania* began as a short that would air before longer programming before shifting into a weekly, half-hour format. In a review posted in 2009, critic Rob Owen of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* wrote that *Infomania* “shares some DNA with Comedy Central’s *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, but expands its critical eye beyond news and politics to all forms of media, from magazines (‘How the !$#@ is this a Magazine?’ is a regular segment) to women’s issues (‘Target Women’).” This era of news satire was more varied not only in format, but also in the diversity of its hosts. Throughout most of its history, televised news satire hosts have almost exclusively been white and male. The late 2000s brought some exceptions to that rule with CNN’s second attempt at news satire, *D. L. Hughley Breaks the News* and Comedy Central’s *Chocolate News*, hosted by David Alan Grier. Similar to *The Daily Show*, though, Hughley’s program was formatted as a talk show, with a monologue, interviews, and sketches focused on current political events (Rosenberg, “The Real Laughs”). Grier’s show was more based around sketch comedy and satirical commentaries about race (Itzkoff, “Chocolate”), having more in common with the news satire of the 60s, 70s, and 80s, like the quick and snappy humor of *That Was the Week That Was*, *Laugh In*, and the early days of “Weekend Update” than that of the 2000s, which was becoming more critical and in-depth.

After many efforts had relatively short lives on the air throughout the 2000s, the field of televised news satire reduced to established programs at the beginning of the 2010s, a decade

that has been dominated by new shows helmed by *Daily Show* alumni, and the influence of Jon Stewart's style is apparent. *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*, *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee*, *The Nightly Show with Larry Wilmore*, *The Opposition with Jordan Klepper*, *Patriot Act with Hasan Minhaj*, *Wyatt Cenac's Problem Areas* and most recently, *Klepper* are all hosted by former *Daily Show* correspondents and play with the genre in their own ways, but all share key characteristics with Stewart's show: these programs focus directly on current news and politics with a clear point of view driven by the host and a more participatory role for audiences. This host-driven perspective, along with the increased diversity of hosts in the 2010s, brings needed fresh perspectives on politics, inviting a broader audience to enjoy the genre. As this project will focus primarily on this era of news satire, Chapter 2 will focus explicitly on a genre analysis of *The Daily Show* in order to better understand its features and how they manifest in subsequent programs airing now. This will help shape my examination of some of the currently airing news satire shows listed above in Chapter 3 and case study of *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee* in Chapter 4. I believe that looking at these shows from a rhetorical, genre-focused perspective will help reveal how these iterations of the genre have been formed through creator and audience interaction.

Why Use Rhetoric to Study News Satire?

While the classical center of rhetoric was oral texts and the emergence of rhetoric and composition shifted that focus to written texts, the age of new media has provided the opportunity for scholars to consider how composers and audiences create and use an entirely new range of texts. Scholars have taken up this need with vigor, studying online videos (Kurtyka, Rulyova), websites (Brown), blogs (Miller and Shepherd, Grafton and Maurer), Twitter (Rulyova), selfies (Buck; Miller, "Memoir"), among many other multimedia texts. Though

television is not at all a new kind of text, it remains a relevant and evolving medium that is sustaining audience attention and is thus worthy of study. Televised news satire has seen a growing number of iterations in the past decade from more diverse hosts and writing teams that air on different kinds of networks, from cable to premium cable to streaming, and increasingly engage with audiences through social media platforms like Twitter and YouTube. Thus, current shows create genre systems, what Charles Bazerman calls "interrelated genres that interact with each other in specific settings" (97), in which they share content and interact with fans, creating opportunities for audiences to connect with the show and extend their engagement beyond viewing.

Much of the existing scholarship on news satire, particularly in relationship to audience, comes from media studies and communications. Scholars in these fields have considered news satire's relationship to educating viewers (LaMarre, McClennen and Maisel) and increasing personal civic engagement (Jones). Heather LaMarre's study, using an online survey, found that exposure to *The Colbert Report* resulted in "a positive effect on issue knowledge," particularly regarding Political Action Committees (PACs), more than those exposed to the morning news show *Morning Joe* (407-408). Similarly, McClennen and Maisel analyze *The Colbert Report*'s coverage of campaign finance law and PACs, arguing that it served as a "civics lesson" with real-world implications (45). Jeffrey Jones, relying on textual analysis of a variety of televised news satire programs in his book *Entertaining Politics: Satiric Television and Political Engagement*, argues that pop culture can support civic culture when both the producers and audience engage meaningfully (39) and that news satire in particular can offer the audience complex ways to engage and perform civic engagement (233). While these studies include both quantitative study (LaMarre) and textual analysis (McClennen and Maisel, Jones), they all

incorporate a view of audience that is more quantitative; audience is seen as a commodity, as a group to be attained (How do we attract audiences?) and acted upon (What effect do we want to have on the audience?). These studies, importantly, do not consider the audience as a mere passive receiver, but they also do not consider how audiences contribute to and shape the content of news satire as well. A rhetorical view of audience allows for the consideration of audiences as active contributors to the genre's conventions and content.

Looking into genre interactions among new media texts and audiences through the lens of rhetoric and composition scholarship is essential now as digital texts are so user-driven, accessible, and easy to share widely and across platforms. Current news satire takes advantage of many genres in its creation and dissemination of content, and it is within this system of genres that we can see audiences engage and interact. Studying the news satire genre, then, offers opportunities to understand how television programs and audiences might interact through a genre system, visible ways to see how audiences uptake the news satire genre, and an opportunity to see how audience and genre shape one another through interaction, all rich areas of inquiry that would add considerably to rhetoric and composition's understanding of audience and genre development and interactivity. Additionally, this project will also examine ways in which televised news satire interacts with other multimedia genres and texts, such as social media posts.

In a general sense, I believe that news satire is also particularly a timely area of study considering its role in intervening in questionable political rhetoric. McClennen and Maisel write that satire can play a role in "bringing attention to core issues at stake in American politics" (1) through its ability to "offer the public alternative avenues of information and critical engagement" (4). As the current administration continues to roll back progressive measures and

implement policies that disadvantage the most vulnerable among us, the aforementioned "post-truth" rhetoric is increasingly used to justify or support these decisions as being in the best interest of the public at large. As this project aims to reveal more clearly, news satire offers a means of revealing the truth behind the rhetoric. Additionally, news satire is also a currently popular genre, with multiple programs currently airing and successfully maintaining audience attention and critical acclaim.

Genre

The goal of this project is to reveal how audience expectations and responses play a role in shaping genres through the study of televised news satire. Genre provides a useful framework for this work for several reasons. First, the key method used in this study, genre analysis, allows for the clear definition of the conventions of the genre and to see how those conventions have changed over time. Genres are not static containers; while genres are sometimes constrained by antecedent genres (Jamieson 414) and the need to respond appropriately to recurring situations (Devitt, "Generalizing" 576), they are also dynamic, "adapt[ing] and grow[ing] as the social context changes" (580). Through its focus on actions accomplished through genres (Miller 151), rhetorical genre theory recognizes and reveals the roles that both creators and audiences play in the process of text creation, distribution, reception, and assessment of the text's success. If the genre is unable to achieve its aims for writers and users, it must be adapted by the creators who produce it, the audiences who use it, or both. Thus, rhetorical genre studies allows us to see not only the changes that genres undergo, but also how and why those changes occur.

Second, rhetorical genre studies provides a clear framework for understanding how people use and respond to genres. Anne Freadman defines this as "uptake," and Mary Jo Reiff and Anis Bawarshi write that "the ability to know how to negotiate genres and how to apply and

turn genre strategies (rules for play) into textual practices (actual performances) involves knowledge of uptake" (85). As Dylan Dryer acknowledges, "[u]ptakes are exceptionally difficult to pin down" and involve many different "interactions among forms, practices, identities, and social formations" (61). Dryer's conception of "uptake enactment," which he defines as "the act of producing an utterance or text in response to uptake affordances," aligns well with the kinds of responses produced by audience members that I will study, particularly in Chapter 3. These uptake enactments will help reveal the influence of audience on the news satire genre.

Third, rhetorical genre studies reveals the role that ideology can play in shaping and constraining genres and their users. Judy Z. Segal's analysis of breast cancer narratives illustrates how the genre shapes perceptions of women diagnosed with the disease through the perpetuation of dominant narratives. Segal argues, "because of the willingness of people to tell certain kinds of stories and receive them and repeat them and even ironize them, these stories make other stories much harder to tell – and they make it harder to speak about breast cancer in genres other than the personal story" (11). On the part of creators, breaking the common uptake of the genre requires breaking some of its conventions while keeping it recognizable, something I will discuss in Chapter 2 as I consider how Jon Stewart's *Daily Show* adapted news satire in a way that allowed for and invited more engaged viewer uptakes, particularly those visible uptake enactments. Genre also affects and constrains uptakes of audiences, as seen in Dara Rossman Regaignon's study of child rearing books and Anthony Pare's look at institutional genres in social work. Regaignon's work found that child rearing books "project anxiety onto its readers in order to motivate its utterance" (141) through "an uptake profile entirely motivated by worry" (146). By promoting worry and anxiety as an affective response in young mothers, child rearing texts ultimately encouraged their own use and further consumption; in other words, the genre

creates its own exigency (146-147). Regiagnon highlights "the need to consider the ways in which uptakes are affective as well as social and rhetorical" (157); I will argue in Chapter 2 that appeals to pathos and the affective dimension of uptake play an important role in the success of news satire and its ability to invoke audience response. Similarly, Pare draws on Bazerman's systems of genre to reveal how genres are embedded with ideological positions that may or may not align with those of the users taking them up (63) which can cause ideological conflict (65). Pare's study uncovers how genres demand particular types of identity performances, and though resistance and subversion through "alternative methods of practice" sometimes occurs, it is "not always easy or possible" (68-69). While Segal reveals how genres can shape the way information is presented and accepted, Regaignon illustrates how genres can encode certain uptakes in consumers and Pare shows that genres can also shape ideologies and identities of composers. These studies illustrate the power of genres and the multifaceted ways that we can understand communication and response through genres, which makes it an ideal lens for my study.

Finally, genre studies provides useful frameworks for studying how multiple types of texts interact. Though I am focusing primarily on televised news satire, understanding how the genre works also involves understanding its context and the system of genres that are involved in its creation, dissemination, and reception. As mentioned previously, Bazerman's concept of systems of genre offers a means for analyzing how multiple genres interact, creating "a complex web of interrelated genres where each participant makes a recognizable act or move in some recognizable genre, which then may be followed by a certain range of appropriate generic responses by others" ("Systems of Genres" 97). Bazerman's study of political genres online illustrates how users are able to participate in the system of genres to create a political identity and "form a public political presence" to take part in social action ("Genre and Identity" 29), as I

will argue occurs among creators and audiences in news satire, particularly in digital spaces. In her study of anti-obesity health campaigns in print and online, Monica Brown shows how digital genre systems affect public perceptions of and engagement with the issue of obesity. Brown finds that corporations often appropriate genres in an effort to cultivate legitimacy and credibility and typically use this authority to promote slacktivism, such as liking a social media post or joining a particular online group, rather than encouraging more direct action like donating time or money (202-203). Brown's study reveals the usefulness of systems of genre as a means for studying how action is framed and particular uptakes are suggested to users in digital spaces. While I will be looking at how news satire shows present these calls to action, digital genres will make up an essential part of the system when considering how audiences respond to and engage with those calls.

Audience

While genre offers a key lens for my study of news satire, a main focus of this project is audiences and how they take up, respond to, and ultimately play a role in influencing genre through these actions. In order to examine this role that audiences play, it is important to define the concept of audience and its evolution. As James Porter writes, audience "has been a central concept in rhetoric at least since the fifth century B.C. and a key concern of composition since the formal emergence of that discipline in the late nineteenth century" (ix). The term itself is slippery, as there are many different ways to think about audience; Aristotle thought about physical audiences composed of real people in front of an orator, and this is often how we still imagine audiences in everyday life, as people consuming texts. However, Porter points out that, as "[a]udiences also exist in texts, in the writer's imagination, [and] in the general culture" (x), the idea of imagining real individuals as audience is insufficient (5).

Since audience is such an important aspect of our communication and rhetorical success, scholars have theorized various ways to conceptualize audience. Walter Ong's seminal work "The Writer's Audience is Always a Fiction" points out the differences between oral and written rhetoric, considering the key disparity that the writer must imagine the audience as a group and cast them in certain roles (58). Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford also made a significant contribution to audience studies with their article "Audience Addressed/Audience Invoked: The Role of Audience in Composition Theory and Pedagogy," which proposes two types of audience for writers: audience addressed, which is a concrete group of people (78), and audience invoked, which is a construction of the writer's imagination (82). They argue, "The most complete understanding of audience thus involves a synthesis of the perspectives we have termed audience addressed, with its focus on the reader, and audience invoked, with its focus on the writer" (90). Douglas Park, in his piece "Analyzing Audiences," advocates for locating audiences based on their social situations, including the setting and function of the text (482). Porter's 1992 study of audience also advocates for a social view of audience, but extends Park's view to include the audience as a contributor to the discourse (114). Porter argues that a writer must "become one" with the audience (115), and in order to change the audience, the writer must change also (116). Porter's social view of audience emphasizes the interaction between writers and audiences rather than a one-way line of communication, but it defines audiences primarily based on their textual practices, linking it most closely to the "audience invoked" (Reiff 411).

In 1996, Ede and Lunsford responded to their "Audience Addressed/Audience Invoked" essay, acknowledging that it failed to consider "the ways in which audiences can not only enable but also silence writers and readers" (29). The possibility of multiple audiences brings tension and contradiction for writers, especially students trying to navigate different sets of expectations

(30). Further, Reiff's article, "Rereading 'Invoked' and 'Addressed' Readers Through a Social Lens: Toward a Recognition of Multiple Audiences," proposes that "compositionists [should] embrace a social model of audience that accounts for the multiple and shifting roles of readers as they participate in social groups" (414). Extending the work of Ede and Lunsford, Park, and Porter, Reiff emphasizes the need to acknowledge multiple reading roles, positions, and uses for the text that audiences can have, which can "more comprehensively account for the dynamic, social nature of communication" (422).

The rise of new media, greatly expanding the spaces in which people can create and consume texts, further complicates our notions of audience and their multiplicity. In 2006, Ede and Lunsford again responded to their own work with new media in mind, considering that audiences in the age of new media have become more collaborative and participatory, making relationships between creators and audiences more complex and reciprocal (48). Ede and Lunsford emphasize that creators and audiences shape one another rather than audiences existing as a passive receiver; audiences take an active role in choosing, processing, utilizing, and responding to the texts they consume. This becomes even more apparent in the age of new media, as audiences have wider access to immense amounts of content, and their ability to interact with one another, directly with creators, and with other related entities has increased due to spaces like social media platforms, comment sections, forums, and fan pages.

The idea of active audiences is not a new one. The active audience theory, used primarily in media studies and communications work, stands in opposition to older passive audience theories such as the "hypodermic needle model," which suggests that audiences receive information and meaning in a one-way transfer (Chandler and Munday "Hypodermic Model"). These passive audience theories were still popular as television studies emerged; for example,

structuralist studies were popular in Europe in the 1970s, relying on a conception of passive audiences and mostly focusing on the structure of the text itself (Wilson 17); structuralist perspectives profess that "audience responses are constructed by the text" and are processed immediately (11), similar to Ong's idea of the fictionalized audience or Ede and Lunsford's "audience invoked." In this type of model, audiences are not given the space and time to do much thinking or interpreting beyond what is "embedded" in the text by the creators. However, studies focusing on radio and television audiences began to reveal that viewers had particular motivations and uses for texts; uses and gratifications theory was defined and refined in the 1970s and argued that audiences' media choices were a result of their evaluations of their individual desires and needs (West and Turner 395). This led to a paradigm shift away from the assumption that the media's fixed messages directly influence the audience to the idea that audiences are self-aware and use media for their own purposes and goals (396). Broadly, active audience theory states that audience members play a role in interpreting and using the texts they consume, being "actively (albeit often unconsciously) involved – both cognitively and emotionally – in making sense of texts" (Chandler and Munday, "Active Audience Theory").

Active conceptions of the audience are also found in reader response theory, which has been extended from its traditional use for written texts to new media; this theory states that "meaning is formed, not found," "emerg[ing] from the process of interaction between texts and their attentive users" (Wilson 64). Across types of media, audience activity has been linked to interrelated processes of perception, comprehension, interpretation, evaluation, and response to illustrate the idea that audiences use their own critical thought and judgment to understand media texts and use them for their own purposes (Chandler and Munday "Active Audience Theory"). One illustration of this is through the study of fans and non-fans. As Henry Jenkins writes, "*fans*

. . . [is] used loosely to describe anyone who forms an intense affective bond with a particular property" ("Fandom" 16). Fandoms are the collaborative and participatory groups that fans participate in, "refer[ring] to those who claim a common identity and a shared culture with other fans" and "engage with a broad array of different media objects." Fans, in addition to consuming content, often create their own related materials such as zines, fanfiction, and art or they participate in message boards and conventions connected to their fandom. In his article, "Star Trek Rerun, Reread, Rewritten: Fan Writing as Textual Poaching," Jenkins argues that fans work as cultural scavengers who reclaim works as their own in order to make the work more reflective of their own experiences and identities (86); he argues that this particularly occurs in marginalized communities, where fans create space for themselves within dominant representations (87). Fandoms, then, are composed of audiences where meaning making extends beyond the content they consume to related works and interactions created and perpetuated by audiences themselves. More recently, Jonathan Gray and Sarah Murray offer non-fans as a source for audience study, indicating that we might learn from "audiences who use dislike as a resource to articulate their positions of marginalization and exclusion from a perceived televisual norm" (357). Gray has also worked with the idea of anti-fans who are active in their strong dislike for particular texts; they often form antagonistic communities around disliked texts, which reveals another dimension of audience interaction (71). Considering the fan and the anti-fan can help illustrate the idea that audiences are not passive consumers, but critical audiences who are motivated to engage with content based on different exigencies. These terms contribute to conceptions of how multiple audiences engage with the same text. Though my work is not centered specifically on fandoms, I will attempt to further this work in Chapter 4's case study of *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee*, where I consider the impact of the participation of multiple

audiences, particularly thinking about those who engage with the the show's content through different entry points, such as its coverage in the news media; this includes people outside of typical fans who are watching the show because they enjoy its content.

Where Audiences and Publics Collide

Public sphere theory has a long history that has transformed and adapted remarkably over time due to ever-changing contexts of where and how people communicate. Habermas' foundational 1962 work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* began by envisioning "the coming together of private people into a public" (35). The public was the carrier of public opinion and "put the state in touch with the needs of society" (31). Importantly, the bourgeois public sphere was a reading public that participated in rational-critical debate in spaces like salons and coffeehouses; they served as an audience for written work while participating in the talk of the public sphere. Thus, they were making choices about the texts they consumed, thinking critically about that content, and participating in debate and discussion about these topics. Habermas clearly proposes the idea that citizens do not merely receive information about what is going on in the world and accept it, but engage with it on a higher level, both individually and socially. This is often how audiences and publics are positioned in opposition to one another, with audiences being more passive, and publics being more active and engaged; however, as I argue in this project, this is a false dichotomy, and audiences and publics have much in common and often overlap.

In the case of news satire, active audiences are engaging with content dealing with current events and politics that frequently asks audiences to take some sort of action in response. These actions typically are aimed at producing social change and are thus activist in nature, including donating money to a cause, participating in campaigns for public comment, voting, or

contacting representatives, among others. Audience members who respond to these calls to action are also members of publics. Though Habermas' work on publics is older and could not predict the changes that would come along with the rise of new media and digital technologies, his concept has been influential for those who study audience interactions with today's publicly accessible genres, such as those found on social media platforms. The relationship between audiences and publics can be tricky to parse, as they are not exactly the same thing, nor are they opposites. In her work on the public sphere, Nancy Fraser explains that the Habermasian public sphere "designates a theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk" (57). Habermas imagined that differences such as class would be bracketed in spaces like coffee houses where people could participate as equals and arrive at mutual agreements on relevant, important topics of debate (Habermas 33). However, Fraser also indicates that the very notion of the bourgeoisie public sphere effectively excluded many groups such as women, illiterate individuals, working class people, and those of "racialized ethnicities of all classes" (67, 63). Because "the bourgeois public sphere was governed by protocols of style and decorum that were themselves correlates and markers of status inequality," some individuals were kept out before the bracketing of difference could even be an option (63). Thus, though Habermas conceptualizes one monolithic public, or participatory audience for public discourse, this is never functionally the case.

Since Habermas' work was translated, other scholars have worked to expand the concept of publics to be more inclusive and account for multiple audiences. For example, Gerard Hauser views a public "as an emergent body of those who are tending to an issue through their active participation in the deliberative processes that bear on it" ("Vernacular Discourse" 335). This definition goes beyond considering the "elite voices" to include average citizens, or what Hauser

calls “vernacular voices.” Their “everyday exchanges” become “part of the public dialogue that forms and expresses public opinion” (336). This wider inclusion results in a “reticulate,” or networked, public sphere where a plurality of publics exist and interact with one another (*Vernacular Voices* 14). It is important to consider publics in this wider sense because, as Hauser writes, “Complex public problems bring multiple perspectives to bear, each with its own understanding of what constitutes the salient issue. They invite an intersection of various interest publics, each with its own interests at stake” (“Vernacular Discourse” 335). While Habermas felt that the bourgeois public sphere was negatively affected by polarization and fragmentation (163), Hauser sees wider inclusion as essential to the functioning of democracy (339). At the same time, this inclusion still does not reflect a monolithic audience, but multiple ones with different needs and perspectives.

Digital spaces, then, currently provide one of the clearest examples of where audiences and publics collide. Sonia Livingstone connects the ideas of audience and public in her work, challenging the common view that audiences and publics are opposed (“On the Relation” 17). Audiences are often considered passive and trivial while publics are viewed as active and politically engaged, valorizing them over audiences (18). Livingstone argues that the activities of audiences cannot be separated from the activities of publics; this proves true especially in light of televised news satire, where “citizen-viewers” can take on the role of both member of audience and public (21). As news satire’s content typically relies on current issues and political figures for content that viewers may eventually vote on themselves, the genre offers a clear view of this dual role.

Scholars have also worked to conceptualize more clearly how publics emerge in digital spaces. Axel Bruns and Jean Burgess study of Twitter hashtag use in political debate brings

about the notion of the "ad hoc public," composed of a network Twitter users gathering "at the moment they are needed" for discussion and debate about a developing topic, facilitated by hashtags that allow for tracking the topic and for users to participate and enter the conversation (7). Hashtags have become a common way for current news satire programs to encourage viewers to take their engagement beyond viewing and tag conversations occurring about topics discussed in their shows. As I will discuss in Chapter 3, hashtags are also sometimes developed by viewers themselves, and the hashtags transform as ad hoc publics continue to implement them while circumstances around issues change. In Chapter 4, I extend Bruns and Burgess' concept of ad hoc publics develop the idea of "ad hoc public audiences"; like ad hoc publics, ad hoc public audiences emerge somewhat spontaneously in response to an issue and through their engagement with the issue, consume texts. This means that they are often engaging texts indirectly, through media coverage or commentary, for example, which shapes the ad hoc public audience's thinking about that text. The idea of an ad hoc public audience helps explain what occurs when media coverage on a controversial issue brings attention to *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee* and thus invites unfamiliar viewers to engage with the show through the lens of a single incident. The ad hoc public audience emerges briefly to engage with the text and often dissolves quickly but can still have a significant impact on perceptions of the text.

Spreadable Media and the Participatory Audience

Though the role of audience is clearly important to this project's goals, it is also essential to consider how texts themselves have changed in the digital age to facilitate different kinds of circulation and engagement. Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green use the concept of "spreadable media" to describe this phenomenon; "spreadable media" helps describe the shift from a model of distribution of texts to one of circulation, where consumers of media participate

in a text's spread as much as the creators themselves, "signal[ing] a movement toward a more participatory model of culture, one which sees the public not as simply consumers of preconstructed messages but as people who are shaping, sharing, reframing, and remixing media content in ways which might not have been previously examined" (1-2). Spreadability reflects the audience's active role in "shaping media flows" (2) as it "refers to the potential - both technical and cultural - for audiences to share content for their own purposes, sometimes with the permission of rights holders, sometimes against their wishes" (3). The spreadable potential of texts is linked to their ability to be shared and circulated widely, "such as the embed codes that YouTube provides, which make it easier to spread videos across the Internet" (6) or hashtags that allow for tracking conversations and engagement, but "spreadability" also considers "the economic structures that support or restrict circulation, the attributes of a media text that might appeal to a community's motivation for sharing material, and the social networks that link people through the exchange of meaningful bytes" (4).

To illustrate spreadability in action, Jenkins, Ford, and Green use the example of Susan Boyle, the *Britain's Got Talent* contestant whose audition singing "I Dreamed a Dream" went viral. They point out, "what allowed the Susan Boyle video to travel as far and as fast as it did was the fact that it *could* travel so far so fast. People had the right tools and knew what to do with them" (11). YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook in particular provide a multitude of tools to share within and outside their own platforms, and form part of "an integrated system of participatory channels and practices at work" that "support an environment" conducive to content circulation. They point out, though, that the ease of sharing does not explain *why* Boyle's audition went viral. They suggest that the answer to this lies in platforms' ability to "support the cultural practices in which [the audience] want(s) to engage" (11). As people shared the clip of Boyle, friends and

communities who share interests engage in conversation, furthering the topic and boosting the audience for the video. The context for the video is shaped as it is shared into different social circles who may have different uses for the content (6).

While entertainment clips are prime candidates for spreadability due in part to their ability to appeal to mass audiences, spreadability "also increasingly applies to news, branding and advertising, political messages, religious messages, and a range of other materials" (9). The digital age has made it very easy to create these spreadable texts and design them in ways that appeal to the audience, whether that is through appealing to a sense of curiosity, desire for knowledge, or longing to belong or stand out. By sharing spreadable texts through individual social media accounts, audiences not only participate in furthering reach of that content; they also shape perceptions of their own identities and values. Within the concept of spreadability, "audiences play an active role in 'spreading' content rather than serving as passive carriers of viral media: their choices, investments, agendas, and actions determine what gets valued" (21). Spreadable media includes not only texts that travel widely, "but also those that achieve particularly deep engagement within a niche community" (22). Importantly to my project, spreadability professes that audiences play an active role in shaping the circulation of media content in ways "which may allow them to serve their own needs" (23). It becomes significant, then, for creators to understand audience needs and desires. In *Desperately Seeking the Audience*, Ien Ang suggests that the individuals who make up an audience are essentially "invisible" to creators and companies trying to understand them (30). This statement certainly makes sense when we consider that it was written in 1991, but Jenkins, Ford, and Green argue that advances in technology only mean so much if we are not shifting to engagement-based models of understanding audience (118). Engagement-based models "see the audience as a collective of

active agents whose labor may generate alternative forms of market value" through "pursuing content across multiple channels," such as DVR, digital downloads, or streaming (116). In an engagement model, audience actions outside of viewing, such as recommending texts to a friend, researching texts, or generating related texts like fan fiction or art, are valued for their ability to spread the media further.

Today's media landscape demands a shift to more engagement-based understanding of audiences, even more-so than when *Spreadable Media* was published in 2013. I argue that news satire is a genre that has taken advantage of new media platforms to engage more viewers and learn more about its audience; this has taken the shape of hashtags, calls to action, and the dissemination of highly shareable digital media. News satire treats its audience *as* a public, composed of citizen-viewers with the power to act in response to the topics presented (Livingstone, "On the Relation" 32). While the entire audience for news satire cannot be described as "activist" in their engagement, these strategies do an effective job at engaging such an activist audience through content calls to action that respond to particular issues, including facilitating the political engagement of members of the public, raising money for organizations, and calling for participation in public comment campaigns, among other actions focused on advancing change.

The role of activist audiences and their role in responding to and shaping digital or new media genres can also be seen in work on publics and public genres, which contributes important knowledge to our understanding of how audiences shape, use, and spread genres for their own goals in the public sphere. Jennifer Nish's "Spreadable Genres, Multiple Publics: The Pixel Project's Digital Campaigns to Stop Violence against Women" connects the concept of spreadable media to digital activism and activist audiences. Nish focuses on the nonprofit The

Pixel Project, which uses spreadable genres "in order to facilitate awareness and public dialogue about violence against women" (242). Nish argues that "certain online activist genres are designed with spreadability in mind and that this spreadability is an integral part of building activist publics through digital media" (245). As Jenkins, Ford, and Green write,

> Understanding spreadability will allow audiences and activists to form new connections and communities through their active role in shaping the circulation of media content. The concept of spreadability also gives these groups new means to mobilize and respond to decisions made by companies and governments in ways that challenge decisions that adversely affect them and to exploit gaps in the system which may allow them to serve their own needs. (23)

Importantly, Nish also develops the idea that those who take up these activist genres "by sharing a blog post or retweeting a message, for example - are also making themselves visible to the activist public and performing their identity as an activist. When individuals share a genre that demonstrates their relationship to an activist public, they engage in an uptake that asserts their individual agency by positioning themselves in relation to a collective" (244).

The concepts of spreadable media and activist audiences are also joined clearly, I argue, in the news satire genre. First, the culture of spreadable media in a participatory culture is reflected in the way that people consume news. According to the Pew Research Center, as of 2010, 92% of Americans reported using multiple platforms to learn about the news in a day, "including national TV, local TV, the internet, local newspapers, radio, and national newspapers," with "46% of Americans getting news from four to six media platforms each day" (Purcell et. al. 2). Notably, "37% of internet users have contributed to the creation of news, commented about it, or disseminated it via postings on social media sites like Facebook or

Twitter." It would be difficult to imagine that this number has done anything but grown in the years since 2010, as smart phones have become even more ubiquitous and media has become more savvy in their use of social media as a dissemination tool. This participation reflects a desire to stay connected with others on current events; according to the study, "Some 72% of American news consumers say they follow the news because they enjoy talking with others about what is happening in the world and 69% say keeping up with the news is a social or civic obligation" (4). Many Americans look to others to keep them informed; about "50% of American news consumers say they rely to some degree on people around them to tell them the news they need to know." Jenkins, Ford, and Green emphasize the importance of people making "socially embedded decisions when they choose to spread any media text" (13). People may choose to include their own commentary alongside the story or not, but this sharing can shape a person's identity, as others view that shared content and think "about what the person who shared it was trying to communicate." As I will argue in Chapters 2 and 3, the news satire genre relies on these concepts to spread their messages further, and current iterations often encourage audiences to take on an activist role in response to many of the stories they share.

Chapter Overview

The remainder of this project aims to examine the ways that audiences engage with the televised news satire genre, facilitated greatly by spreadable genres like tweets, and consider how this participation by multiple audiences has shaped the genre's development beyond a hybrid genre able to achieve different types of viewer uptake than comedy or news alone. To accomplish this, I will look more closely at changes in the genre spurred most clearly by *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*, analyze audience interaction, engagement, and activism through hashtags that developed from two *Last Week Tonight* segments focusing on net

neutrality, and complicate the idea of audience through a case study of an incident involving *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee* that occurred in late May and early June of 2018.

In Chapter 2, I argue that to understand how news satire has become a genre that is able to engage audiences in activist uptakes, we must look to *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*; the show developed audience-centered conventions that combine news and comedy but go beyond the typical uptakes for either genre by engaging viewers both intellectually and emotionally. I first focus on a genre analysis of 16 episodes of *The Daily Show* in order to reveal typified features of the televised news satire genre and understand its audience-centered conventions more clearly. I also incorporate interviews with members of the show's cast and staff here in an attempt to offer "further insight into the meanings, intentions, uptakes, and activity of the participants" (Bazerman 326). I argue that *The Daily Show* played a key role in shaping audience expectations for news satire by creating a program that was heavily invested in current events and politics and often reflected the emotional state of its audience, far more than previous iterations of the genre. Further, I connect these conventions to *The Colbert Report*, another news satire spinoff of *The Daily Show* airing around the same time; together, these programs engaged audiences in real world action in 2010 with "The Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear," an event that attracted 215,000 people to Washington DC (Montopoli). The event was one of the first large-scale efforts to engage a news satire audience in a real-world activity, and it was successful, bringing a crowd that far exceeded expectations for participation. *The Colbert Report* took this engagement further, using the show as a form of "public pedagogy" (McClennan 3) to engage viewers in the changing rules around Super PACs. As a result of my analysis, I argue that news satire has evolved beyond a hybrid of news and comedy to a distinct genre of its own, able to inspire viewer uptakes that news and comedy alone typically cannot. Subsequent versions of

news satire shows, starring hosts who came out of *The Daily Show* tradition, have incorporated more of this call for real world action into their own shows; thus, the positive audience response has had a direct effect on the content of current news satire.

While Chapter 2 focuses primarily on the changing news satire genre through the Jon Stewart-era of *The Daily Show* and how it began to encourage audience engagement, Chapter 3 looks more closely at how these changes have shown up in currently airing news satire and have led to a more participatory, activist audience, particularly as spreadable media help facilitate that activism and the circulation of ideas. This adds to existing work in rhetoric and composition that focuses on participatory audiences and digital genres (Weiser et. al., Nish) while also expanding Bruns and Burgess' concept of ad hoc publics by looking more closely at them in action. Specifically, I will draw on 2 segments from *Last Week Tonight* about net neutrality from 2014 and 2017. In both instances, Oliver calls for viewers to voice their support for net neutrality by submitting public comments to the FCC website. Related hashtags emerge for both calls to action, with the 2014 hashtag introduced through the show's official Twitter account and the second developed by users who took up the URL the show developed to make the comment page more accessible and turned it into a hashtag. In this chapter, I use a content analysis approach. Content analysis is used to "examine the content or information and symbols contained in written documents or other communication media" and involves the gathering of "a body of material to analyze" and "a system for recording specific aspects of its content" (Djamba and Neuman 49). Through an examination of a corpus of 50 tweets from each hashtag, I record the rhetorical purpose of these tweets and analyze how users are engaging with them, as well as comparing how the use of each tweet differed. This analysis will reveal how viewers of *Last Week Tonight* became an ad hoc public on Twitter, using each hashtag to rally additional public comments to

the FCC as well as share articles and information and discuss the issue's implications. This chapter will further support the argument that the audience for the genre tends to be engaged, participatory, and sometimes even activist, helping to illustrate more clearly points from both my first and second chapters as well as how spreadable media offers a means for audience action and furthering calls to participate beyond the show's viewers.

In Chapters 2 and 3, I examine how the creator/audience engagement typically works in news satire; in Chapter 4, I attempt to complicate this further by performing a case study in which context brought additional audiences to the interaction. On May 30, 2018, an episode aired in which Bee called the first daughter, Ivanka Trump, a "feckless cunt" for tweeting a photo of herself and her toddler in the midst of children being forcibly separated from their families at the US/Mexico border. The move was not particularly out of character for Bee, who has consistently used profanity on her show since its inception; however, an unrelated incident with Roseanne Barr, who tweeted a racist remark and found the reboot of her show, *Roseanne*, quickly cancelled as a result, became a comparative incident for White House officials and the media. This broad attention and media coverage introduced new audiences to *Full Frontal* outside of its typical context. This chapter, then, aims to understand how what I am calling "ad hoc public audiences," building from Bruns and Burgess' concept of ad hoc publics, emerge as publics become audiences for texts through their coverage in other media, such as news articles and programs. To do so, I will use rhetorical genre analysis to continue to build on my work from Chapters 2 and 3 and reflect how Bee's comment aligns with typical news satire conventions but is recontextualized by media coverage, shaping and dispersing uptake to broader audiences. I will also use frame analysis, which examines how "events and issues are organized and made sense of, especially by media, media professionals, and their audiences" (Reece 7), to

analyze media coverage of Bee's comment and better understand how the incident was framed for ad hoc public audiences. This chapter serves to complicate audience engagement with news satire; whereas the previous two chapters mostly focus on "typical" interactions, this chapter seeks to find what occurs when the genre is taken out of its original context entirely for audiences who may be unfamiliar with its format and goals.

In my final chapter, I will consider the significance of my findings about genre, audiences, and publics, particularly implications for genre, ad hoc publics and ad hoc public audiences, and how the televised news satire genre continues to change as multiple audiences engage with it. More broadly, I want to consider what this means for how media might use rhetorical strategies to engage citizens and create action. I think it is also essential to consider the limitations of this project, which cannot "prove" in a quantitative sense that news satire has a one-to-one relationship with viewers' action or political engagement or that audience engagement has played a key role in changing the genre; as people have multiple influences, sources of information, and motivations for action, even careful interviewing or survey work might not provide the definitive proof one would need to fully support these claims. Instead, I want to emphasize how the audience's interactions with the genre have brought about current news satire shows that actively work to cause an impact in the real world.

Chapter 2 – The Audience Acts: How *The Daily Show* Defined a Generation of News Satire

As evidenced by the timeline provided in Chapter 1, news satire has undergone a number of transitions throughout its life on American television. While the genre has consistently been defined by putting a comedic spin on current events and politics, the format, content, and tone have changed considerably from the 1960s to the programs airing today. To understand where the conventions of currently airing news satire come from, I argue that we must look to *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. The show left an undeniable imprint on the genre through the establishment of conventions that have shaped subsequent iterations of the news satire genre; in particular, I will focus on the show's format, content, and tone to reveal how it uses elements of journalism to inform viewers about real-world politics and current events, appealing to ethos, and uses comedy to entertain and engage the audience, appealing to pathos. In these appeals, Stewart is able to reflect audience emotion and establish trust and rapport with the audience. These conventions are audience-focused and aim to engage viewers with timely and impactful topics, working to leave them feeling knowledgeable about current events and creating space for viewer action, or uptake. Uptake, as defined by Anne Freadman, are "invitation[s] or request[s]" that occur when we engage with genres ("Uptake" 40); "knowing a genre is knowing how to take it up" ("Anyone" 63), or recognizing those invitations or requests, and making choices about how, ultimately, to proceed. I argue that *The Daily Show* established the use of distinctive rhetorical, audience-centered appeals that have become genre conventions for televised news satire through their reinforcement on *The Colbert Report*; these conventions continue to define today's televised news satire programming through the encouragement of activist viewer uptakes that are not typical through comedy or news alone, such as directly engaging with issues through

discussion, debate, and political participation, something that I will explore further in Chapter 3. In this way, news satire can be understood as an evolving genre with hybrid roots, combining conventions of comedy and news in a way that goes beyond both to encourage viewer engagement and action.

In order to reveal these conventions more clearly, this chapter will begin with a genre analysis of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, to be supplemented by context and background information from interviews with people who worked on the show from *An Oral History of The Daily Show*. This context will help support the purpose behind the conventions revealed in the genre analysis, which points to goals of establishing a more critical and audience-focused genre. I will then consider how these conventions were taken up in *The Colbert Report*, which added strategies of active public education and encouragement of viewer action. The two programs aired back-to-back for several years, and together they collaborated to create one of the first real-world public events related to a news satire program, "The Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear," the huge success of which reveals the effectiveness of the audience-aware conventions established by *The Daily Show* through visible audience uptake outside of viewing. Later, *The Colbert Report*'s direct participation in politics, through action like Colbert testifying before Congress in character and establishing his own Super PAC, worked to further educate viewers and encourage their active engagement beyond viewing. As Geoffrey Baym has described *The Daily Show*, these programs offer an "alternative journalism" that not only "uses satire to interrogate power [and] parody to critique contemporary news," but also offers "a model of deliberative democracy" that extends to viewers (261). This chapter will illustrate how the shows are able to offer this model through their genre hybridity, combining the comedy and news

genres to ultimately go beyond the capabilities of either component genre, as I will expand on at the end of the chapter.

The Daily Show with Jon Stewart Genre Analysis

In order to reveal the conventions developed by *The Daily Show* that encourage engaged viewership, I will use a genre analysis approach to identify recurring patterns across a corpus of texts as a means to reveal typified features of the televised news satire genre. With this in mind, I will examine my corpus to illuminate the show's generic features including appearance, sound, format, content, and tone, thinking particularly about how the show uses journalistic conventions, elements of comedy, and rhetorical appeals to accomplish its goals and intended uptakes. This process of analysis also includes interviews provided by the text *An Oral History of The Daily Show*, which can offer "further insight into the meanings, intentions, uptakes, and activity of the participants" (Bazerman 326). Because my focus is on how *The Daily Show* creates space for participatory audience uptake, rhetorical genre analysis offers a means for understanding how this iteration of the genre and, as I argue, subsequent iterations, are able to do so. As Carolyn Miller has written, a "rhetorically sound definition of genre must be centered . . . on the action it is used to accomplish" (151). Through this analysis, I offer evidence of news satire as an evolving hybrid genre that combines conventions from news and comedy and through this combination, is able to achieve viewer uptake that neither genre can typically accomplish alone.

Throughout this section and chapter, I refer to trust and credibility as outcomes of Stewart's appeals to ethos. It is important to note here that this trust and credibility is, in some ways, built in its opposition to traditional news media; the "trust" that audiences have with Stewart grows out of the idea that he is transparent in his beliefs. Whereas traditional journalists

are intended to be "unbiased," Stewart is held to no such standard, and his point of view is usually quite obvious. We see this most clearly as Stewart often calls out politicians and the media's handling of certain events, as I will expand on in this genre analysis. Stewart "points to the disconnect between reality and what politicians and the news media describe as reality, channeling the audience's id and articulating its bewilderment and indignation. He's the guy willing to say the emperor has no clothes" (Kakutani). As such, Stewart positions himself as a person who is not necessarily furthering a political agenda but instead is trying to cut through the noise of both sides to better understand the reality of what is happening: as a 2008 *New York Times* article titled "Is Jon Stewart the Most Trusted Man in America?" puts it, "*The Daily Show* is animated not by partisanship but by a deep mistrust of all ideology. A sane voice in a noisy red-blue echo chamber, Mr. Stewart displays an impatience with the platitudes of both the right and the left and a disdain for commentators who, as he made clear in a famous 2004 appearance on CNN's *Crossfire*, parrot party-line talking points and engage in knee-jerk shouting matches" (Kakutani). This results in a show that does not feel like it is trying to continue disillusioning the viewer with more spin, but rather frames Stewart as a person like the viewer, trying to pick apart political rhetoric and understand what issues and policies actually mean, just as they are. This transparency and effort to see through the political status quo lends Stewart credibility and, as I argue, the trust of his audience.

Additionally, it is important to make a note here about "the audience." The goal of this chapter is to analyze the ways in which *The Daily Show* shaped the news satire genre to be more audience-focused and encourage engaged, activist viewer uptake. The audiences for *The Daily*

Show and *The Colbert Report* in particular were likely largely middle to upper class[1], younger[2], white Americans with more liberal beliefs. As *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* were hosted by white men, this considerably shapes the perspectives presented within them, as well as the audiences that they attract and how they engage with those audiences. When I note that Stewart "appeals to the audience" or "builds trust with the audience," for example, these factors are in consideration.

For this genre analysis, I looked at a corpus of 16 episodes[3] of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. These episodes were chosen primarily based on availability and access; most full episodes from the Stewart era are not available online through legal means. Viacom, the company that owns Comedy Central and thus the rights to the *The Daily Show*, has limited access to these episodes, and only offers short clips of the show through the Comedy Central website and YouTube. I was able to purchase a 16-episode collection through Amazon called "The Jon Years," however, and these are the episodes that make up my corpus. This 16-episode series contains an episode from every year that Stewart hosted the show with the exception of 1999. While two of the episodes are notable for their coverage of intense moments in American history (the September 20, 2001 episode is the show's first after the September 11th terrorist attacks, and the June 18, 2015 episode occurs the day after the Charleston, South Carolina shooting at a historical African-American church), the majority of the episodes discuss more

[1] A 2015 Wall Street Journal poll found that "*Daily Show* viewers [were] more affluent than those of other late-night shows," having a higher median income (Vranica).
[2] A 2004 study conducted by the Pew Research Center found that almost half of 18-24 year olds surveyed watched *The Daily Show* at least occasionally ("News Audiences"). Media buyer Horizon Media reportedly found in 2015 that *The Daily Show*'s median audience member age was 29 in 2000 and 46 in 2015, though this remained "still much younger than other high-profile late-night programs" (Vranica).
[3] These episodes include "December 13, 2000," "September 20, 2001," "September 16, 2002," "November 10, 2003," "September 30, 2004," "September 13, 2005," "July 12, 2006," "September 10, 2007," "October 29, 2008," "January 26, 2009," "June 16, 2010," "November 17, 2011," "June 12, 2012," September 30, 2013," "March 24, 2014," and "June 18, 2015."

everyday events and political happenings. The spread of episodes across 16 years is useful in that it allows me to see changes and variations in the show over time.

Every episode of *The Daily Show* begins in the same way; the announcer reads the date, which appears on the screen before a transition to the *Daily Show* logo as the announcer says, "From Comedy Central's News Headquarters in NY, this is *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*." The theme song, called "Dog on Fire," then begins to play as the camera enters the studio and swings down to focus on the desk where Stewart sits. The show is recorded in front of a live studio audience, who can be heard laughing, clapping, and reacting throughout each episode, much like a typical late-night comedy talk show and in contrast with a typical news broadcast. Throughout its run, *The Daily Show* has aired in the late evening on Comedy Central, Monday through Thursday.

The show clearly takes cues in appearance from cable and nightly news programs. The color scheme of graphics and backgrounds relies heavily on red and blue, borrowing from the colors of the American flag. A stylized globe appears behind the logo in the introduction and is also used in the background. In later years, the background appears to be a cityscape at night, similar to many nightly news and late night talk show programs. As the show opens, the camera swings over to Stewart sitting behind a desk wearing a suit and tie, as most professional news anchors do as well, lending some ethos through this appearance. Throughout the opening monologue, he is typically framed from the waist up where viewers can see the desk, the papers and pen Stewart typically uses through the broadcast, and Stewart's hands, which he often uses quite animatedly; this is a wider shot than a typical news anchor would be framed in, giving the show a bit of a different feel while still reminding the viewer of its similarity to a news broadcast. The paper and pen are another way to mimic the visual expectation of a news anchor,

Figure 2.1 – Graphics often appear to Stewart's right, mimicking the appearance of a typical newscast ("September 30, 2014").

but they also functionally serve as props during the broadcast. Stewart has ripped up his papers, thrown them, crumpled them, and otherwise used them to express emotion. For example, during the September 20, 2001 episode and the June 18, 2015 episodes, Stewart uses both the paper and pen to expend nervous energy while he monologues about the national tragedies that just occurred. Further, as Stewart monologues, related graphics often appear on the left side of the screen (see fig. 2.1). While these borrow directly from the appearance of news programs, they are often also a source of humorous commentary. Occasionally these will be used to introduce the titles of recurring segments, such as *Indecision [Year]* during election cycles, playing off of the common "Decision" titling that news networks use when headlining election content, or *Mess O'Potamia*, a not-so-subtle judgment of the Bush administration's handling of the war in the Middle East (see fig. 2.2). Overall, this appearance appeals to the credibility of a mainstream newscast, while injecting it with the humor that is expected in satire.

Figure 2.2 - Graphics on the left-hand side of the screen often introduce recurring segments and contain a joke or commentary about the topic ("April 21, 2004").

Stewart remains at the desk during correspondent pieces, where there is often a split screen showing Stewart at the desk on one side and the correspondent "on location" on the other (see fig. 2.3). During the guest segments of the show, Jon sits at a desk on the viewer's right side while the guest sits on a couch on the left side, much like the set up on *The Tonight Show* and other late-night talk shows (see fig. 2.4). In 2005, this set up changed to the one used for the rest of Stewart's run, with Stewart pivoting to the side of the desk and the guest sitting across from him; in this setup, the host and guest are able to look directly at each other, providing for a more conversational feel. At the same time, this removes the visual reminder of a late-night talk show and creates space for these interactions to be less "small talk" oriented and more journalistic, turned toward relevant issues in the news. Like late night talk shows, guests are often still promoting their own work through their appearance on the show; unlike late night talk shows, guests' conversations with Stewart usually pivot toward current events and issues. This shift in tone is apparent in the September 30, 2013 episode when Stewart interviews Bill O'Reilly; while O'Reilly was on the show to promote the release of his new book, *Killing Jesus*, the episode largely focuses on the potential for a government shutdown over the Affordable Care Act at the

hands of Republicans, and Stewart and O'Reilly banter about this issue, as well as United States intervention in the Syrian Civil War (see fig. 2.5). Similarly, Stewart's conversation with Kurt Vonnegut involves discussion of Hurricane Katrina, the war in the Middle East, and America's approach to democracy ("September 13, 2005"). This style effectively expands the show's capacity to critically approach issues and create fruitful dialogue about timely issues that impact the world and viewers' lives; though these are typically issues that are otherwise in the news, these conversations usually offer a more accessible approach to them that is, by the nature of the show, lightened by humor. At the end of the show, Stewart typically returns to the central position behind the desk again to offer any final comments and end the show.

Fig. 2.3 - Correspondents "on location" often appear in a split screen with Stewart ("September 30, 2004).

Fig. 2.4 - Early episodes of the show had guests sit on a couch to the left of Stewart's desk, much like late-night talk shows such as The Tonight Show do ("November 10, 2003").

Fig, 2.5 - The change to Stewart and his guests sitting across from one another at the main desk marked a shift toward interviews that were more critical and journalistic in style **(***"September 30, 2013").*

The Daily Show is broken up into four segments, separated by commercial breaks. The most typical order for these segments is as follows: the show begins with Stewart briefly mentioning the guest for the episode or other upcoming content before launching into the first segment, which is most often a monologue focusing on a significant headline or story of the day,

with the second segment being a correspondent interview or taped field piece, the third segment being a guest interview, and the final being closing notes and the "Moment of Zen." Though this is a common structure, the order and types of segments can shift from episode to episode; for instance, the September 30, 2004 episode features Stewart interacting with an "on-location" correspondent during the opening segment, while the June 16, 2010 episode uses the second segment to continue the opening monologue. The September 20, 2001 and June 18, 2015 episodes, both of which respond to traumatic recent events, vary in that the opening monologue is extended and more informal, without the use of supplemental video clips or other media. In another variation, the December 13, 2000 episode covered the court ruling that decided the 2000 presidential election and the entire episode involves Stewart throwing to various correspondents in Washington DC, Texas, and Iowa (though actually just on green screens in the studio), locations relevant to their news coverage, as they try to make sense of the ruling; there is no monologue or guest interview in the episode. These variations in format, then, seem mostly in response to the type of event being covered, which mirrors strategies used by traditional news media that also alter their formats to respond to breaking news, report on special topics, or fill in on "slower" news days.

Stewart's monologues, which are usually presented in the first segment of the show, are often where the show uses media to critique the media, a key way that Stewart builds his credibility by attempting to see through rhetoric and unearth the reality of situations. *The Daily Show* relies on audio and audiovisual clips of politicians, news events, and media coverage of these to illustrate stories, critique current events, and emphasize points, much like news programs. A clear example of this is Stewart's monologue during the first portion of the June 16, 2010 episode, which focused on the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, a

recurring segment called “The Strife Aquatic” (a play on the Wes Anderson movie title, *The Life Aquatic*). In this particular clip, Stewart essentially performs a rhetorical analysis on a speech given by President Barack Obama after he visited the Gulf. Obama begins by saying that the spill is “assaulting” our shores and our citizens, and he wants to recap a “battle plan” moving forward (“June 16, 2010”). Stewart follows this by saying, “You heard the man, we are at war! With an inanimate object - oil. We’ve already got the posters printed and ready to go,” as a poster appears on the left side of the screen featuring a crane covered in oil and wearing an Uncle Sam hat with the text “I want <u>you</u> to wash me.” Obama proposes establishing a national commission to understand the spill’s causes and investigate. The camera returns to Stewart, frustrated with this plan: “I thought you said we were at war, in a battle, it’s assault! And you formed a commission? . . . Please tell me you’ve got a battle plan that *sounds* like a battle plan?” Obama continues by saying that the Secretary of the Navy will develop a long-term Gulf Coast restoration plan as soon as possible. The camera cuts back to Stewart as he puts his head in his hand: “You know they [the Navy] have bombs and shit, did you know that? Long term restoration plan? How did we go from ‘we’re locked in mortal combat with oil’ to what seems to be the minutes from a Wichita Falls City Council meeting? . . . This isn’t really a war speech is it? You’re just starting off with a war metaphor. What is it you actually have to say?” Then, the final clip from Obama’s speech seems to take another turn tonally: “Tonight, we pray for that courage. We pray for the people of the gulf. And we pray that a hand may guide us through the storm toward a brighter day.” Stewart critiques this tone change for taking a hard turn from “We’ve got a commission and all is well” to “May God have mercy on our souls”: “If this is a commission-based administrative problem, what’s with the freaky talk? Maybe he’s trying to win over more of the Fox Nation people. At least they go for that sort of thing.” At this, Stewart takes the opportunity

to look at how the media has approached the speech, as he cuts to clips of Fox News anchors discussing how "the president's use of religion is not sitting well with everybody" and critiquing him for invoking God when he "does not go to church on a regular basis." Stewart juxtaposes this with a clip from the previous day in which Gretchen Carlson suggests that Obama should have gone to church, that "it might be a good idea to ask for divine intervention about how we're going to fix this whole leak!" Stewart follows up, "But only if he does it in a church on a Sunday! If he does it from the Oval Office on a Tuesday, that's the devil's work." This segment is a good example of Stewart's monologue style, which often brings together a variety of primary source clips with Stewart's commentary to discuss an event and shows a fuller picture of how the media has approached it, as well. Through this format, Stewart combines conventions from traditional news programs by integrating relevant clips of the event in question, grounding the segment in fact, but subverts the traditional news format by using his interjections to question and critique Obama's statements as well as incorporating clips from other news programs. While this segment does not request action from viewers, it does encourage them to think critically about the words of politicians as well as how those words are framed and discussed by news organizations. At the same time, Stewart is able to build his own credibility as he attempts to cut through the rhetoric of both a politician and media coverage of that politician's speech.

The juxtaposition of multiple primary audiovisual sources to highlight hypocrisy or nonsensical reasoning, particularly among politicians and members of the media, is a common strategy on *The Daily Show*. Again, this appeals to the audiences' sense of reason and reinforces Stewart's credibility, as he presents a view of what is currently happening but in a wider context than news media typically provides. For example, in the September 15, 2005 episode, Stewart covers the confirmation of Chief Justice John Roberts, playing clips from many House and

Senate members speaking during the hearing. In particular, he highlights Republican Senator Tom Coburn of Oklahoma, who tearfully professes, “My heart aches for less divisiveness, less polarization, less finger-pointing, less bitterness, less mindless partisanship, which at times sounds almost hateful to the ears of Americans” (“September 15, 2005”). Stewart follows this by pointing out that Coburn had previously been quoted as saying, “The gay community...is the greatest threat to our freedom that we face today” in spring 2004, and “I favor the death penalty for abortionists” in July 2004, statements that certainly sound divisive. Stewart also shows a clip from earlier in the hearing where Coburn was captured doing a crossword puzzle during testimony. “At least the crossword puzzle he was doing was appropriate,” Stewart quips, while an image of a crossword puzzle appears in the top left corner, the words filled in spelling out, “Tom Coburn is a phony.” Though this clip is brief, it is quite effective at illustrating the idea, through his own prior statements, that Coburn’s emotional testimony at the hearing was disingenuous, a juxtaposition that viewers would not see in a mainstream news broadcast. Here, Stewart puts a politician’s public statement into the context of his own past words. Such contextualization can illuminate understanding, but it often does not occur on traditional news programs adhering to a quickly changing 24-hour news cycle.

In addition to Stewart’s monologues, like nightly news programs, *The Daily Show* often relies on correspondents. This was true throughout Stewart’s tenure, though I observed in my corpus that the show began to rely less on them starting around 2008, during the second half of Stewart’s run. The last episode in the corpus that used a correspondent was the June 12, 2012 episode, which was a taped field piece with Correspondent John Oliver covering voter suppression laws. Correspondents are usually introduced with a specific title related to the story at hand that satirize the ways in which news programs appeal to ethos through the use of specific,

specialized titles. For example, in the December 13, 2000 show, Stephen Colbert is introduced as the "Senior Political Correspondent." As the show went on, correspondent titles progressively became longer and more specific for comedic effect. In the September 13, 2005 episode, Colbert is introduced as the "Senior Judicial Confirmation Analyst." On the September 10, 2007 episode, in a segment about Senator Larry Craig being arrested for lewd conduct in a men's restroom at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport, Rob Corddry is introduced as the "Senior Anonymous Congressional Gay Public Restroom Sex Correspondent." Correspondents generally appear on the show in one of three ways: "on location," in a taped field piece, or in the studio sitting across the desk from Stewart. When correspondents are "on location" wherever a story is happening (though these are most often shot on green screens), Stewart and the correspondent talk back and forth throughout the piece with the camera switching between them or showing them both on a split screen. This is the case, for example, in the December 13, 2000 episode, where Steve Carrell is outside the Supreme Court, and the November 10, 2003 episode where Stephen Colbert is in London, locations relevant to the story being covered. Alternatively, Stewart sometimes throws to correspondents for a taped field piece. Examples include a piece from Rob Corddry related to the rescue of miners in Pennsylvania on the September 16, 2002 episode and Steve Carell's interview with Mr. T as he prepared to sue Best Buy over using his likeness in the November 10, 2003 episode. Finally, correspondents would sometimes sit across from Stewart in the studio to chat about a particular story or issue, sitting across from each other at the desk, much like the guests did after 2005. This setup is used in the November 17, 2011 episode where "Senior Historical Context Correspondent" Sarah Vowell discusses New York's "Evacuation Day" as the best holiday after Thanksgiving. Collectively, correspondents also provided *The Daily Show* with opportunities to explore more diverse viewpoints; Wyatt Cenac,

Aasif Mandvi, Hasan Minhaj, Jessica Williams, Al Madrigal, and Larry Wilmore are all notable in their roles for taking on issues affecting marginalized groups during Stewart's tenure. While this casting played one role in the sense that it satirized the idea that news media only has people of color cover communities of color (Wilmore, for example, served as "Senior Black Correspondent" when covering issues that affected African Americans), it also broadened the range of topics that the show discussed and did so in the voices of people often directly connected to those topics. Broadening the diverse perspectives represented in the genre, Cenac, Minhaj, and Wilmore all went on to host their own news satire shows after leaving *The Daily Show*.

While correspondents take on personalities of their own, especially in the earlier episodes, Stewart sometimes engages with them as a comedic foil or voice or reason; where correspondents typically deliver jokes, Stewart often guides the conversation back to the issue at hand and its implications. In other words, in correspondent segments, Stewart is often not the one delivering the punchline, but setting up for them. Through this process, he might introduce opportunities for correspondents to make jokes about the topic at hand or highlight the absurdity of a correspondent's stance, as he often did with Colbert. For example, on the September 13, 2005 episode, Stewart covers the confirmation of Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts. During it, he interviews "Senior Judicial Confirmation Analyst" Stephen Colbert. When asked if we learned anything new about Roberts during the hearings, Colbert asserts that "there has been no end to the revelations," including things like Roberts not being a fan of cufflinks and that he parts his hair on the left ("September 13, 2005"). Stewart questions this, but Colbert doubles down on these pieces of information being "telling." Colbert says the hearings have lacked

contention and have ultimately been boring, referencing Clarence Thomas' 1991 confirmation hearings and Anita Hill's testimony that Thomas sexually harassed her:

> Colbert: To me, there are only two kinds of Supreme Court confirmation hearings - the kind where people talk about pubic hairs on Coke cans, and the kind where they don't. Sad to say this is the latter. I often wonder what happened to that pube on a Coke guy? That's a real "Where are they now?"
>
> Stewart: Actually, Stephen, you're referring to Justice Thomas, Clarence Thomas. He's a Supreme Court Justice now.
>
> Colbert: Come on, pube guy? You're pulling my leg, Jon.
>
> Stewart: No, Justice Thomas is the court's most reliably conservative voice.
>
> Colbert: Wow, way to go, pubester!

This particular excerpt critiques how news media often seizes on sensationalist details of an event to the extent that its central focus is lost; Colbert has to be reminded by Stewart of the person being confirmed in the hearings where all he can remember was the most salacious detail, despite the fact that the person in question remains a Supreme Court justice. While it is possible that viewers could come away from the segment with more of a memory of the sensationalism already emphasized in the media, Stewart and Colbert highlight this shortcoming of the media through the absurdity of Colbert's position and elevate the idea of being well-informed. Colbert's persona is confident, but often asserts information that is nonsensical, biased, or incomplete while Stewart questions him or responds with a corrective. In this way, Stewart represents what many audience members want to be: sensible, informed, and able to concisely call out nonsense and falsehoods when they arise, effectively "winning" the interaction. In this way, the show not

only satirizes mainstream news programs, but also appeals to the viewer's sense of reason and desire to be right.

The final segment of the show is very brief and involves Stewart wrapping up with final comments. Once *The Colbert Report* began in 2005, this time was sometimes used to bridge between the two shows, with the hosts bantering briefly, something that is not uncommon on 24-hour news networks like CNN. Every episode ends with the "Moment of Zen," which is typically a brief clip relating back to a topic discussed in the episode; the tone of these moments range from humorous to absurd to somber, depending on the episode's content. For example, the December 13, 2000 episode, which focused entirely on the recount of the 2000 election, featured a "Moment of Zen" that was a clip from NBC where a reporter receives a copy of the Supreme Court decision settling the recount, and the reporter awkwardly struggles to make sense of it on air. This directly calls back to an earlier moment in the show, where Correspondent Steve Carrell appears to be frantically studying the decision but is actually just looking at a large Chinese take-out menu. The pairing of these two moments works to comment on the relentlessness of the news and the speed with which journalists sometimes have to respond to breaking news, sometimes to the detriment of both them and the viewers. In contrast, the "Moment of Zen" on the June 18, 2015 episode features Pastor Clementa Pinckney, one of the people killed in the Charleston church shooting, talking about freedom. Much like the format of the show, the "Moment of Zen" changes based on the content covered, but it generally leaves audiences with another satirical connection to the news media or a chance for critical reflection.

Unlike traditional news media broadcasts that are intended to be held to an expectation of unbiased, dispassionate reporting, *The Daily Show* combines rhetorical appeals, but particularly utilizes appeals to pathos and ethos, to underscore its message and shape audience response.

Stewart's performance on the show regularly involves disbelief, frustration, anger, grief, elation and other emotions. In this way, Stewart, though appearing much like an anchor on a nightly news program, offers an alternative to the traditional journalist; he reacts to the news during his solo segments and acts almost as a foil to the correspondents, who are usually presenting an absurd story or taking a nontraditional approach to it. This allows Stewart to correct information or ask leading questions that serve to critique the story or the media's approach to it, or to underscore a significant point, building his credibility while reflecting the range of emotions that often can arise when engaging with news and politics.

Stewart is skilled at representing the kind of disillusionment and confusion that can arise with our relentless news cycle, which sometimes results in false narratives. A good example of this comes in the June 16, 2010 episode, which primarily covers the Deepwater Horizon oil spill that occurred in the Gulf of Mexico a few months prior. As covered in this chapter previously, the first segment of the episode covers President Barack Obama's speech after visiting the Gulf himself. The second segment continues Stewart's monologue and returns to Obama's speech once again to highlight his statement that we have known for decades that our reliance on foreign oil is unsustainable. He remarks that now is the time to innovate and "seize control of our own destiny," suggesting that this has not been emphasized in the past ("June 16, 2010"). Stewart quickly throws to a clip of President George W. Bush in 2006 saying almost exactly the same sentiment as Obama in 2011. "But see, back then, in 2006, we didn't do it," says Stewart. "Because oil dependence had at that point only entangled us in two simultaneous wars. But now, it's gotten us into 2 wars and a giant spill. *That's* the push we needed." In this way, Stewart suggests that the time is ripe for these efforts because we are being forced to confront them; this will be the time that energy initiatives stick. Stewart continues, "You know, I wish we had taken

care of this energy problem 10 years ago when there was no war and the economy was great. *That* would've been a great time to develop a long-term energy strategy." He then cuts to a clip of President Bill Clinton in 2000 talking about the creation of a long-term energy strategy, echoing Stewart's exact words. The segment continues with similar clips of every president stretching back to Richard Nixon in 1974. "Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me. Fool me 8 times, am I a f*cking idiot?" asks Stewart. Stewart continues to offer possible obstacles to tackling the energy problem, and clips of presidents continue to reflect that we have had the ideas, we have repeatedly set the deadlines, and action has not taken place.

As these clips continue, Stewart is increasingly frustrated and incredulous. "We've redefined success and *still* failed," remarks Stewart. The segment reveals through the use of video clips something that is easy to forget: that US presidents have professed a goal of addressing the country's reliance on foreign oil and need for sustainable energy for decades. These clips together create a convincing argument that getting serious about pursuing alternative energy has been on presidents' minds much longer and goals have been set and foregone more often than each subsequent president would like the public to believe. Throughout the segment, Stewart takes on a dual role as the narrator and the audience member, as though he is seeing these clips unfold in real time. Because the genre allows for it, this dual role allows Stewart to emote his frustration, likely parallel with many of the viewers, and create an emotional connection through sympathetic identification. As I have mentioned previously, he is able to talk about this issue in a way that provides a broader context and historical framing to the issue, whereas traditional news media typically focuses on covering current perspectives and events most closely. As Stewart builds his argument by bringing together numerous historical news

clips and commentary, he appeals to the audience's sense of logic and their emotions, strengthening his connection to the audience in the process.

Ethos and pathos are also key appeals in episodes where the show must respond to major tragedies in the news. As the genre allows for the incorporation of emotion, unlike the traditional news genre, Stewart does not refrain from using a pathetic appeal at these times. This occurs twice in my corpus, in the September 20, 2001 and June 18, 2015 episodes where Stewart does extended monologues about the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York and the Charleston, South Carolina church shooting, respectively. In both of these monologues, Stewart is somber, reflecting on the difficulty of speaking on national tragedy in the context of a comedy show. Stewart uses these moments to reflect on the events and in both cases, the monologue reflects something about the national mood. The September 20, 2001 episode, occurring just nine days after the September 11th terrorist attacks, begins with Stewart asking a question directly to the audience: "Are you okay?" He apologizes for being "another entertainment show beginning with an overwrought speech of a shaken host" and cracks a small joke about "getting back to work": "there were no jobs available for a man in the fetal position under his desk crying, which I gladly would have taken. So I come back here" ("September 20, 2001"). As his monologue continues, Stewart shifts to a more hopeful tone. He indicates that, when something as silly as President Bush saying "subliminable" becomes funny again, that's when we will know we have "ridden out the storm." Stewart remarks that our barriers are gone as we have united as a country, and through the "extraordinary" work of our firefighters, policeman, and first responders, "we've already won" because "chaos cannot sustain itself." He ends with a statement about how the view from his apartment has changed, a hopeful allegory for the changed perspective of the nation:

> The view from my apartment was the World Trade Center, and now it's gone. And they attacked it - this symbol of American ingenuity and strength and labor and imagination and commerce, and it is gone. But you know what the view is now? The Statue of Liberty. The view from the south of Manhattan is now the Statue of Liberty. You can't beat that.

The monologue reflects the grief, but also the optimism, of the time: the idea New York City would rebuild and heal and that the US would come together as a nation, stronger and more united than before. Additionally, as the news satire genre allows for the incorporation of pathetic appeals, blending emotion and humor, *The Daily Show* is able to cover and respond to current events in ways that traditional news media cannot.

Though the June 18, 2015 episode is similar in its approach, it takes a different tone, again reflective of at least a portion of the national mood. In discussing the Charleston, South Carolina church shooting that killed nine African American parishioners, including the pastor, during a Bible study, Stewart confesses that he "didn't do my job today" and has nothing prepared for the audience:

> And maybe if I wasn't nearing the end of the run or if this wasn't such a common occurrence, maybe I could have pulled out of the spiral, but I didn't. And so, I honestly have nothing, other than just sadness once again that we have to peer into the abyss of the depraved violence that we do to each other and the nexus of a just gaping racial wound that will not heal, yet we pretend doesn't exist. I'm confident, though, that by acknowledging it, by staring into that, and seeing it for what it is, we still won't do jackshit. Yeah, that's us. And that's the part that blows my mind. ("June 18, 2015")

As opposed to the 2001 monologue, Stewart reflects a much more pessimistic outlook, having covered many mass shootings and acts of racial violence in the past with seemingly little done afterward to prevent similar attacks. He laments our swift response to foreign terrorism but inability to respond decisively to domestic terrorism, and states, "This was a terrorist attack. This was racist," invoking language that he says other politicians and members of the media avoid in these contexts. "That's the thing, Al-Qaeda, all those guys, ISIS - they're not shit compared to the damage that we can do to ourselves on a regular basis," says Stewart. He ends the monologue by apologizing for the lack of jokes, and the rest of the episode is spent interviewing Malala Yousafzai, a 2014 recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. As in 2001, his expressions of frustration, helplessness, and anger align with the emotions of many throughout the country, creating an empathetic connection to those viewers. That Stewart admits that he is unprepared because of the overwhelming news is likely relatable to many, and again, represents a subversion of the traditional news genre through a strong pathetic appeal.

While I argue that Stewart helps viewers feel informed and creates a strong emotional connection with him, it is important not to overstate the breadth of this effect. As *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* aired once a week, the show's reliance on critiquing the mainstream media ultimately means the show focused largely on dominant topics and narratives. Because of Stewart's strong emotional appeals, his monologues envision like-minded viewers and come clearly from his perspective, that of a white man with a considerable amount of privilege, and many of the issues he discusses will not affect him directly. This undoubtedly leaves some perspectives out of the show, even considering the contributions that a diverse group of correspondents may make, and likely limits its audience, as noted previously. Still, his role in

shaping news satire into a more audience-centered genre, influencing every iteration that has come after, is significant.

These various examples of incorporating intentional rhetorical appeals to ethos and pathos into the show illustrate how Stewart was able to build a strong reputation for credibility with his audience. Stewart not only shows himself as an informed citizen, but he establishes that he has strong feelings and opinions about what is happening in the world and the people in it. In an age of cynicism about not only politics but the media that cover it, the news satire genre offers a range of ways to productively break journalistic conventions in order to earn credibility, audience trust, and, in turn, engagement.

Broadening the Context: Interviews with Participants of the News Satire Genre

As evidenced by the genre analysis, I argue that there are a few key components to *The Daily Show*'s success and ability to connect with audiences: a journalistic format, appearance, and commitment to accurate information, particularly through the use of primary source video clips, and appeals to ethos and pathos to entertain through comedy and connect with the audience, establishing a positive rapport with viewers. We continue to see these conventions in the news satire shows airing today, and they have led to current programming that is audience-engaged and encouraging of activist uptakes such as participating in social media discussions and debates through the use of hashtags, donating money to causes, and publicly voicing opinions; this is discussed in-depth in Chapter 3. While these conventions are apparent in the genre analysis, I also think it is important to consider the context for the decisions that led to the establishment of these conventions in order to understand the goals and thinking behind them. *The Daily Show (The Book): An Oral History* offers insights into the entire run of the show through interviews with Jon Stewart, correspondents, staff, and guests of the show. In this

section, I will provide context from this text that helps further illuminate these conventions and reveal a look at the exigence behind the show.

As revealed in the genre analysis, *The Daily Show*'s appearance is heavily influenced by cable and nightly news programs; this was an intentional choice. Chuck O'Neil, *The Daily Show*'s director beginning in 2000, said, "I really wanted to make the *Daily Show* set and graphics look like *World News Tonight*. It would give much more gravity to the jokes, if we made it look serious" (Smith 65). This thinking extended outside the studio as well, as Stewart hired Jim Margolis, a veteran producer from *60 Minutes*, to produce the show's field pieces, showing a commitment to making the correspondents' taped work look as close to a mainstream news program as possible (66). Writer Jason Ross emphasized that "Jon was really adamant about keeping up with the pace of the media that we were making fun of. So instead of being satisfied by sticking with some *Not Necessarily the News*-type format, he wanted to make sure that our graphics were just as good as Fox's graphics" (216). In the studio, the staff also focused on making the production in studio feel like a newscast for the audience. According to Margolis, "[W]hen I came in they used to stop between acts, and the warmup guy would go back out and talk to the studio audience while Jon talked to the producers. . . . I told them we've got to get rid of the warmup guy and get to the next act as quickly as possible to keep the audience engaged" (65). "Jon, by allowing slips and flubs to happen on air and not reshoot" had the effect of making the show seem more like an authentic news broadcast and helps frame Stewart as a real, relatable person (65). Whereas traditional news media can sometimes feel affected and wooden, the use of humor and more casual tone of news satire helps the genre feel more approachable while still retaining some of the feel, and elevated ethos, of a newscast.

Journalistic conventions also influenced the show's focus as Stewart directed more of a focus on hard news. "It was pretty quick that things changed. One of Jon's lines was, 'No more Carol Channing jokes' - the celebrity stuff. Instead of doing six headlines a show, we started doing three headlines a show, but they were more intense," said Adam Chodikoff, researcher and senior producer (Smith 6). Stewart was a fan of George Carlin and wanted to infuse the same sensibility into his humor; the show needed a "substantive foundation," and Stewart started "target[ing] powerful people and institutions," making the jokes more deliberate in an effort to point out concerning and absurd issues with people in power (6). The content shifted to "[become] a commentary on the phoniness and shortcomings of the news media and politicians, wrapped in a parody newscast" (104). This required more research and collecting of sources to support the jokes. According to Madeline Smithberg, one of the creators of the show, "The cool thing was that we really built *The Daily Show* as a news-gathering organization. We had footage deals. We had feeds. We started collecting B-roll" (49). In a way, the staff did twice the work of a traditional news organization, gathering both primary source footage of politicians and events *and* footage of the media that covered them.

Though the show resembles news programs in its appearance and reliance on news footage, its freedom from limiting journalistic standards and conventions proved to be an asset. The 2000 election was a formative season for *The Daily Show* in a number of ways, as it provided a chance to establish Stewart as a critical political voice, and the half-hour, four-day-a-week format was of great benefit, allowing the writing staff to keep the show's content incisive and fresh, particularly when it came to the post-election recount. Writer Chris Regan said, "You could see the traditional media outlets struggling to cover this whole situation with some sort of dignity, and we weren't bound by that. The 2000 election was so bizarre that only a comedy

news show was really prepared to cover it" (Smith 51). While 24-hour cable news networks are bound to relentless coverage of current events, *The Daily Show* had the opportunity to ask, what does our audience actually want to see right now? This question becomes an undercurrent throughout Stewart's run as host, as the show looked to be more engaged with its audience and responsive to the issues in which viewers were invested. "They realized in 2000 that actually engaging with elements in politics that people really cared about and got animated about was a more powerful fuel for the show, as opposed to the show being what it was earlier, more of a sort of parody of newscasts," said media critic James Poniewozik (39). "'Indecision 2000' is the point at which you see *The Daily Show* moving from parody to satire." This shift was also facilitated by the show's more intent focus on current topics that audiences found significant. As I note earlier in the chapter, this also means that, in order to identify the topics audiences cared about, a particular kind of audience must be identified. Stewart's appeals reflected that he likely considered viewers that shared his own experiences and perspectives, which ultimately leaves out a range of other points of view and lived experiences. Though this chapter focuses on a more homogeneous audience, Chapter 4 considers more conflicting and diverse perspectives of the multiple audiences engaging with this genre.

As illustrated in the genre analysis, the show's content often took aim at inconsistencies in politicians' words and behavior but also worked to keep news media in check by looking at their tactics for covering current events. According to the writers, this was also cemented during the 2000 election, and the focus of the show shifted from simply making jokes about events themselves to exposing political spin and *how* the media covered events. "We had to cover the [2000 election] recount for a half hour each night. The news reporters who had to cover it twenty-four hours a day and had nothing to say, those were the people who went crazy, and

that's what we realized we could focus on," said writer J. R. Havlan (Smith 51). "The coverage of the 2000 elections was the turning point in the percentage of how much we covered a news story and how much we covered how that news story was covered." This often meant piecing together past and current clips to highlight contradictions in politicians' policies and actions. Ben Karlin, writer and later, executive producer, said:

> We were hearing and seeing Bush Administration people say things that directly countermanded things that they or their surrogates had said before. If we, as basically stoner comedy people, could remember it, how was it possible that the actual media couldn't remember it, or didn't care, or didn't think it was important? People were so caught up in this cycle of new news that they had completely lost the fact that these politicians are all over the place. (105)

The administration's tactics played into something that *The Daily Show* was especially good at: pointing out inconsistencies by simply playing politicians' own words back to them, providing much-needed context for current news stories. This time was critical for forging the show's reputation for saying what others would not. "If there was an attitude at *The Daily Show*, it was that we were willing to say things that would get you in trouble by naming what was bullshit," said Colbert (116). The need to cut through bullshit became a theme as the show sought to root itself in truth according to Elliott Kalan, an intern who rose through the ranks to head writer:

> I noticed that CNN went to the trouble to fact-check an SNL piece. And then Jon Kyl, the Arizona senator, was on CNN and said something wrong, and the reporter goes, 'Well, we'll have to leave it there.' So we looked for clips, and CNN did this routinely - they didn't fact-check their own guests, they just said, 'We'll have to leave it there.' If you look at the entire show over Jon's run, and

> how it evolved, everything it did, from going after CNN to going after the Obama Administration, yes, we were against war and for good things. But the larger theme was truth and not abdicating responsibility for the words you use. (199)

This approach, of holding politicians and public figures accountable when mainstream news would not, was successful at creating a trustworthy ethos for Stewart, who was voted in a 2009 *Time* poll as the most trusted newscaster in America (Poniewozik). It also, again, offered audiences needed context for the stories of the day, shaping perceptions of these events and key figures and fostering the "deliberative democracy" that Baym mentions as a feature of the news satire genre.

Baym sees the version of deliberative democracy furthered by *The Daily Show* as one inspired by Jurgen Habermas' idea of public conversation based in reason that is accessible to equal participation by all: "a theory of deliberative democracy as expressed on *The Daily Show* understands the political system ideally to be comprised of individuals engaged in reasoned discussion, a cooperative discourse that seeks to reach a consensual notion of the common good" (272-273). This is viewed by some scholars as an idealistic view of deliberative democracy, as the discussion of political issues and practices often leads to a debate about things like the very humanity and rights of certain groups. Arabella Lyon writes, "Deliberation is an act fraught with hierarchal power, contingency, and manipulation. Human rights deliberations have been demonstrably subjected to shameless strategy and instrumentalism, and they often are used to promote the self-interests of nations, communities, and dark powers lacking respect for human dignity and difference" (7). While a utopian view of deliberative democracy is equalizing, this can erase valuable differences and lived experiences in favor of reaching consensus; as Lyon further writes, "In prescribing procedure, presuming equality, privileging rationality, constricting

the discourse of deliberation, and overvaluing consensus, it moves away from recognizing and maintaining difference. In effect it finds difference disruptive rather than productively diverse" (11). Still, Baym argues that we see the ideal of reasoned deliberation more clearly in *The Daily Show*, where interviews with guests are cooperative and non-combative without shying away from real issues and questions. That the show often calls out politicians and public figures for inaccurate or misleading statements where other outlets do not also serves as a form of deliberation, answering those statements with a response that fleshes out the topic at hand. Baym praises *The Daily Show*'s approach as a positive model among negative examples like MSNBC's *Hardball* and CNN's *Crossfire*, shows where, he argues, conversations are merely for aggressively "maximizing [guests'] own self-interests" rather than looking for areas of agreement, compromise, or further development (273), more in line with the risks that Lyon sees in the deliberative democracy model. Stewart's ability to talk reasonably but meaningfully with politicians across the ideological spectrum, rejecting falsehoods and empty rhetoric when needed, is another factor that earned him credibility with many.

Stewart's ethos was also influenced by the show's reliance on pathos, as reflected in the genre analysis. *The Daily Show*'s use of emotion developed throughout Stewart's tenure as host, and the September 20, 2001 episode, discussed previously in this chapter, was one of the first instances of emotion driving the show. Since the show taped in New York City, Stewart and the entire cast and crew were directly impacted by the events of September 11th, bringing expectations for them, like other NYC-based shows, to directly address the tragedy. The episode involved a nine-minute emotional, but ultimately hopeful, monologue, ending with Stewart bringing out his puppy for the "Moment of Zen" ("September 20, 2001"). Before Kalan started as an intern at *The Daily Show* in 2002, he was an audience member watching Stewart's response

to the September 11th attacks: “That episode didn’t make anything okay at all, but at least someone was saying the type of thing I wanted the president or the mayor to say” (Smith 77). This reaction highlights Stewart’s ability to reflect audience emotion, in contrast to other figures in power who must generally appear more measured and “in control.”

The appeals to pathos in the show appeared not only through Stewart’s monologues, but also his interactions with correspondents. Lizz Winstead, one of the show’s creators, reflected that the emotional aspect of Stewart’s role was an intentional choice on his part:

> Instead of Jon playing a character - the news anchor, one of the derelicts in a derelict world of media - Jon made a creative decision to take the show in the direction of the correspondents presenting the idiocy, and then Jon is the person who calls out the idiocy with the eloquence that the viewer wishes they had. And he did it in a way that’s not condescending, it’s not smug. It’s funny, it’s emotional, it’s calling out bullshit. So Jon became the voice of the audience. (Smith 39)

Stewart cultivated this focus throughout his staff by encouraging writers to pursue topics they were passionate about. “[Stewart] always said, ‘We need to make sure we’re channeling our emotions. What do we find joyous? What makes us have a strong emotional reaction? If something makes you angry, why? Bring that to the idea. If something’s just purely fun, let’s just have fun with it,’” said production staff member and field producer Ramin Hedayati (381). “He wants us to be writing to, and pitching to, that strong feeling.” The result was a show built on the issues that the writers - and Stewart - cared about, and that emotional charge is apparent when watching the show. Though at times Stewart expressed “unfiltered anger” about the night’s topics (168), media critic James Poniewozik emphasizes that the show “generally wasn’t cynical

or snarky. The show cared about stuff and it didn't simply give up. . . .The humor was always from a point of view that held out a hope that the world could be improved, and I think that tone was essential to its success" (149). As the genre analysis reveals, the appeal to the audience's common values, reason, and emotion creates the connection that can be activated for more dynamic engagement.

In the years since leaving *The Daily Show*, Stewart has successfully continued to selectively exert his political clout to advocate for issues he feels strongly about, namely benefits for 9/11 first responders and veterans of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. This shows the strength of Stewart's political ethos; he is not seen as just a comedian, but a person who understands American politics and takes a stand where he feels his voice can make a difference. This also is a powerful example of how the shift from media satire to political action can occur, something that I argue has occurred as subsequent news satire shows have developed out of the *Daily Show* mold, beginning with *The Colbert Report*.

News Satire, Real-World Politics, and Audience Engagement

In *The Daily Show: (The Book)*, Stewart never says that his goal for the show was to exert real power in politics or manifest an activist audience; in fact, he reiterates the show's "false authority" at different moments throughout the book (Smith 260), indicating a position that many news satire hosts have taken: their shows are simply comedy. Still, it seems obvious from the discussion throughout this chapter that the show was committed to accurate information, calling out falsehoods and hypocrisy in politicians and the media, and ensuring that the show covered the kinds of issues cared about by its audience, staff, and host. This results in a viewership that feels informed and primed to act on that information, whether or not that uptake is activated. We

see a call for viewer action to occur, however, in 2010, with the "Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear," a joint effort between *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*.

Though *The Daily Show* was undeniably influential in its own right, its combination with *The Colbert Report*, hosted by former correspondent Stephen Colbert, brought even more attention and potential for impact. As the shows aired back-to-back on Comedy Central, *The Daily Show*'s final segment, before the "Moment of Zen," was often used to bridge between the two shows, with Stewart and Colbert talking briefly on a split screen. Rather than replicating Stewart's model, Colbert turned it on its head, doing the show as a character modeled after conservative pundits like Bill O'Reilly. Thus, whereas Stewart served as a kind of voice of reason and reflection of the audience's emotion, Colbert expanded the persona he cultivated as a correspondent on *The Daily Show*, satirically pointing out issues with extreme pundits by directly parodying them. *The Colbert Report* brought the same key news satire conventions to its programming as *The Daily Show*, "critiqu[ing] political discourse while equally satirizing the inanity of the mainstream news media," but with a caricature of right-wing pundits at its center (McClennan 8); as Sophia McClennan and Remy Maisel explain,

> Stewart's show demands accountability, honesty, and truth for the public through a satirical method that asks the audience to scratch its head and question the stories we are fed. Colbert *enacts* the insanity by taking the pundit, opinion-driven world of news media to an exaggerated level that exposes all of its flaws. . . . Stewart would begin by unmasking those in power, then Colbert would put the mask back on, but this time it was bigger and more ridiculous. The audience finished the hour enlightened and engaged. (88)

Like Stewart, Sophia McClennan notes that though Colbert is "quick in interviews to describe his own show as comedy and not news," the show's format coupled with real-world action like "the rally on the National Mall and his aborted run for presidency . . . fashions [Colbert] as someone who provides insights into issues that he hopes will lead to public debate" (McClennan 62).

The plan for Stewart and Colbert's rally began as a means to parody Glenn Beck. According to Stewart, "Beck started doing rallies, and I just thought that was a really funny idea. I can't remember what his was called. Something ridiculous. 'Restoring Honor.' He was going to gather people to restore something that hadn't been lost" (Smith 260). Though Stewart and Colbert were originally going to hold "dueling rallies," the two were combined into "The Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear" (261). Stewart pitched the idea to viewers as "a pageant for noncrazy, non-book-and-flag-burning, nonscreaming America: 'Not so much the Silent Majority as the Busy Majority.'" The intent, then, was a "plea for rationality in an increasingly irrational political and media landscape." Stewart found the idea of playing with the "demagoguery" that he saw in pundits appealing; "'Let's go down there and get a bunch of people, but then not have them do anything'" (262).

What began as a joke turned out to have a large impact and reflected Stewart and Colbert's engaged viewership. While the permit filed for the event estimated an attendance of 25,000 (McClennan and Maisel 96), the National Parks Service informally estimated a crowd of more than 200,000 on the National Mall (Tavernise and Stelter), while Beck's rally, the inspiration for this event, brought about 80,000 attendees (McClennan and Maisel 97). *The New York Times* noted that participants "clogged traffic and filled subway trains and buses to overflow" (Tavernise and Stelter). Further, the Comedy Central broadcast of the event garnered

two million viewers, with another 570,000 watching online; in total, "Stewart and Colbert reached about 2.8 million people that day in real-time with many more seeing the event subsequently" (McClennan and Maisel 97). Notably, reporters Sabrina Tavernise and Brian Stelter interviewed numerous participants who professed that Stewart "gave voice to [their] feelings of frustration and isolation." Though there was no political campaigning from Stewart or Colbert on the main stage, some rally-goers took it upon themselves to "actively canvass" while in attendance (Tavernise and Stelter). These responses reflect an engaged audience willing to participate outside of viewership, in some cases extending to political activism. This is an illustration of where fandoms, "collaborative and participatory groups" made up of audience members "who form an intense affective bond with a particular property" (Jenkins "Fandom" 16), collide with publics, "emergent bod[ies] of those who are tending to an issue through their active participation in the deliberative processes that bear on it" (Hauser "Vernacular Discourse" 335), something I discussed in Chapter 1. Viewers attend the event as fans, but some also use this opportunity to actively participate in politics; as such, they represent the "citizen-viewer" that Sonia Livingstone describes as fulfilling both roles of audience and public simultaneously (Livingstone "On the Relation" 21).

Though Stewart's approach was to analyze and critique current news and politics that his audience would care about, Colbert took this approach a step further. In her 2011 book, *American According to Stephen Colbert: Satire as Public Pedagogy*, Sophia McClennan makes a case that "Colbert's program offers its audience a way to combine entertainment with political reflection" (1). Using Henry Giroux's term, "public pedagogy," meaning education that occurs on a public scale outside of a traditional classroom space, McClennan argues that *The Colbert Report*'s work in educating its viewers was especially groundbreaking because it "emerged in a

moment when the reigning public pedagogy was especially oppressive," during the Bush Administration, as questioning the administration's decisions and policies "after 9/11 became virtually tantamount to treason" (2-3). Further, McClennan also points out that Colbert's program fits Giroux's definition of "critical pedagogy," or one that "encourage(s) reflection, the development of democratic sensibilities, and social commitment" (3). Because Colbert gets his message across through an over-the-top parody, viewers are asked to think and reflect about what he's actually saying and the logic (or lack thereof) underlying actual pundits' words. Thus, the show is noteworthy in its combination of public and critical pedagogies, "us(ing) a wide-reaching media forum to foster public debate of major issues . . . in a way that energizes and amuses its audience" (3).

In the quest to educate the public, *Colbert*'s pedagogy is active, taking part directly in political processes. Just a month before the Rally, on September 24, 2010, Colbert appeared in character before the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, and Border Security to discuss his experience working alongside migrant workers with the United Farm Workers' "Take Our Jobs" program (McClennan 145). Though he submitted a completely different speech to the committee before his appearance, "he used the opportunity to satirize right-wing views on immigrant labor, exposing many of the logical flaws in their arguments." Perhaps most memorably, Colbert also launched his own Super PAC in 2012, leveraging it into his second presidential campaign (the first being a more short-lived attempt in 2008) (McClennan and Maisel 36). The creation of Colbert's Super PAC occurred after "a series of court decisions made it legal for political donations to become more secretive and more rampantly controlled by corporations and the wealthy," creating ample opportunity for corruption (38). McClennan and Maisel argue that Colbert was the perfect venue to discuss this,

as the news media "directly benefit[ted] from it" and thus were largely quiet about it (39). Colbert's Super PAC, "Americans for a Better Tomorrow, Tomorrow" revealed the lack of regulation and oversight in campaign finance, making it possible for nearly anyone to create a Super PAC should they so desire. In doing so, "Colbert decided to try to get his audience to be social actors in the process, not just by contributing money to his Super PAC, but also by creating their own Super PACs" using a $99 "Colbert Super PAC Super Fun PAC," which came with FEC paperwork, an instruction manual, and, for fun, an Allen wrench (41-42). The show sold 1,000 of these, and many did register Super PACs with the FEC (42); in fact, "2.5% of all the nation's Super PACs" were Colbert-influenced (43), representing a large number of viewers who became social actors in the process as well. Colbert, too, raised more than $1 million for his Super PAC. When he announced his run for the presidency, laws required Colbert to relinquish his control of his Super PAC. Thus, Colbert "passed on the reins to Stewart," illustrating the loopholes that allowed candidates to easily maintain control of Super PAC funds (36). Rather than simply telling audiences about these concerning issues, completing the actual processes in a humorous context increases the impact of the information.

While this information alone seems to communicate an impressive impact on the audience through public education and a successful call to action, formal studies also support the idea that Colbert's Super PAC content was influential. In 2014, Bruce W. Hardy, Jeffrey A. Gottfried, Kenneth M. Winneg, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson performed a study to measure viewer perceptions of their knowledge and actual knowledge acquisition about campaign finance and super PACs after watching relevant *Colbert* episodes (330). As the researchers note, "existing literature suggests that when political information is presented within the context of humor, viewers will be more attentive, motivated, and engaged with the content, which in turn

will foster learning of that content, perhaps even more so than other sources of information" (332). Ultimately, the study "found that *The Colbert Report* viewing increased both perception of how knowledgeable the respondents were about super PACs and 501(c)(4) groups and also increased actual knowledge of campaign finance regulation related to these independent expenditure groups" (348). Further, "there is strong support for the notion that *The Colbert Report*'s influence was greater than that of other types of news media."

Overall, through the development of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and later, *The Colbert Report*, we see a shifting role for audiences. As Stewart served as a voice for the audience on topics they cared about and encouraged critical reflection on these issues, Colbert built on this model and took it further through action-oriented audience appeals, giving viewers a way to engage and learn about issues through both the show's direct participation and opportunities for viewers to directly participate as well.

The Daily Show and *The Colbert Report* were not the first to use their programs to engage in politics outside of their shows. *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* notably ran a candidate for president in 1968, using their "prime-time pulpit" to comment on the election (xi). The "Pat Paulsen for President" campaign is described by David Bianculli as "the *Comedy Hour* master stroke," a "running gag" that "took more than a year to tell, targeting and lampooning the entire political process of campaigning" (213). The idea began, of course, as a joke and involved running an inanimate object like the *Mona Lisa* or the Statue of Liberty as a write-in candidate. It evolved into a real campaign featuring the show's editorials host, Pat Paulsen, with the show hiring Don Bradley, a California political consultant who had worked on successful campaigns for President John F. Kennedy and California Governor Pat Brown (216). With Bradley's insider knowledge guiding them, Paulsen's candidacy was announced early on in January 1968, before

even Bobby Kennedy had entered the race (218). Mason Williams, a writer for *Comedy Hour* said that Bradley's direction to present Paulsen as a legitimate candidate led him to realize that "this whole presidential campaign was going to become a way for the general public to get a broader sense of the political process. You're illuminating what goes on, but also attempting to make people interested in the political process by demystifying it" (216). *Comedy Hour* used Paulsen's candidacy as a means to comment on and joke about the race as candidates emerged, and more seriously, "Paulsen was responding to Vietnam-era social division and national crisis, and his campaigns were able to draw attention to fundamental ways that many politicians were disconnected from their constituencies" (McClennan and Maisel 35). Paulsen has been credited with receiving 200,000 write-in votes, though Bianculli questions that figure (226). Regardless, Paulsen's editorials developed into a 10-month campaign for president; thus, Paulsen's role on the show represented the first opportunities for viewers to directly interact with a televised news satire program.

Ultimately, I agree with Bianculli's assertion that the Paulsen campaign "would later inform the Jon Stewart playbook by imitating and lampooning the process and, on occasion, interacting with its real-life participants" (217). More than 30 years later, there are certainly parallels between the *Smothers Brothers* method of producing content critical of politics and politicians and taking direct part in those processes, particularly when we consider Stewart's commitment to critical commentary on politics and politicians and Colbert's campaigns for president in 2008 and 2012. However, it seems clear that *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* take this model further, developing the hybrid news satire genre to engage audiences in active uptakes outside of viewing. As McClennan argues, Colbert in particular begins to extend these strategies to include public education and engaged political action, making political

processes more transparent and asking viewers to directly participate along the way. Colbert's creation of a Super PAC was interactive and called upon on audience engagement and action for its success. Thus, the two significant, entwined developments in the news satire genre during the Stewart/Colbert era are the establishment of audience-centered conventions that led viewers to feel informed and calling on those activated audience members to take action or participate in some way. These are facilitated by the features revealed in the genre analysis, including the show's format and content and rhetorical appeals to ethos and pathos. These changes to the televised news satire genre reflect that it has evolved beyond a hybrid genre to a genre of its own, composed of elements of comedy and journalism but able to expand the possibilities of what each genre might be capable of separately.

News Satire: Beyond a Hybrid Genre

From its earliest days in the form of *That Was the Week That Was*, covered in Chapter 1, news satire has been a hybrid genre that combines elements of comedy and news. This characterization works in the sense of purposes, as news satire aims to both entertain and inform, but also in medium, using the appearance and format of traditional news broadcasts to frame humorous takes on current events and politics. Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Karlyn Kohrs Campbell discuss how generic features are combined in rhetorical hybrids, blends of forensic, epideictic, and deliberative genres that overlap and combine in practice (146). These blends are productive but typically transitory in that they fuse genres to satisfy specific rhetorical conditions (147). Jamieson and Campbell suggest that because they respond to specific situations and needs and thus recur infrequently, genre hybridization often does not change audience expectations for the dominant genre (154). Through their example of eulogies delivered at politician Robert Kennedy's funeral, they illustrate how rhetors were able to satisfy communal and institutional

needs through combining elements of deliberative rhetoric, such as those used in political speeches, with the typical genre of the eulogy (150). Jamieson and Campbell do suggest that a "possible exception" could be "a fusion [that] occurs with some regularity and creates formal expectations in the knowledgeable audience," including those "sustained by a recurrent situation" (154) or "by an institution such as the papacy" (155). In contrast to Jamieson and Campbell's idea that most genre hybrids are usually fleeting since they respond to particular situations and needs, Brian Rose suggests that genre hybridity has been commonplace on television, particularly in the reality television boom of the early 2000s (2). Rose's examples of *The Osbournes*, blending sitcom and documentary, and *American Idol*, blending variety and talent shows, represent originators that led to numerous similar programs like *Keeping Up With The Kardashians* and *The Voice*, respectively, that continue to find success. While classic genres continue to thrive on television, creating and evolving existing genre hybrids is one of the key ways that networks and streaming services attempt to keep content exciting for audiences.

Similarly, I argue that the televised news satire genre has evolved over time beyond the simple hybrid of its component genres, those that contribute significant DNA to news satire's conventions, comedy and news. In this way, news satire has become its own third genre that is capable of more than either component genre alone. Neither the news nor comedy genres commonly lead a call to action, a call to organize a public rally, or a call for public debate. These activist uptakes are distinct outcomes that *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* have both been able to accomplish. While their purposes were rhetorically situated in a kairotic[4] moment,

[4] *Kairos* is a Greek word meaning "a time when conditions are right for the accomplishment of a crucial action" ("Definition of KAIROS"). Robert Leston writes that *kairos* "is best exemplified by the rhetor who gains a nuanced appreciation for the shifting circumstances that perpetually occur, is able to recognize what the moment calls for, and can deliver a fitting response to that moment" (29-30). In this case, Colbert's show recognized the changing policies around Super PACs was a good time to cover and question the implications of these changes, especially as the subject was receiving little media coverage (McClennen and Maisel 39).

such as when Colbert created his Super PAC and related content as court decisions changed legal circumstances around Super PACs in concerning ways, it seems that this ability to create opportunities for activist uptakes appears to be a feature of the genre rather than a transitory modification, as Jamieson and Campbell suggest, perhaps indicating that news satire has evolved to a distinct genre of its own. This idea is supported by the fact that current iterations of news satire programs continue to take up and further similar strategies to involve viewers in political discussion and action, something I explore further in Chapters 3 and 4.

While Stewart set up important, audience-centered conventions for the news satire genre and Colbert used those conventions to engage viewers in public education about political processes, I will argue in Chapter 3 that subsequent news satire programs have continued to move further toward encouraging audiences toward socially engaged uptakes such as using hashtags, making donations, and publicly voicing their opinions on issues. This becomes apparent when looking at current iterations of the genre, where these conventions continue with a focus on audience engagement and action through interactive and widely-accessible venues like social media. I will argue that this is a change that has been embraced by audiences that are looking for ways to engage and make change on issues that they care about, and this has continued to fuel this feature of news satire.

Chapter 3 – The Audience Responds [and Becomes a Public]: *Last Week Tonight* and the Formation of Ad Hoc Publics

In this chapter, I argue that, through their engagement in the use of hashtags, news satire audiences become "ad hoc publics," a term developed by Axel Bruns and Jean Burgess that refers to publics emerging "at the moment they are needed" (7) to discuss, process, and address issues as they are occurring, providing a dynamic and flexible space for conversation, awareness-building, and action. These publics can be seen most clearly when we examine the sub-genre of hashtags. In this chapter I focus identifying an ad hoc public emerging from a call to action on a currently airing iteration of the news satire genre, *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*, and I examine this through Twitter hashtags.

In Chapter 2, I argued that *The Daily Show* set up audience-centered conventions for the televised news satire genre that ultimately had the effect of priming viewers for action. These conventions were also taken up and extended by *The Colbert Report*, a program that grew out of Stephen Colbert's role on *The Daily Show*. The effect of these audience-centered conventions can be seen in *The Daily Show*'s partnership with *The Colbert Report* to host "The Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear" and Colbert's efforts to actively educate the public on issues like campaign fundraising and Political Action Committees (PACs). Through his efforts to directly involve audience members in actions such as creating their own PACs, Colbert's show illustrated how, through detailed content and appeals to ethos and pathos, viewers were willing to participate in political processes at the request of a comedy show. These examples reveal televised news satire as developing beyond a hybrid genre, combining elements of comedy and news but able to surpass what either genre typically accomplishes alone to successfully activate

political action through audience engagement. The genre's flexibility, then, allows it to space for calls to action that ask viewers to take up significant topics in observable ways.

In this chapter, I explore how the conventions established by *The Daily Show* and the public pedagogy and action undertaken by *The Colbert Report* are furthered by *Last Week Tonight*. While Stephen Colbert in particular did longer term "projects" on *Colbert*, discussing an idea in depth over time and introducing ways for audience members to get involved in that issue, *Last Week Tonight*, airing only once a week, uses its more limited time with its audience to call for viewer action more frequently and on a wider range of issues; each episode typically includes a deep dive into a different topic. The show often makes calls to action on these topics, and these are furthered through a genre system of "interrelated genres that interact with each other in specific settings" (Bazerman 97) composed of spreadable genres (Nish 240) including cross-media platforms such as *Last Week Tonight*'s website, YouTube channel, and official social media accounts. The term "spreadable genres," developed by Jennifer Nish, builds on the idea of "spreadability," or "the potential - both technical and cultural - for audiences to share content for their own purposes" (Jenkins et al. 3). Spreadable genres, then, include those that are easily shareable, such as memes or Instagram photos (Nish 241), and they "support the formation and coordination of more diffuse publics by allowing for a wider distribution of uptakes than institutional genre systems and sets allow" (242). Hashtags associated with the show's segments provide one means to engage audiences and bring awareness to causes on platforms outside of the show itself; considering hashtags as a spreadable sub-genre, we can extend Jennifer Nish's definition of spreadable genres, that they "perform specific rhetorical functions" that "help form and coordinate publics centered around activist issues" (240), to hashtags.

In particular, this chapter will focus on two hashtags associated with *Last Week Tonight*; as I discuss later in the chapter, hashtags are commonly used on *Last Week Tonight* and Twitter is a common platform for both hashtag use and political news sharing and discussion. The televised news satire genre utilizes this cross-media genre system to engage audiences through calls to action, such as participating in public comment campaigns or donating money for a particular cause, that are often accompanied by hashtags. Hashtags serve as a kind of sub-genre, with users deploying them within tweets for various rhetorical functions, including critiquing issues, making calls to action, and rallying awareness and support (Daer, Hoffman, and Goodman 2). Hashtags used may emerge directly from *Last Week Tonight*'s genre system (such as directly through a segment on the show or through a tweet posted to *Last Week Tonight*'s official Twitter account) or be created by viewers through related phrases they choose to uptake as a hashtag. Uptake, to paraphrase Anne Freadman's definition, is what happens when a person recognizes a genre and makes a decision about how to respond; in Freadman's example, someone saying "it's hot in here" gets taken up by a listener who opens a window to cool the room off, though the listener could have chosen to uptake that statement in a variety of ways ("Uptake" 95). In both instances of hashtag use I look at in this chapter, the rhetorical purposes of the hashtags are various as they are shaped by the ad hoc publics using them. Ad hoc publics use hashtags not only to talk about *Last Week Tonight*, but to further its calls to action, generate additional conversation, and scale[5] the issue up to a wider audience through the use of additional, related hashtags. As ad hoc publics emerge in response to issues raised by *Last Week Tonight*, I argue that this viewer engagement has had an impact on the show itself, influencing the content and style of the show as well as real world impact through social action.

[5] Scalability, a term developed by danah boyd, describes the broader distribution and visibility of content made possible by technology (7).

Last Week Tonight's Format and History of Issue Engagement

Hosted by a former *Daily Show* correspondent, the journalistic and rhetorical conventions discussed in Chapter 2 can be seen in *Last Week Tonight*, but with some notable changes that reflect the evolving nature of the televised news satire genre. In contrast to *The Daily Show*, *Last Week Tonight* relies almost exclusively on Oliver delivering stories from the anchor chair, typically foregoing correspondents, guests, and pre-taped interviews. This, along with the show's position on HBO and lack of commercials, gives the show the ability to spend more time talking directly to the viewer and diving deeply into particular topics, often dedicating 15 to 25 minutes of the show's 30-minute run time to an in-depth piece. These topics are often relevant and concerning but not part of the current dominant news cycle, such as the lack of regulations on compounding pharmacies ("Compounding Pharmacies"), exploitation of prison labor ("Prison Labor"), and the challenges and risks associated with voting machines ("Voting Machines"), to name a few. Though this focus on lesser-covered subjects is common, Oliver does not shy away from current events, either, and will sometimes dedicate the longer segment to more pressing issues, such as the upcoming 2020 census ("Census"), the impeachment of President Donald Trump ("Impeachment"), or, as this chapter will look at in more depth, net neutrality ("Net Neutrality", "Net Neutrality 2"). Utilizing its cross-media genre system, all of the longer segments from the show are posted to *Last Week Tonight*'s official YouTube channel where they are freely accessible and easily shareable across media platforms.

Like *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* before it, *Last Week Tonight* relies on pulling information and footage from journals, newspapers, and news stations, working to build their jokes on a foundation of fact. In an interview with NPR, Oliver said, "You can't build jokes on sand. You can't be wrong about something - otherwise that joke just disintegrates. . . . You try

and be as rigorous as you can in terms of fact-checking because your responsibility is to make sure that your joke is structurally sound" ("Is John Oliver's Show Journalism?"). As I argued in Chapter 2, this solid foundation of accurate information helps viewers feel informed and primed to act on issues. As Stephen Colbert did in his segments on Super PACs, Oliver often asks viewers to take some sort of action. *Last Week Tonight*'s in-depth, longer segments often end with a call to action or indication of how the issue at hand might be improved through political measures. These are often met with tangible action, as the press has noted. Though it is difficult to isolate the show's direct impact on policies, laws, and organizations, *Time*'s Victor Luckerson has made several connections between the show's in-depth segments and real-world social actions. For example, the show tackled the topic of unfair bail practices that "keep poor, low-risk defendants locked up before they're even found guilty of a crime" (Luckerson). The episode aired in June 2015, and by July, "New York mayor Bill DeBlasio announced that the city would relax bail requirements for people charged with nonviolent crimes and misdemeanors." Another segment looked into the Miss America pageant organization, which claims to be the largest source of scholarship money for young women in the world. Oliver found that the organization's estimates were wildly inflated, but that they are, indeed, correct about their position as the leader in providing women's scholarships. At the end of the segment, Oliver proposed that viewers donate to other sources of women's scholarships ("Miss America 2015"). As a result, the Society of Women Engineers, specifically mentioned in the show, "racked up $25,000 in donations in two days following the segment, or about 15% of its typical annual donations from individuals" (Luckerson).

Last Week Tonight often relies on the internet and social media to involve its viewers through various means, including the creation of websites or hashtags to target a specific issue.

These calls to action typically occur on-air and are furthered through the show's spreadable genre system, where hashtags can play various roles. For example, in 2016, the New York Yankees changed their ticket policy to ban printing tickets at home in an effort to make them more difficult to resell. Oliver covered how Yankees owner Lon Trost stated that this policy would keep full-price ticket buyers, particularly those in the front rows, from having to sit next to people who had "never sat in a premium location" and were able to get the tickets cheaply ("Political Fundraising"). In an attempt to embarrass Trost for his elitism, the show bought front row tickets for the first three home games of the season and invited viewers to tweet a photo of the ridiculous outfit they would wear to the game with the hashtag #IHaveNeverSatInAPremiumLocation. Winning viewers would be selected and could purchase the tickets for a quarter each. The show sent people dressed as Ninja Turtles, sharks, unicorns, and dragons to the game, and the Yankees illuminated "Thanks, John Oliver. Everyone is welcome at Yankee Stadium" on their video board (Perry). Oliver's contest and colorfully-dressed game attendees were also picked up as news stories on CNN ("John Oliver sends"), CBS Sports (Perry), and *The Washington Post* (Bieler), among others. Using a hashtag as the means of entering the contest allows viewers to do so almost instantaneously and connects them to one another on a public platform for potential discussion and awareness about the underlying issue of Trost's elitist attitude; though this is less serious than many of the political issues, policies, and crises discussed on the show, this offers one example of hashtags functioning practically, to enter viewers into a contest, and socially, to create a connections among viewers that ripples out into action and media coverage. This is "scalability" in action, danah boyd's term that describes the broader distribution and formation of publics made possible by technology (47-48).

Two illustrative examples of how *Last Week Tonight* calls viewers to act using digital means and its cross-media genre system, as well as the source of data for this chapter, are Oliver's two segments on net neutrality. The first segment aired on June 1, 2014, the show's fifth episode, and explained the idea that net neutrality means "all data has to be treated equally, no matter who created it" and internet providers cannot privilege or hinder access to any website or online service ("Net Neutrality"). In the absence of net neutrality, large companies like Amazon or Netflix could conceivably pay to have their content load more quickly or reliably, disadvantaging others who cannot afford to pay for the same access. Oliver points out that this change would most benefit cable companies, and at the time of airing, Comcast had spent more than $18 million dollars on lobbying, more than any other company except defense contractor Northrup Grumman (Center for Responsive Politics, qtd. in "Net Neutrality"). Additionally, President Barack Obama appointed Tom Wheeler, a former lobbyist for cable and wireless companies to head the Federal Communications Commission, the federal agency in charge of regulating the internet; Oliver compares this to "needing a babysitter and hiring a dingo" ("Net Neutrality"). The segment was positively received, including a response from Tim Wu, the Columbia law professor who coined the phrase "net neutrality"; Wu tweeted that Oliver's explanation "rendered every other explanation obsolete" (qtd. in Uberti).

At the end of the segment, Oliver issues his call to action as he points out that there is actually something viewers can do: the FCC is currently taking public comment at their website, which he displays on the screen. Oliver makes a direct, though seemingly reluctant, appeal to internet commenters, who he calls "monsters." Oliver points out that this group spends much of its time leaving mean or sarcastic comments on videos such as those of cute toddlers dancing or Oliver's own *Last Week Tonight* clips. The examples are not only intended to be funny, but

illustrate some of the content that might be at risk if net neutrality were to end, making a logical appeal to internet dwellers. "This is the moment you were made for, commenters," Oliver says with triumphant music in the background, mimicking the patriotism and emotional revelry in a call to war. Oliver implores internet trolls to visit the FCC website and submit comments in support of net neutrality: "For once in your lives, focus your indiscriminate rage in a useful direction!" he says. "Turn on caps lock and fly, my pretties, fly!" Fly, they did, as the FCC website quickly crashed. The show then took to another genre in their system, Twitter, to announce on their official account at 10:25 pm that evening, "We may or may not have crashed fcc.gov/comments. Whoops!" followed by "In the meantime, for the satisfaction of communal complaining, vent your Net Neutrality frustration on Twitter using hashtag: #FlyTrollsFly." Thus, the hashtag #FlyTrollsFly was not borne out of the show directly, but out of its attendant social media and was given the rhetorical purpose of tagging complaints about the potential end of net neutrality; viewers following the show's account or those looking for more information about the online campaign in support of net neutrality would have been most likely to initially come in contact with this particular hashtag. #FlyTrollsFly was presented as a way to mark complaints on Twitter, but as my analysis in this chapter will show, tweets using it also encourage others to submit comments, share articles and resources about net neutrality, and praise the show for its accessible explanation of the issue and offer of a way to help.

The impact of this segment was confirmed by researchers trying to determine the cause of a surge of public outcry on the topic. The Pew Research Center found that the week before the segment aired, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) "received 3,076 comments" on the subject of net neutrality (Williams & Shelton). The week after, "the FCC received 79,838 comments," an increase so large that the federal agency's website experienced "'technical

difficulties.'" The Pew Center looked into the possibility of other mainstream news media influencing this influx of responses. Overall, across newspapers and television, there was little coverage of net neutrality during the months leading up to and following Oliver's segment. Newspaper coverage peaked in mid-May, and 24-hour news channels mentioned the topic only 28 times "between February 2nd and July 19th," with none of the stories airing in late May or early June. Additionally, the "pro-net neutrality organization" Battle for the Net embedded the show's segment on its website under the heading "'Understand the Battle,'" showing "how intertwined John Oliver had become with this debate." Ultimately, the research indicated "a high correlation between the comedian's segment and the surge in public comments to the FCC," indicating the high scalability of this call to action and a clear example of the show's ability to mobilize viewers as a networked,[6] ad hoc public on pressing issues; it is especially impressive considering that this occurred just a month after the show premiered. Coincidentally, President Obama supported net neutrality in a speech in August 2014 and the FCC voted in favor of net neutrality in February 2015 ("Net Neutrality"), reclassifying "wireless and fixed-line broadband service providers as Title II 'common carriers, 'a public utility-type designation" that gave the FCC regulatory power over the industry (Solon).

While the first segment and subsequent events provide a clear view of a call to action and ad hoc public response, comparing the responses to the 2014 and 2017 segments provides a richer look at how ad hoc publics emerge and engage with the hashtags generated from each segment. *Last Week Tonight* took up net neutrality as a subject again on May 7, 2017, as the policy was in danger again due to FCC Commissioner Ajit Pai's plans to overturn the 2015

[6] boyd defines networked publics as "publics that are restructured by networked technologies," an "imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice" (39). Networked publics are able to form because of technological affordances and are simultaneously shaped by those affordances.

order, reclassifying internet service again (Solon). Oliver covered the issue in a nearly 20-minute segment, ending by asking again that everyone submit public comments and call their representatives and Senators in support of net neutrality: "Once more, we the people must take this into our own hands" ("Net Neutrality 2"). Oliver makes an appeal to "every internet group," including gamers, YouTube celebrities, Instagram models, "MySpace Tom," and even "Donald Trump's internet fans on sites like 4chan and Reddit," since net neutrality is "one of the few things that we actually really agree on." The message is one of coming together for a greater good to maintain access to something we use every day. Oliver insists that we all should have the time for this, providing several examples of "internet time-wasting" such as 540,000 people who commented on Beyonce's Instagram pregnancy announcement post; surely we can also take time to comment on this significant issue. Oliver again emphasizes that he "needs you once more" for "five to ten minutes of minor effort" and ends by evoking the 2014 segment in saying, "Fly, my pretties, fly once more!" Because the FCC had buried the public comment page on their site, making it much more difficult to access the specific page related to the net neutrality proceedings, the show created a shortcut, gofccyourself.com, which would take viewers directly to the appropriate comment page. While this was presented as a URL and not a hashtag, #GoFCCYourself was taken up by viewers on Twitter and used in various ways, much like #FlyTrollsFly was; as my analysis will show, however, the use of this hashtag extended as the issue continued to unfold, and its use transformed as time passed and the kinds of communication needed around the issue changed.

Similar to the first segment, response from viewers was overwhelming, as the influx of comments submitted to the FCC's website garnered a statement from the FCC's chief information officer on May 8 stating that the FCC website had seen a "coordinated series of

cyber-attacks" (Wallace). A government investigation by the inspector general completed in August of 2018 concluded that there were no cyberattacks and attributed the large volume of traffic to Oliver. The report detailed that minutes after *Last Week Tonight* aired, traffic to the [FCC] website spiked by 3,116%, 'resulting in the disruption of system availability'" that lasted into Monday (Wallace). They specifically attributed "'spikes in web traffic coinciding exactly with the timing of: (1) the release of information during the ... episode; (2) the release of the episode on the *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* YouTube channel; and (3) tweets about that release.'" As with the first segment, this evidence points to the ability of the show to call viewers to action successfully, generating an ad hoc public on the subject at hand. In this case, an ad hoc public generates its own related hashtag from the URL the show created and utilizes it on spreadable media platforms like Twitter, allowing for great scalability. As my analysis will show, users uptake the hashtag with a variety of rhetorical purposes in mind, remaking the hashtag to adapt to the kairotic moment. *Kairos*, defined as "a time when conditions are right for the accomplishment of a crucial action" ("Definition of KAIROS"), is a factor influencing the success of rhetorical strategies, and users taking up the hashtags, particularly #GoFCCYourself, seem to have had this in mind as the circumstances around net neutrality changed and prompted the need for response from an ad hoc public..

Methods

The net neutrality examples above clearly support the idea that when the show makes a call to action, viewers respond. In order to continue my rhetorical genre analysis of the televised news satire genre from Chapter 2, further understand how these activist audiences emerge, and see more clearly how they engage with issues, I turn to social media, where it is possible to see how individual people are uptaking the show and its topics; social media is a space where

"citizens themselves are actively and visibly involved in the processes of public communication and deliberation without a need for intermediaries to act on their behalf" (Bruns 68). Users on Twitter, specifically, commonly use hashtags, "a largely user-generated mechanism for tagging and collating . . . messages – tweets – which are related to a specific topic" to "mark them as addressing particular themes" (Bruns and Burgess 2). Users can generate and use hashtags freely, and it is possible to see and search tweets using a particular hashtag without even having a Twitter account. Further, participatory and activist audiences use the hashtag sub-genre for a variety of rhetorical purposes related to raising awareness and encouraging support for particular causes. Though I am focusing on hashtags on Twitter, hashtags can also find use on other platforms like Instagram where they can spread to additional users and be remade for other purposes based on the platform's focus and capabilities. Twitter is the most productive platform to focus on for my analysis, however, as it is deeply connected with American politics, particularly at this moment. In an interview with *60 Minutes* shortly after the 2016 election, President Donald Trump credited Twitter with his winning the presidency (Flora), and he continues to use the platform heavily, to the point that news outlets regularly report about his tweets. In general, most politicians use the platform and even use it to make major announcements; for example, Cory Booker announced that he was suspending his campaign for president in a video posted to Twitter on January 13, 2020 (see fig. 3.1). In addition to being plugged in to current American politics, Twitter has long been considered a platform where people look for and share real-time information about current events and breaking news (Small 873). A summer 2018 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center found that 71% of Twitter users get news on the site (Shearer and Matsa). It makes sense that viewers of political satire looking to engage that interest on a social platform might do so on Twitter. Finally, *Last Week*

Tonight's use of Twitter as part of its genre system and use of hashtags link the show closely to the platform. Thus, Twitter is a logical platform for hashtags related to *Last Week Tonight* to manifest.

Figure 3.1 - A tweet from Cory Booker's official account announcing the suspension of his 2020 campaign for president (@CoryBooker).

In order to understand how viewers took up hashtags associated with the show, I am using content analysis. Content analysis is used to "examine the content or information and symbols contained in written documents or other communication media" by gathering "a body of material to analyze" and "creat[ing] a system for recording specific aspects of its content" (Djamba and Neuman 49). This approach allows me to develop a coding system specific to what I want to analyze, the rhetorical purposes users attach to the hashtags, and describe how that compares within and across the hashtags. I chose two of the hashtags related to the net neutrality

segments discussed previously: #FlyTrollsFly from the 2014 segment and #GoFCCYourself from 2017. I chose these hashtags because they deal with related topics, and generally, I think it is interesting to see that the show returned to this issue after having success with calling on viewers to act previously. I also think that looking at two hashtags that were created three years apart and related to the same show may be revealing in terms of how viewer engagement has changed, but also how the show might approach these issues in similar or different ways[7].

I took a non-random sample of each hashtag by searching for each one in the search bar at the top of the Twitter homepage; both searches were conducted on January 10, 2020. I screenshot the first fifty tweets from each search found in the "Top" tab, which shows the tweets that have received the most engagement. Thus, my corpus includes 100 individual tweets. I did not include replies, promoted tweets, tweets with attached gifs[8], or retweets with attached comments in this count. I did include tweets with attached still images as I noticed several of the images were text-based, offering instructions to others on how to submit comments; this seemed significant, as rallying others to comment was one of the dimensions of participation I aimed to capture. Once the tweets had been screenshot, I transcribed the date, screen name, @ handle, tweet, image description (if applicable), number of replies, number of retweets, and number of likes for each tweet into a spreadsheet.

To focus my system of coding, I considered the research questions, "What kinds of rhetorical engagement happen on tweets using hashtags related to *Last Week Tonight*?" and "How does engagement with the show occurring through tweets and hashtags change from the

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[7] Given the desire for comparison here, I did consider that it would be useful to see how the use of #FlyTrollsFly changed over time. However, there are only three publicly available tweets that use #FlyTrollsFly occurring outside of June 2014. While these three were from 2017, only three tweets did not seem significant enough to draw solid conclusions from.

[8] Interpreting gif use can be tricky, as people use them for a variety of rhetorical purposes, adding another layer of meaning to the text it accompanies. There were very few tweets including gifs in my two searches, and in an effort to avoid overcomplicating my coding process, I left these tweets out of my corpus.

2014 hashtag to the 2017 hashtag?" With these questions in mind, I coded the tweets in three ways. First, I coded according to rhetorical function, and developed three categories: "rallying," "informing," and "identifying." These categories were adapted from similar coding categories developed in the article "Rhetorical Functions of Hashtag Forms Across Social Media Applications" (Daer et. al). I coded tweets that appeared to be supporting and furthering this call to post comments on the FCC site as "rallying" and I considered any comment that linked the FCC site, linked the *Last Week Tonight* video on YouTube, and/or directly called for others' participation or mentioned the user's own participation in posting a comment to be part of this category. I did not include tweets in this category that did not make reference to submitting a comment to the FCC site or link to the *Last Week Tonight* segment, even if they were voicing support for net neutrality, as a user seeing the hashtag without this added content would likely need to seek further information beyond the tweet to truly be rallied to participate. Tweets coded as "informing" included links to related articles or additional information about net neutrality and how to support it beyond commenting on the FCC site or sharing the *Last Week Tonight* segment. The third category, "identifying," included tweets that identify the user's stance on or feelings about net neutrality or the *Last Week Tonight* segment. Tweets coded only as "identifying" do not link or reference commenting on the FCC website or link the segment for others. I did allow these categories to overlap when necessary; for example, if a comment both linked to the FCC comment site and added an opinion about the situation, I coded it as both "rallying" and "identifying." I found that all of the tweets I gathered fit into one or more of these three categories.

Second, I coded the tweets according to whether or not they used other hashtags. Through observing this intertextual interaction, I wanted to see how many users were connecting to other conversations through the use of multiple hashtags. This was a simple yes or no coding process.

Finally, I coded the tweets according to whether or not they mentioned or tagged *Last Week Tonight* and/or John Oliver. I noticed as I transcribed that many of the tweets using #FlyTrollsFly directly mentioned or tagged John Oliver or *Last Week Tonight* while many in #GoFCCYourself did not. Because these hashtags were created 3 years apart, with #FlyTrollsFly coming very early in the life of the show, this difference can illustrate something about the level of ownership viewers felt over the causes and hashtags furthered by the show. This was a simple yes or no coding process. Coupled with the rhetorical purpose data, this data can reveal how users take up hashtags associated with the show in ways that extend and reshape conversations about issues.

Results

#FlyTrollsFly emerged after the initial airing of the show and was tweeted out by the official *Last Week Tonight* Twitter account after the FCC website crashed. Its stated purpose was to offer space for people to post public comments - space for "communal complaining" - while waiting for the FCC website to work again. This was not the first time *Last Week Tonight* started a hashtag from its Twitter account or directly from the show, but it was the first time such a hashtag was tied to a political call to action. Tweets gathered for this hashtag range from June 1, 2014, the day the *Last Week Tonight* segment aired, to June 24, 2014. Notably, 56% (see fig. 3.2) of these tweets were categorized as "rallying," directing others to take part in leaving comments for the FCC, linking the *Last Week Tonight* video, or stating their own participation in leaving a comment. Many of these tweets were straightforward in the sense that they provided a brief

comment, used the hashtag, and linked the FCC site or the video (see fig. 3.3). Many also included direct quote or reference to the segment itself, for example, including the phrase "cable company f*ckery" (see fig. 3.4). Some users self-identified as having commented themselves (see fig. 3.5), some simply asked others to provide comments (see fig. 3.6), while one user combined this approach into a single tweet (see fig. 3.7). Seven of the tweets, or 14%, were "informing," performing actions such as linking articles from news organizations. Thirty-one of the tweets, or 62%, were classified as "identifying." These ranged fairly widely, from praising the show and Oliver (see fig. 3.8) to musing about the risks of losing net neutrality (see fig. 3.9).

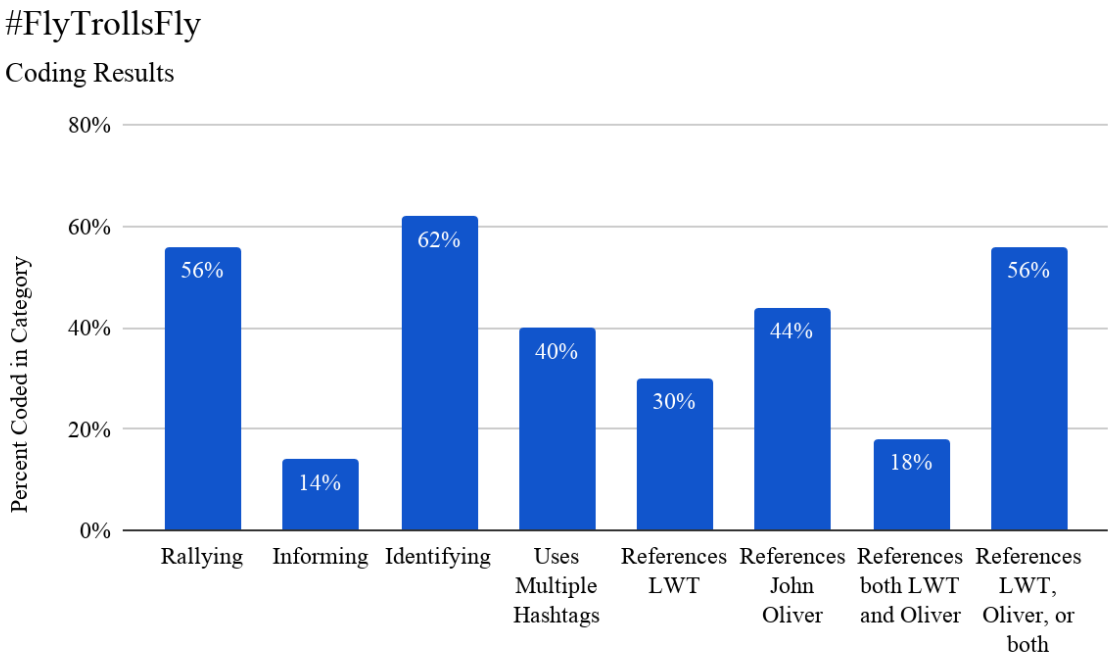

Figure 3.2 - #FlyTrollsFly coding results.

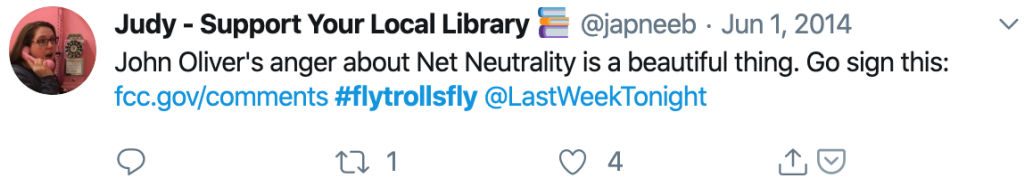

Figure 3.3 – Identifying/Rallying: a user offers a comment on the show, suggests readers leave an FCC comment, links to the FCC site, uses the hashtag #FlyTrollsFly, and mentions the show's official account (@japneeb).

Figure 3.4 – Rallying/Identifying: A user quotes the segment in their tweet (@WKimmel).

Figure 3.5 – Rallying: a user expresses their participation in leaving a comment on the FCC site (@rugbykiki).

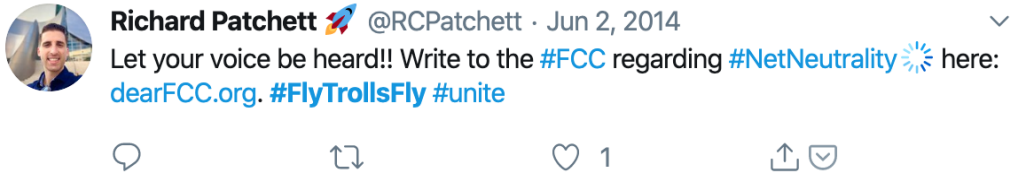

Figure 3.6 - Rallying: a user directs others to leave a comment on the FCC site (@RCPatchett).

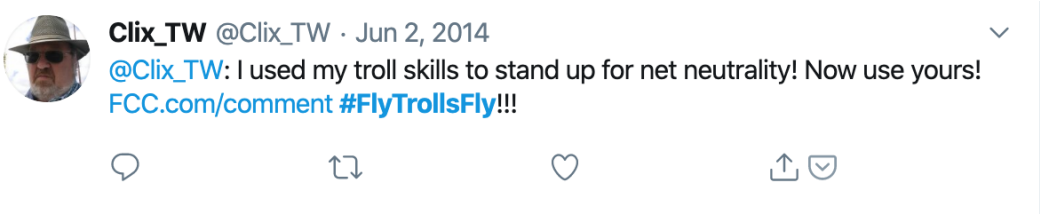

Figure 3.7 – Rallying: a user professes their own participation in the FCC comments and directs others to do the same, linking the FCC site (@Clix_TW).

Figure 3.8 – Identifying/Rallying: a user praises Last Week Tonight *and links to the FCC website (@buddahheadbrian).*

Figure 3.9 - Identifying: a user considers a consequence of ending net neutrality (@kittykatinabag).

Across my data set, 20 tweets, or 40%, connected #FlyTrollsFly to other hashtags, including #NetNeutrality, #KeepTheInternetFree, #Unite, and #InternetFreedom, among others. In total, 30% of the #FlyTrollsFly tweets mentioned or hashtagged the show, while 44% mentioned or hashtagged Oliver, and 18% did both, for a total of 56% that referenced the show or Oliver in some way.

Moving to #GoFCCYourself, the numbers look significantly different. Only 22%, or 11, of the tweets were coded as "rallying" (see fig. 3.10). Three of these tweets used an image to relay instructions for submitting comments to the FCC, perhaps as a way to circumvent character limits (see fig. 3.11). Nine tweets, or 18%, were coded as "informing." While some of these users share articles related to net neutrality, others think about the commenting process itself. For example, in tweet coded as rallying and informing, a user calls to others planning to submit comments to the FCC website and recommends that they write a unique message rather than copying and pasting, likely in an effort to prevent the opposition from discounting comments (see fig. 3.12); the tweet reflects the user's meta-awareness about the process of commenting and strategic effort to ensure comments shared are not dismissed as spam. Meanwhile 39 tweets, or

78%, were classified as "identifying." As with #FlyTrollsFly, the tweets coded "identifying" are fairly diverse, and many are emotional in nature. Two users lament fake comments submitted to the FCC site meant to impersonate others (see fig. 3.13 and fig. 3.14). Several targeted FCC Chairman Ajit Pai directly (see fig. 3.15), and many expressed worry about the impending repeal, including one user who worries about how her small business will be affected (see fig. 3.16). Two users stated that they would be "in mourning" for the loss of net neutrality, injecting a bit of humor into the subject but also emphasizing the weight of the issue (see fig. 3.17). I also noted two tweets mentioning "The Internet is Free Again," a trending topic and hashtag used by proponents of repealing net neutrality (see fig. 3.18 and fig. 3.19). Both are critical of the hashtag without actually using it, keeping the tweets out of that particular conversation stream. Overall, #GoFCCYourself saw a greater diversity in tweet content than #FlyTrollsFly, which was mostly directly related to promoting the call to submit a comment to the FCC.

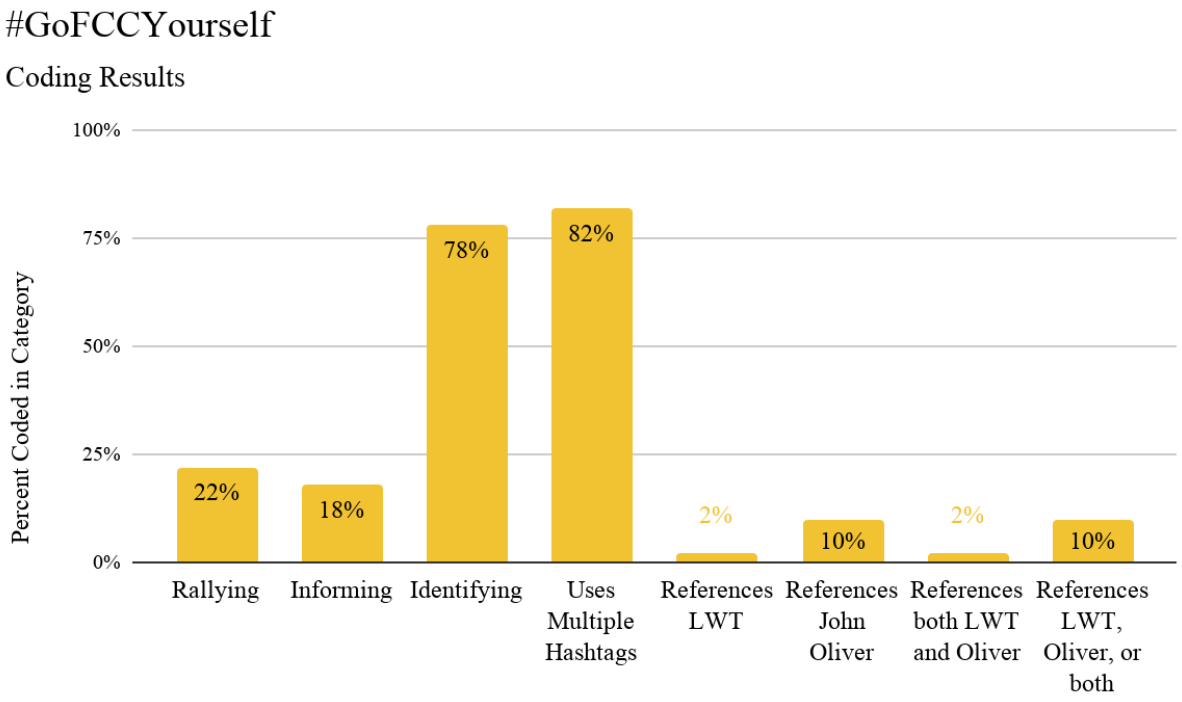

Figure 3.10 - #GoFCCYourself coding results.

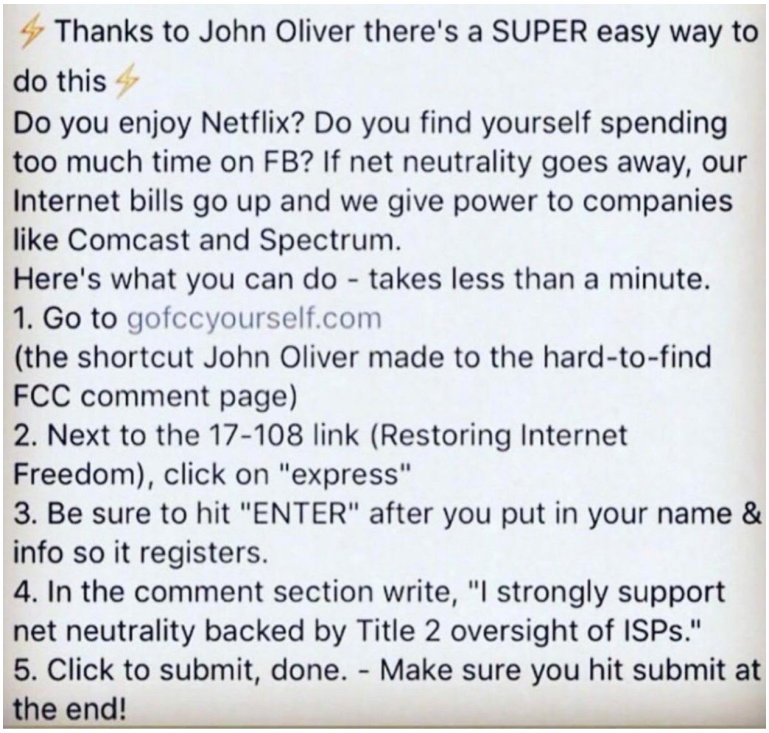

Figure 3.11 – An image used in tweets to instruct others how to leave comments on the FCC site.

Figure 3.12 – Rallying/Informing: A user tells others to submit unique comments to the FCC rather than copying and pasting (@editoremilye).

Figure 3.13 – Identifying: a user expresses her opinion about fake FCC comments (@HelenKennedy).

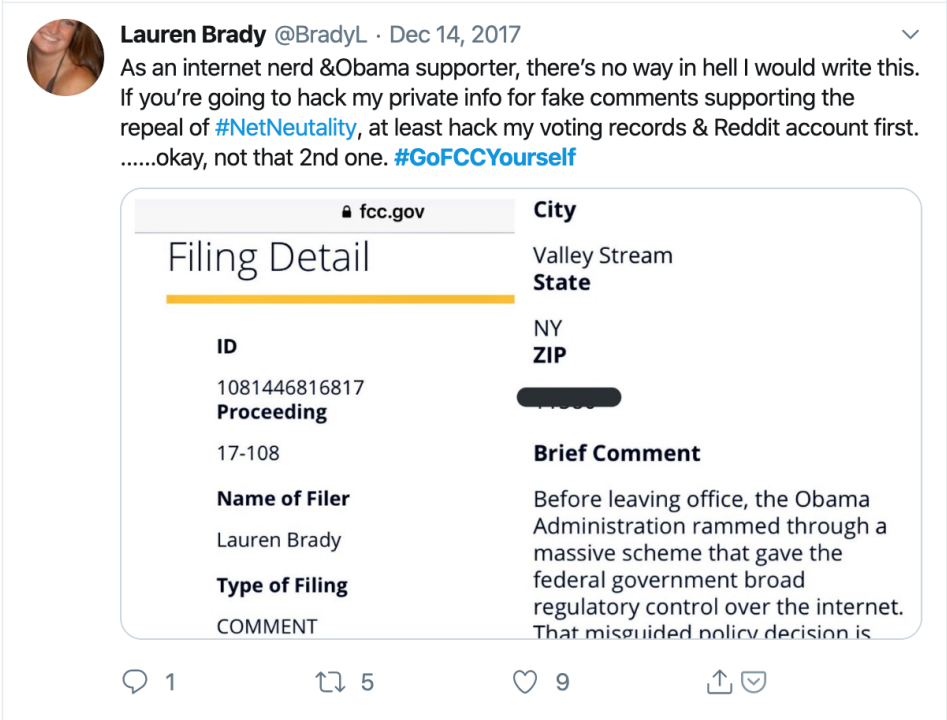

Figure 3.14 – Identifying: a user displays an FCC comment that she alleges was falsely filed on her behalf (@BradyL).

Figure 3.15 – Identifying: a tweet targeting FCC Chairman Ajit Pai (@JTStevison).

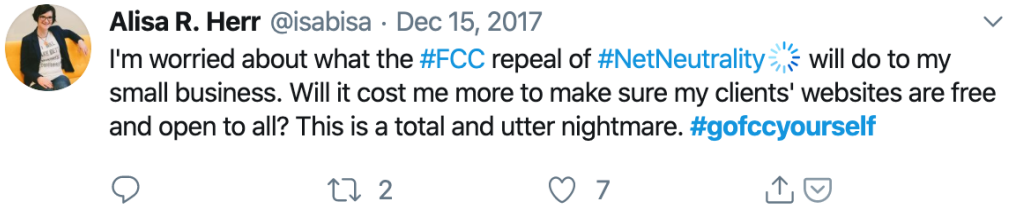

Figure 3.16 – Identifying: a user expresses worry about what the end of net neutrality might do to her small business (@isabisa).

Figure 3.17 – Identifying: a user expresses that they will be in mourning for the death of net neutrality (@codoneee).

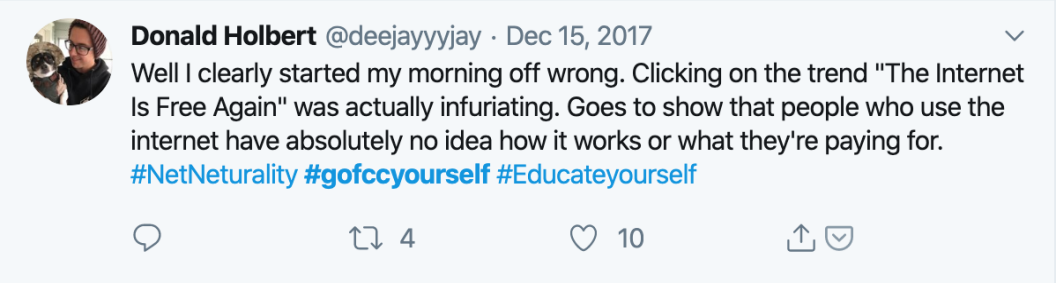

Figure 3.18 – Identifying: a user expresses frustration over a trending topic that leads to tweets in favor of ending net neutrality (@deejayyyjay).

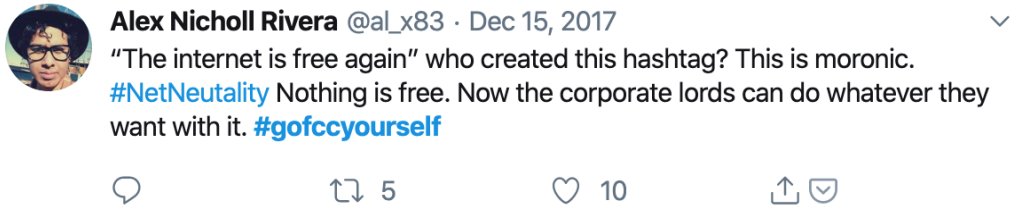

Figure 3.19 – Identifying: a user questions a hashtag started to support the repeal of net neutrality (@al_x83).

Across my data set for #GoFCCYourself, 41 out of 50, or 82%, used additional hashtags. Hashtags included #NetNeutrality, the most widely used across both data sets and the one that seems to connect to the largest Twitter conversation on the issue; #FCC; #AjitPai; #BattleForTheNet; and #Resist, among others. In this data set, only one tweet directly references the show while five, or 10%, mention John Oliver. The one tweet mentioning the show also mentions Oliver, for a total of 10% of the tweets mentioning *Last Week Tonight*, Oliver, or both.

The two hashtags also received different levels of engagement from other users. The #FlyTrollsFly set of tweets had 9 replies, 206 retweets, and 159 likes. The #GoFCCYourself set received significantly more engagement, with 45 replies, 612 retweets, and 1,521 likes.

It is worth noting that the tweets using #GoFCCYourself span from November 22, 2017 to December 17, 2017; this puts them all several months after the initial airing of the *Last Week Tonight* segment in May. The hashtag likely had a resurgence at this time because of the kairotic moment: on November 21, 2017, Pai announced his intentions to roll back the Obama-era policy and reclassify internet service again, putting it outside the regulation of the FCC. The

commission was to vote on this change on December 14, 2017, explaining why the hashtag continued to have high engagement through a few days after that date. Given this timing, it makes sense that far fewer tweets using #GoFCCYourself mention Oliver or *Last Week Tonight* than the #FlyTrollsFly tweets; the original segment aired months before, and it is possible that many of the users who picked up the hashtag did not even know it originated from the show. Still, the hashtag remained a way of marking information and conversation about net neutrality. Though I did not analyze all of the tweets under this hashtag, a quick look at the "Latest" tab on Twitter reveals that #GoFCCYourself has continued to be an active hashtag as recently as November 5, 2019 (see fig. 3.20). Recent tweets continue to be attached to commentary about the issue of net neutrality, illustrating the potential for the news satire genre's calls to action to persist[9] and continue to mobilize dispersed audiences.

[9] danah boyd uses the term "persistence" to describe how digital content is not ephemeral and exists long beyond its initial production (46-47).

Figure 3.20 – The most recent tweet using #GoFCCYourself (as of January 25, 2020), posted on November 5, 2019. It shares an article about AT&T paying a $60 million fine for throttling "unlimited" data plan users (@NRay7882).

Discussion

While many of the users in my data set do likely serve as audience members for *Last Week Tonight*, their participation in tweeting using #FlyTrollsFly and #GoFCCYourself to discuss net neutrality constitutes their membership in publics; as I noted in Chapter 1, the roles of audience and public are often difficult to parse because they overlap significantly. Daniel Dayan writes that publics are active in the sense that they are collectives offering and calling for attention to issues they care about (52), and the tweets gathered reflect this, showing a group drawing attention to net neutrality and promoting action on the issue. Further, Bruns and Burgess write that Twitter hashtags are a means of "rapid formation" of ad hoc publics that gather to discuss breaking news or specific issues (2), emerging "as and when they are needed" (7). Through the use of related hashtags and sharing of associated content across various genres,

users create "a patchwork of overlapping public spheres centered around specific themes and communities which through their overlap nonetheless form a network of issue publics that is able to act as an effective substitute for the conventional, universal public sphere of the mass media age" (Bruns 69). In this sense, the audience members who tweet using hashtags related to *Last Week Tonight* to promote or discuss a cause or issue presented by the show constitute an ad hoc public, and many used multiple hashtags to connect with other issue publics. They emerge "ad hoc," or as needed, at two different points, when net neutrality is under threat. Considering this group as a public also captures the idea that some users of the hashtag, particularly #GoFCCYourself, may not even be viewers of the show and illustrates the effectiveness of spreadable genres and the scalability of news satire calls to action. As seen in my corpus, many of the users attached additional hashtags to their tweets to expand their reach, including those that would connect to adjacent topics and issues; examples include #FreeSpeech, #Resist, and #InternetFreedom. Once the "ad hoc public" emerges and becomes part of the larger network of issue publics, the boundaries begin to blur and the focus becomes more on the topic rather than the hashtag's origin. This seems evident in the data, where only 10% of the #GoFCCYourself tweets mention *Last Week Tonight* or Oliver.

The data indicates that ad hoc publics use hashtags for various rhetorical purposes, including rallying participation in *Last Week Tonight*'s calls to action, but also as a means of tagging discussion, related resources, and general venting of opinions (see fig. 21). Both hashtags were developed alongside a call to action, and ad hoc publics did use the hashtags to promote the posting of comments to the FCC website. This illustrated clearly in the tweets for #FlyTrollsFly, where the majority of tweets were directing others to the website or to view the segment urging the submission of comments, but also constituted nearly a quarter of

#GoFCCYourself tweets as well. It is clear that for both hashtags, though, users also took up the hashtags for other purposes. Most significantly, particularly for #GoFCCYourself, "identifying" tweets show users as people concerned about net neutrality, whether they were simply expressing their idea that the issue is important or bringing more intense emotion to their message. One user worries about how net neutrality will affect her small business, which involves building websites for clients, calling the situation "a total and utter nightmare" (see fig. 16). Another expresses fury over misinformation circulating about the topic (see fig. 18). One user encourages others, "Let your voice be heard!!" (see fig. 6). Oliver's emotional appeals to viewers, where he calls upon groups of viewers to comment accompanied by dramatic music, may have influenced the way that users felt as they went to use the hashtag, particularly for #FlyTrollsFly as the majority of those tweets occurred within days of the segment's airing. However, this is also coupled with the emotional nature of the topic itself, acting as an activator for viewers' feelings on the subject; many of us require the internet to function effectively in our work and personal lives, and net neutrality potentially threatens that constant. The hashtag offered one way to tag these responses and connect with others who felt the same.

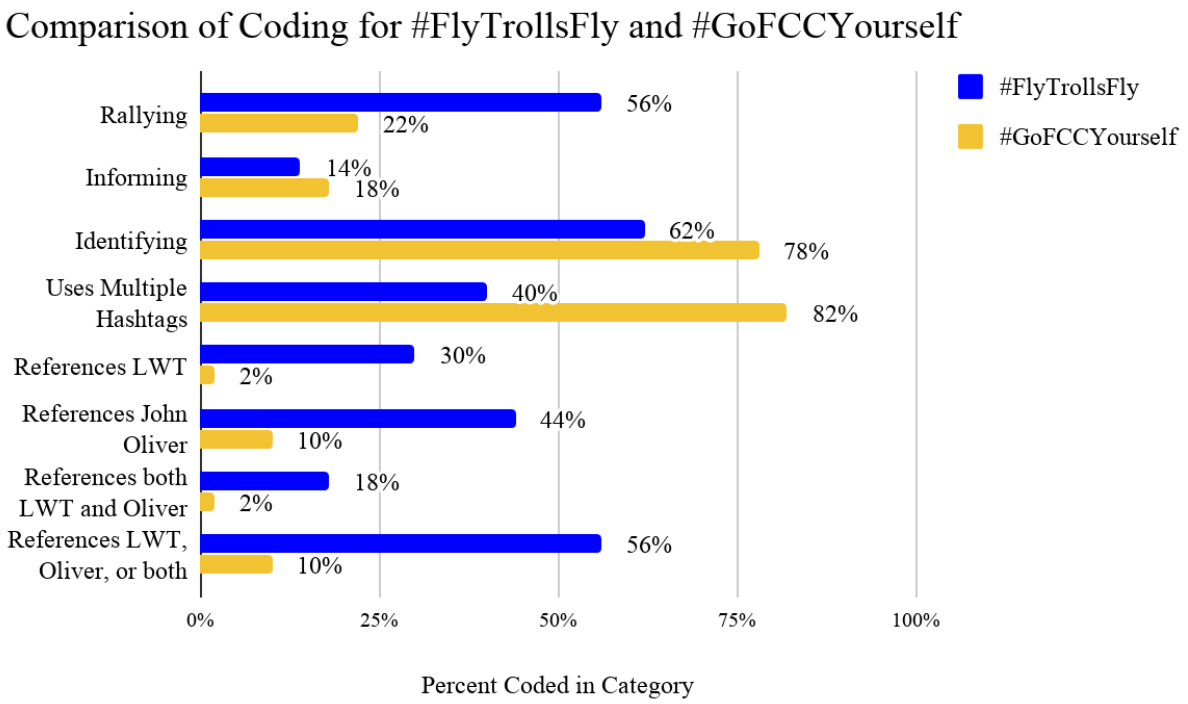

Figure 3.21 – Comparison of Coding for #FlyTrollsFly and #GoFCCYourself

The majority of tweets using either hashtag also use one or more other hashtags, such as #NetNeutrality, #BattleForTheNet, and #Resist, connecting to other conversations happening beyond the show. While most of the attendant hashtags are directly related to net neutrality and debate about the internet, some, like #Resist or #FreeSpeech, potentially connect to other topics where users are attempting to generate collective action. In this way, hashtags serve as a means to disperse the audience and extend *Last Week Tonight*'s message beyond its core viewership. The pairings of multiple hashtags have the potential to further awareness of the issue and the call to submit comments beyond viewers of the show and is also a clear example of how spreadable media works to expand the impact of messages. Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green define spreadable media as "the idea that the effectiveness and impact of messages is increased and expanded by their movement from person to person and community to community" (21). Audiences are active participants in the spreading of content, and "as material spreads, it gets

remade" (27). Through spreadable media, users can take up a hashtag like #GoFCCYourself and remake it from a product of *Last Week Tonight*, inherently tied to the show and its host, to a part of a larger conversation and network of hashtags about the issue of net neutrality.

It is worth noting that all of the tweets in my data sets were in favor of preserving net neutrality. This might suggest that each hashtag creates a kind of echo chamber where only users with this stance can be found, and publics are predicated on and thrive on rational-critical debate (Habermas 31). However, I would argue that the high prevalence of using other hashtags would bring these users into contact with those publics who might hold differing opinions, potentially mobilizing more dispersed publics formed related issues and ideologies. One of the places where this might occur is through #TheInternetIsFreeAgain, a hashtag attempting to argue in favor of ending net neutrality. Two tweets in my corpus mention this topic (see Fig. 18 for one example), and like many of the tweets in my corpus, many of the tweets using #TheInternetIsFreeAgain also use hashtags like #NetNeutrality and #FCC; this is a potential area of contact among dispersed publics. In terms of engagement these tweets received on the platform, the #FlyTrollsFly set of tweets collectively garnered 9 replies, 206 retweets, and 159 likes. The #GoFCCYourself set received significantly more engagement, with 45 replies, 612 retweets, and 1,521 likes. Because I did not look at replies or the accounts of those who retweeted the tweets in my data sets, it is not possible for me to say how much of this engagement was dedicated to debate. It is likely, though, given that 61% of the 100 tweets I gathered used other hashtags, that these tweets became part of the "patchwork of overlapping public spheres" that Bruns mentions and encountered a variety of viewpoints.

There are risks associated with a hashtag gaining wide visibility among dispersed publics, particularly as hashtags can be "hijacked" and taken up by users in ways that derail the original

intent. In a study of a public relations campaign by Florida State University's football program that centered on a hashtag, Jimmy Sanderson et al. found that negative audience uptake took a variety of forms, "shift[ing] [the narrative] in undesirable directions" (35). In the case of #FlyTrollsFly and #GoFCCYourself, I found no evidence of this kind of appropriation, which may be partly due to the issue's wide support across ideologies; a poll conducted by the School for Public Policy at the University of Maryland found in December 2017, "83% [of respondents] opposed repealing net neutrality, including 75% of Republicans, as well as 89% of Democrats and 86% of independents" ("Overwhelming Bipartisan Majority"). While #GoFCCYourself in particular was remade as conversations shifted away from the *Last Week Tonight* segment into more emotion-driven discourse as the date of repeal, the narrative associated with the hashtag remained the same: net neutrality should be preserved for the good of all.

Overall, the data reflects that ad hoc publics transformed the hashtags through their use of them. This is illustrated through #FlyTrollsFly as the hashtag began as a way to mark "communal complaining" and became a mechanism for praising the show's net neutrality segment, sharing articles and resources, and recruiting more participants to the campaign to submit comments to the FCC. #GoFCCYourself was created by users inspired by the GoFCCYourself.com website name, the site that directly takes users to the FCC comment page related to net neutrality. It is reasonable to suppose that the hashtag initially began as another way to promote the site and commenting after the *Last Week Tonight* segment aired in May 2017; by November and December 2017, when the tweets in my corpus were posted, only 22% were coded as "rallying." Because of the kairotic moment, with Pai announcing the plan to officially repeal net neutrality on November 21, 2017, the hashtag transformed into a space for a range of content, with most tweets coded as "identifying," or bringing users' own experiences,

fears, emotions, and other personal contributions to the conversation. The knowledge that a repeal was coming shifted the exigence behind the hashtag, and viewers and presumably other Twitter users who were in conversations about net neutrality but did not watch the show itself took ownership over the hashtag and used it for their own purposes without feeling the need to link it back to the show. The diversity of responses attached to the hashtag provide an example of Dylan Dryer's term "uptake enactment," or "the act of producing an utterance or text in response to uptake affordances" (65). Because the hashtag as a sub-genre can be used for different rhetorical purposes, simultaneously and shifting over time, ad hoc publics continue to transform its use and remake the hashtag based on the kairotic moment as the issue continues to develop. This is reflected in the fact that #GoFCCYourself continues to be a relevant way to enter and contribute to conversations about net neutrality for months after the segment aired. This also illustrates a move from the more concentrated action connected to the news satire genre by a core viewing group illustrated in Chapter 2 toward a broader, more dispersed public facilitated by Twitter and hashtags, part of *Last Week Tonight*'s genre system.

Finally, I also want to consider how the engagement of viewers has affected the show itself. As I noted earlier, Oliver has stated in interviews that *Last Week Tonight* is first and foremost a comedy show and that their commitment to accuracy in their reporting is just to give the jokes a solid foundation ("Is John Oliver's Show Journalism?"), suggesting that it is not really the show's central goal to inform viewers or to create any kind of real change. It is difficult to prove that the ways that viewers have engaged with the show and responded to requests for action have influenced the thinking about *Last Week Tonight*'s content and format without interviewing people who work there or Oliver himself; ultimately, even this kind of direct access to the show's creation would not reveal such influence as they would offer limited

perspectives on a show that is the collective work of many with varying motivations. From looking at the ways in which the show makes frequent calls for smaller scale actions, like submitting an online comment or using a hashtag, *Last Week Tonight*'s format took a logical step forward to build on the work of *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* to inform viewers and encourage their real world participation and action on political issues. It also seems unlikely that *Last Week Tonight* would dedicate so much time and space to covering focused topics in-depth and regularly engage in calls to action if they did not recognize and repeatedly see their audience as one concerned about current events and willing to engage the material outside of viewing. If the central goal is simply comedy, there are many ways to accomplish that without taking a deeply researched look at an issue and asking viewers to raise their voices about it in some way. I argue that this is evidenced in the two hashtags I looked at; both were connected to the show in some way but their very emergence and use came out of viewers taking action beyond viewing. In the case of #GoFCCYourself, Twitter users have made the hashtag their own long after the show aired to continue talking about the issue of net neutrality, as recently as a few months prior to the writing of this chapter. The fact that the show returned to the issue of net neutrality, spoke of the success of the 2014 appeal, and asked viewers to take the same action again, I would argue, is evidence that viewer action was influential in how the show approached the topic when it arose once more.

Conclusion

Significantly, this chapter illustrates how news satire can play a role in the formation of ad hoc publics that utilize tweets and hashtags for various rhetorical purposes, including encouraging political participation, sharing of information, and connecting to other related conversations and topics. It can also expand our notion of how shifting audience and public roles

can happen via spreadable genres. The #GoFCCYourself hashtag in particular illustrates the potential power of this; the hashtag continued to be popular months after the *Last Week Tonight* segment aired and continues to be used on the platform when talking about net neutrality. Thus, the call to action Oliver made in May 2017 continues to have an impact more than 2 years later, a positive illustration of boyd's concept of "persistence," where digital content remains available and accessible far beyond its initial publication: "what one says sticks around" (46-47). While boyd rightly worries about the risks of "what sticks around los[ing] its essence when consumed outside of the context in which it was created" (47), the #GoFCCYourself hashtag has seemed to persist in ways consistent with the original spirit of *Last Week Tonight*'s call to action, as users have continued to use it as a space to share information and rally in support of preserving net neutrality.

I also argue that this points to the desire of many in the news satire viewing audience for ways to take action. Particularly in the case of #FlyTrollsFly, which came out of only the fifth episode of *Last Week Tonight*, several of the tweets praised the show's in-depth format and that they were provided with some means to act. A 2011 study from Patrick R. Miller points out that research in political science about behavior and thought in voting citizens has long related emotion in political decision making to low information and a lack of rationality (576). While the relationship between emotion and how people develop their own beliefs about political ideology is still a developing area of inquiry[10], at least one study suggests that "it is engaged and informed citizens who are most likely to act upon the emotions that they feel" (594). The ability of news

[10] The 2006 collection *Feeling Politics* offers a range of theory and empirical research on connections between affect and cognition and how they, together, affect political decision making and action (Redlawsk). More recent work published just this year focuses on the emotional dimensions of Brexit (Moss et al.), the emotional aspects of climate change activism (Bond et al.), and new methods for analyzing political sentiment on Twitter (Sarddar et al.).

satire to combine these into one package is powerful, and *Last Week Tonight* is providing ongoing evidence of that.

Ultimately, news satire can act as a catalyst for the creation of ad hoc publics online who reshape hashtags for their own rhetorical purposes and pair them with others to become part of a larger networked conversation. In Chapter 4, I will expand Bruns and Burgess' concept of ad hoc publics to the idea of ad hoc public *audience*, in which people who participate in an ad hoc public role about a certain issue become audiences for related media that is often unfamiliar. As viewers take on the roles of ad hoc public or ad hoc public audience, they shift between (already blurry) audience and public roles, creating more participatory and activist audiences as viewers take part in the circulation of messages and discussion on issues, even as their knowledge might be limited. While Chapter 4 will complicate my findings in this chapter, the net neutrality segments and hashtags discussed here are successful examples of what ad hoc publics can accomplish, and I do not think they represent the ceiling of what the news satire genre might be capable of undertaking.

Chapter 4 – The Audience Multiplies: *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee*, Spreadable Media, and the Ad Hoc Public Audience, A Case Study

In this chapter, I extend the work of Chapters 2 and 3, attempting to complicate the relationship between news satire show and audience through a case study of an incident on *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee* in which the idea of audience becomes more layered as multiple audiences emerge. This chapter, then, attempts to complicate this understanding of audience and genre interaction through a case study of Samantha Bee's controversial comments about Ivanka Trump during the May 30, 2018 episode of *Full Frontal*. In a segment on immigration, family separation, and missing migrant children at the US/Mexico border, Bee called the first daughter and Senior Advisor to the President, Ivanka Trump, a "feckless cunt" for tweeting a photo of herself and her toddler in the midst of this breaking news. The move was not particularly out of character for Bee, who has consistently used profanity on her show since its inception; however, as this case study will reflect, the kairotic moment brought this remark into the public consciousness, as *Roseanne* had been cancelled earlier in the week after a racist tweet was posted by its creator and star, Roseanne Barr. Bee and Barr's comments both received attention from the president and White House press, and though these events are completely separate, their closeness in time and similar scenarios led to the president's tweets and media coverage speaking of them comparatively and raising the issue of a "double standard" for liberals and conservatives engaging in free speech. Through the media coverage of this issue, additional audiences, those who do not typically watch *Full Frontal*, are introduced to the show, and thus, the genre. I argue that these can be considered "ad hoc public audiences," a term developed from Axel Bruns and Jean Burgess' concept of "ad hoc publics," discussed in Chapter 3, which emerge spontaneously as issues occur and develop for discussion and debate, often in online spaces where

communication can be instantaneous (7). Like ad hoc publics, ad hoc public audiences originate in response to an emerging issue to participate in discussion and debate; through this process, they may encounter other genres, like televised news satire, through the media coverage and commentary they consume on the issue. Thus, members of the ad hoc public become an ad hoc public *audience* for those genres. In this case study, audiences consuming news coverage about Samantha Bee's comment become an ad hoc public audience for the news satire genre, what I would call the "introduced genre." Ad hoc public audiences often do not directly participate in the introduced genre, may not share the introduced genre's goals, and may be unclear about the introduced genre's function or what expectations to attach to it. Ad hoc public audiences represent incidental participants in the introduced genre, and they likely do not engage in the same channels of discussion or even hold the same values as the genre's typical participants; as Bruns and Burgess suggest is the case for ad hoc publics, their attention is selective and mostly pertains to the issue that brought their interest initially. Ad hoc public audiences also do not share the introduced genre's uptake memory. Uptakes, as Anis Bawarshi puts it, are "complex, often habitualized, socio-cognitive pathways that mediate our interactions with others and the world" ("Taking Up" 199). When someone encounters a known genre, that person's knowledge of it includes "what to take up, how, and when" as well as "when to resist expected uptakes" (200). Uptake memories, then,are "long, ramified, intertextual, and intergeneric," according to Anne Freadman, and influence the way that we respond to genres ("Uptake" 40). Bawarshi clarifies, that "rhetorical memories work to shape our encounters with what we read, hear, and see, and how we take these up in our responses and actions," and understanding uptake memory "can shed light on the processes of uptake selection and the relations of power that inform them" ("Between Genres" 48). A news program discussing *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee* creates an

ad hoc public audience for the news satire genre composed of people who do not typically engage with it or have uptake memory to shape their uptake of it. Their knowledge of the introduced genre and its content are framed and shaped by the media presenting it to them. In the case of televised news satire, this is further complicated by its enduring recognition as a genre hybrid, or combination of news and comedy. Though news satire has, I argue, evolved beyond a hybrid to become a genre in its own right, expectations can still be muddled for an unfamiliar audience: do we treat Bee as a comedian doing satire, commentator covering the news, or something in between? This uncertainty, I argue, also undoubtedly influences how ad hoc public audiences respond to her and her comments.

To understand more clearly how this ad hoc public audience emerges and what influences their conception of news satire, I will use rhetorical genre analysis to continue to build on my work from Chapters 2 and 3 and reflect how Bee's comment is typical to news satire but is recontextualized into an atypical rhetorical situation, where news coverage reframes Bee's comment into a larger issue; an ad hoc public is formed around the issue, creating, in turn, an ad hoc public audience for the show at the center of the controversy. I will also use frame analysis as a means of studying the media coverage surrounding the controversy. According to Stephen D. Reece, "framing refers to the way events and issues are organized and made sense of, especially by media, media professionals, and their audiences" (7). Margaret Linstrom and Willemian Marais point out that framing is a concept that has been approached and conceptualized by scholars in many different ways (24). From their analysis of these different perspectives, they offer that frame analysis requires selecting a particular medium(s) or topic of study; selecting a time frame; pulling together samples from the chosen medium(s)/topic(s) in that timeframe; selecting and defining frames to identify, either inductively or deductively; and

identifying those frames within the texts (29-31). Frames may be rhetorical devices, such as "word choice, metaphors, or exemplars" (31) or technical devices, such as "headlines, subheadings, [or] photo captions" (32). This process can reveal how a topic is taken up by the news media in particular ways. Frame analysis, then, offers a useful means for "understanding the media's role in political life" (7) as it "select[s] some aspects of a perceived reality and make[s] them more salient in a communicating text in such a way as to promote" specific ways of thinking (Entman 52). As such, I use framing analysis as a means to understand how media content presents Bee's comment and does or does not put it into conversation with Barr's tweet as a way of furthering the discussion of a "double standard" for public figures making controversial political comments. Frame analysis can also help illuminate how the media talks about the genre of *Full Frontal* and Bee's position as its host. As I am contending that ad hoc public audiences consume content through their participation on an issue and thus become audiences for introduced genres through other, dispersed spreadable media, their perceptions of the introduced genre will be shaped by that coverage. By combining rhetorical genre analysis and frame analysis, I am able to gain a better understanding of how an ad hoc public audience might have come to understand the news satire genre as well as Bee's comment and show.

I proceed here with some context for my analysis before exploring and analyzing the timeline of events. I then offer a frame analysis of selected news articles and videos before exploring the idea of how ad hoc public audiences form and are influenced more thoroughly. Ultimately, I argue that because ad hoc public audiences emerge in relation to an issue and in the process, encounter texts through other spreadable media, the framing that media provides is essential to understanding how ad hoc public audiences form as well as take up genres that are unfamiliar.

Context for Analysis

Before beginning this case study, I offer some background to help contextualize the events considered. While this case study focuses primarily on the news satire genre and *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee* most specifically, the nature of the media coverage considered pulls in another, unrelated incident involving Roseanne Barr; as such, some background is offered regarding her and her show, *Roseanne*.

Samantha Bee and Full Frontal

In February 2016, Samantha Bee, a comedian who first gained recognition as a correspondent on *The Daily Show* during Jon Stewart's tenure, premiered a news satire show titled *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee* on TBS. Responses from critics were largely warm, calling her "the perfect balance of angry, ironic, and smart" (McClennen) and "such a welcome jolt of energy that you might wish the show was airing everyday" (Sims). Before the show even began to air, promotional material and online commentary focused on her gender as a unique slant to its composition. Indeed, at the time Bee's show premiered, she was the only woman hosting a late-night show in the US, as well as being the first woman to host a news satire show in the US. This has been something that Bee has embraced, as she has professed in interviews that because she *is* female, her show naturally provides a female perspective on current events and important issues. The opening of the first episode, too, satirizes some of the response to its host: Bee is at a press conference, fielding questions from reporters like, "Is it hard breaking into the boys' club?" "How can I watch your show as a man?" and "What's it like to be a female woman?" ("Episode 1.1"). Bee and former showrunner Jo Miller also worked to ensure that the writing staff was diverse by using a "partially blind" submission process that resulted in the initial writers room being 50% female and 30% nonwhite (Nededog). *Full Frontal*, then,

represents an attempt at creating a more inclusive iteration of the news satire genre, which has historically been largely white and male.

Full Frontal uses a format similar to *The Daily Show* but with some alterations. Bee typically does a longer monologue at the beginning of the episode, while pre-taped interviews with Bee and correspondent's pieces round out the rest of the show. Notably, Bee does not sit behind a desk, but instead stands by large video screens during her monologues, giving them a more active feeling and allowing Bee to be quite expressive; it is typical to see Bee reflect strong emotions on charged topics not only through her words, but through her body language as well. This is similar to the emotion I discuss Stewart exhibiting in Chapter 2, though Bee brings her own energy and look to her show. Much like *The Daily Show*, topics covered by *Full Frontal* are typically in the current news cycle. It is not uncommon, however, for the show to take a particular focus on issues concerning women and that are concerning to women; an episode airing in January 2020 featured pieces on paid parental leave and sexism in country music alongside the first piece of the year about the 2020 election ("January 15, 2020"). Though I have been unable to find data on *Full Frontal*'s audience demographics, it would make sense that with this focus, the show would appeal to women particularly and liberal-leaning individuals more broadly. As a general rule, Bee uses coarse language on the show (which is censored during television broadcasts but not on segments posted to YouTube) and actively speaks against the president and politicians she disagrees with, like Republican Congressmen Ted Cruz and Mitch McConnell.

In addition to its regular episodes, *Full Frontal* occasionally does special events like "Not the White House Correspondents Dinner," occurring at the same time as the official White House Correspondents Dinner, and "Christmas on I.C.E.," a Christmas special focusing on

commentary about US Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Like *Last Week Tonight*, *Full Frontal* often uses its platform to motivate political action; a fundraiser tied to the first "Not the White House Correspondents Dinner" in 2017 raised $200,000 for the Committee to Protect Journalists (Lawler), while the 2018 "Christmas on I.C.E." event featured the reveal of a house on the Texas border purchased by TBS that was renovated and given to a nonprofit to accommodate family members of detained immigrants at the border.

Roseanne Barr

While Samantha Bee's comments on *Full Frontal* are unrelated to a separate event involving Roseanne Barr, media coverage considered in this chapter put the two in conversation; in order to understand why these events were compared, some context about Barr is helpful. Barr found fame in the 1980s doing stand-up and eventually landed her own sitcom, *Roseanne*, on ABC from 1988 to 1997 ("Roseanne Barr"). The show's focus on the working-class Connor family was groundbreaking at the time and earned several awards over its 9-year run on television. Barr also appeared in movies, wrote books, and produced television throughout the 1990s, 2000s, and into the 2010s. In 2017, ABC picked up a revival of *Roseanne* starring the majority of the original cast. The show returned to the Connor family in 2017 but injected the sitcom's formula with politics; as in real life, Roseanne's character was a Trump supporter, and the show looked to engage with issues like immigration, healthcare, and gender identity. The show was highly anticipated, and on March 27, 2018, 18.2 million viewers tuned in to the premiere.

Barr has been a controversial figure throughout her career, but social media has allowed her to speak out more instantaneously, without a filter, especially in regard to politics. In addition to her general support of right wing policies and political figures, Barr has been known to tweet

about conspiracy theories like “Pizzagate” (Edgers), which went viral during the 2016 presidential campaign and alleged that Hillary Clinton was running a secret child sex ring in the basement of a pizza restaurant in Washington D.C. (Fisher et al.). Barr has also tweeted in support of President Trump in controversial instances, such as defending his handling of the violent protests in Charlottesville, a move that caused the executive producers of the *Roseanne* reboot to attempt to set up a conference call with Barr (Edgers). Instead, she emailed that she did not want to talk about it and deleted the tweet. Her behavior on social media continued to be a concern for ABC and *Roseanne* executives, though, as the show began and Barr continued to tweet often.

Timeline of Events and Analysis

The following is a timeline of events, beginning with Roseanne Barr’s tweet about Valerie Jarrett, continuing through the airing of Bee’s remark about Ivanka Trump, to the responses that occurred afterward and put these unrelated events into conversation with one another. As my primary focus is on how the televised news satire genre is reflected for ad hoc public audiences, this timeline mostly focuses on the controversy surrounding Bee’s comment and attempts to record the major events related to it, though it is not an exhaustive account of all responses in the media. I have attempted to capture the general sentiment through providing examples of sources that appeared first in Google searches related to this controversy. As Google’s algorithm ranks results based on their relevance to keywords and the number of other web pages that link back to particular pages (Strickland and Donovan), the sources gathered come from a range of popular websites and news organizations that would be likely sources for people to encounter and learn about these events. Through these sources, we can recognize the

sequence of uptakes through spreadable genres that framed conversation about Bee's comment for ad hoc public audiences.

On May 29, 2018, in the early hours of the morning, Barr engaged with a Twitter thread about Obama-era "secrets" where users claimed that WikiLeaks had evidence of the Obama administration spying on the French government. After a user mentioned Valerie Jarrett, Barr replied in the thread, saying, "muslim brotherhood and planet of the apes had a baby = vj" (see fig. 4.1). Jarrett, an African American woman, was senior advisor to President Barack Obama and assistant to the president for public engagement and intergovernmental affairs from 2009 to 2017. Barr's tweet mentions both the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamist political group, and *Planet of the Apes*, the media franchise in which humans and evolved apes vie for control of the world, suggesting that Jarrett is Muslim and likening her to an ape, a racist comparison with a long history of derogatory use directed at African Americans. The tweet was quickly noticed by others and amplified, with users identifying it as racist and hateful. ABC held an "emergency call" with Barr, one of the show's executive producers, and Disney/ABC group president Ben Sherwood, where Barr said she deleted the tweet. A few hours later, Bob Iger, the CEO of ABC-owner the Walt Disney Company, called Jarrett to apologize (Edgers), and ABC Entertainment president Channing Dungey announced via press release that *Roseanne* was cancelled, reversing an earlier decision to renew it for another season (Aggeler). Later that day, Barr issued an apology to Jarrett via Twitter: "I apologize to Valerie Jarrett and to all Americans. I am truly sorry for making a bad joke about her politics and her looks. I should have known better. Forgive

me-my joke was in bad taste" (see fig. 4.2).

Figure 4.1 – Barr's tweet about Valerie Jarrett (@therealroseanne)

Figure 4.2 – Barr's apology to Valerie Jarrett (@therealroseanne)

The next day, on May 30, 2018, the incident grows to involve the White House. President Donald Trump tweets, "Bob Iger of ABC called Valerie Jarrett to let her know that 'ABC does not tolerate comments like those' made by Roseanne Barr. Gee, he never called President Donald J. Trump to apologize for the HORRIBLE statements made and said about me on ABC. Maybe I just didn't get the call?" (see fig. 4.3). Trump makes the situation about himself, commenting mostly on Iger's decision to apologize to Jarrett, but the tweet simultaneously serves to bring Barr's tweet more fully into the news cycle. As Trump commented on the situation, it is also brought up in a White House press briefing that morning, where Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee

Sanders is asked about the president's tweet: "Has the President spoken to Roseanne Barr, who we know has been a longtime friend of his? And why did he choose to address the ABC apology, instead of the underlying issue of concerns about a racist comment that she tweeted out?" ("Press Briefing"). Sanders replies, "I'm not aware of any conversations that have taken place. The President is simply calling out the media bias; no one is defending what she said," going on to emphasize the "hypocrisy in the media, saying that (sic) the most horrible things about this President — and nobody addresses it." While Trump implies this in his tweet, Sanders lists several instances where she says Iger should have called Trump to apologize on behalf of things said on ABC and ultimately avoids answering the questions asked. She continues to insist that the president was merely pointing out a "double standard," implying that liberals are treated differently than conservatives in the media. Collectively, instead of discussing why Barr's comment was offensive, racist, and hurtful, the statements and media coverage surrounding Barr's tweet set the stage for conversation about "media bias" and a "double standard" in terms of the treatment of public figures who make controversial political statements. Trump's initial tweet about Bob Iger's apology to Valerie Jarrett shifts the conversation from Barr's racism to the idea that many say "horrible" things about him on ABC with no recourse, and Sanders speaks a more succinct complaint into existence about "media bias," "hypocrisy in the media," and a "double standard" for liberal commentators. This kind of comparative language is easy for political commentators to seize on and leaves them looking for a controversy involving a more left-leaning figure to compare Barr's situation to, either as confirmation or refutation of the president's and press secretary's statements.

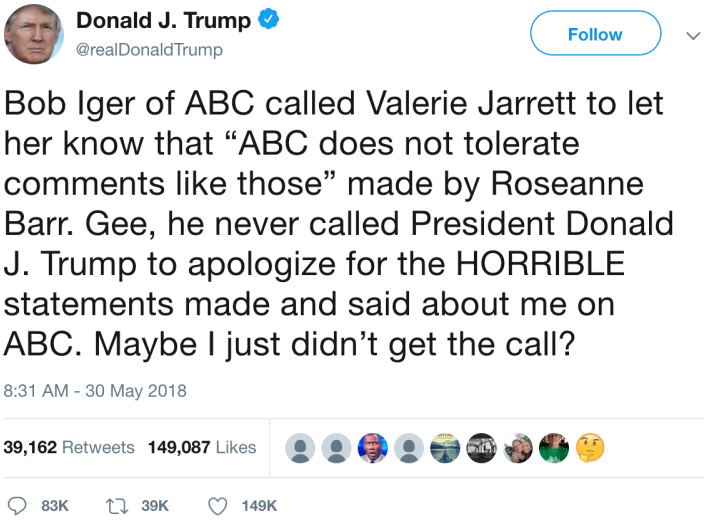

Figure 4.3 - Trump's tweet in response to the Barr controversy (@realDonaldTrump)

That evening, *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee* airs a new episode in which Bee focuses on children being forcibly separated from their families at the US/Mexico border and US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) losing track of almost 1500 children in the process. Over the course of this segment, Bee calls out Attorney General Jeff Sessions, White House Chief of Staff John Kelly, former senator and CNN commentator Rick Santorum, and Homeland Security director Kirstjen Nielsen for their complicity in supporting an immigration policy where children are separated from their families at the border (Schaffstall)[11]. Bee also brings up that in the midst of this news, the first daughter, Ivanka Trump, posted a photo of her and her toddler to Instagram: "Y'know, Ivanka, that's a beautiful photo of you and your child, but let me just say, one mother to another: do something about your dad's immigration policies, you feckless cunt. He listens to you! Put on something tight and low-cut and tell your father to fucking stop it" ("May 30, 2018"). As Bee makes the insult, the in-studio audience responds

[11] Because the May 31, 2018 episode of *Full Frontal* has been removed from streaming services such as YouTube and Amazon, I was unable to find a way to watch and directly quote from the entire segment in question. The information from the segment outside of Bee's quote about Ivanka Trump was found in the thorough recap from *The Hollywood Reporter* cited here.

audibly, seemingly positively, with shouts and applause. In her insult, Bee invokes Ivanka's role as a mother, as the first daughter, and as a senior advisor to the president. She leads with the idea that Ivanka is a mother and should understand the bond between parent and child and have compassion for children other than her own. That Bee mentions Trump as Ivanka's dad and suggests, "put on something tight and low-cut," references President Trump's own disquieting comments about his daughter; Trump famously remarked on *The View* in 2006, "If Ivanka weren't my daughter, perhaps I'd be dating her," among other comments throughout the years that suggest his attraction to his daughter (Withnall). Bee suggests she exploit her position as Trump's daughter in her role as a senior advisor in order to influence her father's policies. Bee's use of the word "cunt" punctuates the statement, an epithet historically directed at women and what Inga Muscio calls "the most powerful negative word in the English language" (xxiii). In a study of both native and secondary English speakers, Jean-Mark Dewaele found that British and American English speakers rated the offensiveness of the word "cunt" at a 4.6 on a 5 point scale, ranking it as the most offensive in a long list of "bad" words and phrases (120). With this in mind, in nearly any context, the word hits Americans heavily and leaves an impression; it is doubtful that Bee and her writers casually inserted this term into the piece without knowing its potential impact, particularly as it was being used to refer to the first daughter and a member of the White House staff. The May 30, 2018 episode of *Full Frontal* has since been removed from streaming services and the clips have been removed from the show's official YouTube channel.

By the morning of May 31, Bee's comment had become news, picked up by major media outlets. The first page of Google search results on February 5, 2020 for "'Full Frontal with Samantha Bee' 'Ivanka Trump' May 2018" includes a video from *The Guardian* and articles from *The New York Times*, *Variety*, *The Washington Post*, *The Cut* (a digital expansion of *New*

York Magazine), and *The Hollywood Reporter*, all posted on May 31, 2018. While their headlines focus on Bee, the majority of these articles link her comment to Barr's tweet and show cancellation. Bee's insult is also taken up by 24-hour news networks, including CNN, MSNBC, and Fox News. Analysis of this news coverage can be found in the following section.

As with Barr's tweet, Bee's comment also becomes a subject for White House commentary. Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders responded to Bee in a statement to *The Washington Free Beacon*, saying, "'The language used by Samantha Bee last night is vile and vicious. The collective silence by the left and its media allies is appalling. Her disgusting comments and show are not fit for broadcast, and executives at Time Warner and TBS must demonstrate that such explicit profanity about female members of this administration will not be condoned on its network'" (Kugle). Unlike Sanders' comments about Barr, which shifted away from Barr's words to focus on the "double standard" applied to her as a vocally conservative figure, this statement takes aim at Bee's words bluntly and calls for condemnation of them. As it focuses on Bee's language, it also shifts focus away from the immigration crisis at the US/Mexico border, the central focus of Bee's segment. Sanders also mentions the "collective silence of the left and its media allies" though many outlets accused by the White House of having liberal bias, such as CNN and the *New York Times*, had discussed the issue already that morning, condemning Bee's insult. On Twitter, Donald Trump Jr. retweets a *Daily Caller* article about Bee's remark, adding the comment, "Good thing there's no double standard [eyeroll emoji] imagine someone… anyone… said this about Michelle Obama or the Obama girls? You think they'd still have a tv show? [thinking emoji]" (see fig. 4.4). While this statement does not directly mention the Barr controversy, Trump Jr.'s tweet does allude to it through his comment

on a “double standard,” the same language Sanders used in her initial press briefing comment about Barr, and invoking television show cancellation.

Figure 4.4 – Donald Trump Jr. responds to Bee’s comment (@DonaldJTrumpJr)

In the afternoon, Bee tweeted an apology on her personal Twitter account, writing, “I would like to sincerely apologize to Ivanka Trump and to my viewers for using an expletive on my show to describe her last night. It was inappropriate and inexcusable. I crossed a line, and I deeply regret it” (see fig. 4.5). Notably, the apology comes directly from Bee rather than from the *Full Frontal* account, indicating that Bee takes personal responsibility for the comment. Her apology is to both Ivanka and her viewers specifically for the expletive, not for the sentiment it was used to express. That she includes her viewers in the apology gestures more widely to the idea that the word is offensive and upsetting to many but might also suggest her regret at putting her show at risk through the comment. Within an hour of Bee’s tweet, the official TBS Twitter

account tweets, “Samantha Bee has taken the right action in apologizing for the vile and inappropriate language she used about Ivanka Trump last night. Those words should not have been aired. It was our mistake too, and we regret it” (see fig. 4.6). Their statement, supportive of Bee’s apology, suggests that they stand behind Bee and *Full Frontal* and will not likely cancel her show or remove her as host. Of course, this also feeds the narrative of a “double standard,” as much of the media conversation up to this point considered whether or not TBS would or should cancel the show in light of *Roseanne*’s fate. With media attention growing, however, advertisers begin to pull their support of *Full Frontal*, including Autotrader and State Farm (Rao).

Figure 4.5 – Bee’s initial apology on her personal Twitter account (@iamsambee)

Figure 4.6 – TBS’s response to Bee’s apology (@TBSNetwork)

The next day, June 1, 2018, President Trump tweets again: “Why aren’t they firing no talent Samantha Bee for the horrible language used on her low ratings show? A total double standard but that’s O.K., we are Winning, and will be doing so for a long time to come!” (see fig. 4.7). Trump’s comment again references the idea of a “double standard,” invoking the Barr controversy again and fueling the story, and the comparison between the two incidents, for another day.

Figure 4.7 – Trump’s response to Bee’s comment (@realDonaldTrump)

On June 6, 2018, Bee appears on her show for the first time since the remark and addresses the situation in the cold open:

> A lot of people were offended and angry that I used an epithet to describe the president’s daughter and advisor last week. It is a word I have used many times on the show, hoping to reclaim it. This time, I used it as an insult. I crossed the line. I regret it, and I do apologize for that. The problem is that many women have heard that word in the worst moments of their lives. A lot of them don’t want that word reclaimed, they want it gone, and I don’t blame them. I don’t want to inflict more pain on them. I want this show to be challenging and I want it to be honest, but I never intended it to hurt anyone - except Ted Cruz. Many men were also offended by my use of the word. I do not care about that. I hate that this distracted from

> more important issues. I hate that I did something to contribute to the nightmare of 24 hour news cycles that we're all white-knuckling through. I should have known that a potty-mouth insult would be inherently more interesting to them than juvenile immigration policy. I would do anything to help those kids - I hate that this distracted from them, so to them, I am also sorry. And look - If you are worried about the 'death of civility,' don't sweat it. I'm a comedian. People who hone their voices in basement bars while yelling back at drunk hecklers are *definitely* not paragons of civility. I am - I'm *really* sorry that I said that word, but you know what? Civility is just nice words. Maybe we should all worry a little bit more about the niceness of our actions. Okay! Thanks for listening. ("June 6, 2018")

While Bee's tweeted apology was directed at Ivanka and her viewers specifically, her on-air apology seems directed at a broader, more diffuse audience including women who have been hurt by the epithet before and the migrant children who were intended to be the focus of the segment. Bee also invokes a group of people "worried about the 'death of civility,'" seemingly acknowledging the ad hoc public audience her show gained through spreadable media coverage; this is not a group she apologizes to, however, as Bee simply suggests that they not worry about the status of civility based on a comedian's words and implies that her comment has been overblown by being taken out of context. Bee notably defines herself as a comedian rather than a commentator or a satirist here, and in this way, she suggests that her use of bad language is nearly expected, and her words are less important than the actions that, for example, endanger immigrant families. Through this framing, similar to her tweet apology, Bee is able to center her regret specifically on using the epithet and deploying it as an insult rather than apologize for her

content more broadly.

As Bee notes, her comment about Ivanka was not the first time the word "cunt" was used on her show. In response to someone calling her a "thunder cunt" on Twitter after the 2016 election, Bee introduced the "Thunder Cunt Award," which she presented to Jake Tapper "for making cable news bearable" ("December 5, 2016"). The show also released commemorative shirts that viewers could purchase, sporting a heavy metal-inspired motif, the words "Thunder Cunt," and the show's logo ("Full Frontal with Samantha Bee"). In this context, Bee is reframing the term as something more positive, to describe someone who is politically outspoken and rebellious. As she notes, however, in the tone and context of her comment about Ivanka, it is an insult, not intended to be endearing or complimentary. Whereas in her tweeted apology, she acknowledges Ivanka and her viewers, here, she invokes women who might have past trauma related to the word and the missing migrant children her segment was about, knocking the media at the same time as she criticizes their penchant for seizing on "a potty-mouth insult" rather than focusing on serious issues. Bee's apology, and the sentiment that she has returned to repeatedly in interviews about this, is centered on regret that this incident distracted from immigration and missing children at the border, the focus of the segment where she insulted Ivanka. Her final statement - "maybe we should worry a little bit more about the niceness of our actions" - again returns to the idea that the policies - actions - discussed in the segment should weigh much heavier than the words used. The remainder of the show continues more or less as a typical *Full Frontal* episode would proceed, with Bee inserting a few jokes about the incident and its aftermath throughout. Notably, the show returns to the subject where the remark originated, following up on missing migrant children in the first segment.

As with Bee's comment initially, her on-air apology also receives media coverage. In the

same Google search mentioned earlier in this section, completed on February 5, 2020 for the search term "'Full Frontal with Samantha Bee' 'Ivanka Trump' May 2018," the first page includes June 7, 2018 articles from *Vanity Fair* and *USA Today* covering Bee's apology. These articles are included in the analysis below.

Frame Analysis of Media Coverage

Frame analysis, which offers a means of understanding how media organizes, connects, and contextualizes events and issues (Reece 7), reveals how the media put Bee and Barr into conversation with one another, framing the two events in terms of a larger debate. This method also usefully allows for a closer look at how media sources talk about *Full Frontal* and Bee, and thus illuminate (or not) the show's genre. This analysis, overall, helps illustrate the emergence of ad hoc public audiences and the shaping of audience responses.

In an effort to analyze the media's response to Bee's comment, I collected the first 10 results that came up in a Google search conducted on February 5, 2020 for "'Full Frontal with Samantha Bee' 'Ivanka Trump' May 2018." While frame analysis typically involves setting time parameters on the corpus, I did not set limitations on this, as Bee continues to be asked about this incident in interviews; it is revealing to see how media coverage continues to frame this situation and continue to put Barr's and Bee's incidents into conversation months after it occurred, so I did not want to exclude these sources, particularly if they came up prominently in my search. Thus, I gathered 10 news articles posted by a total of eight news outlets. I also went to the "Videos" tab on this search and selected the first video from each of three major 24 hour news networks: CNN, MSNBC, and Fox News. By including these sources, I acknowledge that videos online and 24 hour news networks are where many Americans get their news each day. Focusing on the first page of results helps reveal what a person Googling the controversy might see

initially and provides a look at how different popular television and print media outlets cover the story.

As I read or watched each text, I recorded the date, source, headline, and any and all information particular to three key factors I developed deductively. First, I wanted to know how many of the items related Bee's comments and situation to Barr's and how that connection was presented and described. This factor helps reveal how closely tied the two were in media coverage and how this connection was framed for audiences, whether it was in terms of a "double standard" or some other framing. Second, as I read and watched these texts, I also considered whether the content was straightforward reporting or editorializing, or including contributor's own thoughts about feelings about the matter. Third and fourth, I looked at how Bee was described and how *Full Frontal* was described. This is in an effort to see how the media talks about the genre and what kind of figure Bee is. As I argue that the news satire genre's roots as a hybrid of comedy and news can make genre expectations blurry, I think it is important to consider how *Full Frontal's* genre is presented to readers and viewers of news coverage, especially with those unfamiliar with the show in mind.

The headlines for the articles and videos in my corpus largely follow the story from Bee's insult to apology as they progress through time (see table 4.1). The dates range from May 31 to August 9, 2018, so earlier articles are more about the initial incident (for example, *BBC* headline, "Samantha Bee insults Ivanka Trump with obscene phrase"), with various headlines calling Bee's comment a "slur," "slam" and an "insult." Later articles focus more on Bee's apology (such as USA Today's headline, "Samantha Bee apologizes for Ivanka Trump insult on 'Full Frontal'"). Vanity Fair's headline, "Samantha Bee Apologizes One Last Time for Ivanka Trump Comment - But with a Catch," teases the idea that Bee's apology was not completely genuine,

while the "catch" they mention in the article seems to simply be that Bee intentionally did not apologize to men who were offended by the word. Only one headline mentions Barr: Fox News' video is titled "Double standard for Samantha Bee and Roseanne Barr?" and sets the expectation for comparing the two while picking up the phrasing used in Press Secretary Sanders' statement.

Source	**Title**	**Date**	**Reporting/ Editorializing**
Hollywood Reporter (Schaffstall)	"Samantha Bee Calls Ivanka Trump the C-Word in 'Full Frontal' Segment"	May 31, 2018	Reporting (Recap of the segment)
Variety (D'Addario)	"How Samantha Bee Hurt Her Show and Her Cause With Ivanka Trump Slam (Column)"	May 31, 2018	Editorializing
The Cut - digital expansion of *New York Magazine* (Aggeler)	Link: "What Did Samantha Bee Say About Ivanka Trump?" Headline: "The Samantha Bee Ivanka Trump C*ntroversy, Explained"	May 31, 2018	Editorializing
New York Times (Koblin)	"Slur Toward Ivanka Trump Brings an Apology From Samantha Bee"	May 31, 2018	Reporting
CNN	"Samantha Bee calls Ivanka Trump a 'feckless c***'"	May 31, 2018	Editorializing
MSNBC	"Samantha Bee Apologizes To Ivanka Trump For 'Inappropriate' Language'"	May 31, 2018	Editorializing
BBC	"Samantha Bee insults Ivanka Trump with obscene phrase"	June 1, 2018	Reporting
Fox News	"Double standard for Samantha Bee and Roseanne Barr?"	June 1, 2018	Editorializing
New York Times (Bennett)	"About Samantha Bee, Ivanka Trump, and That Word"	June 2, 2018	Editorializing
USA Today (Lawler)	Link: "Samantha Bee apologizes for Ivanka Trump insult on 'Full Frontal'"	June 6, 2018	Reporting

	Headline: “Samantha Bee addresses Ivanka Trump comment on ‘Full Frontal’: ‘I regret it’”		
Azcentral - *USA Today* subsidiary (Goodykoontz)	“Samantha Bee apologizes for Ivanka Trump insult, urges action over words”	June 6, 2018	Editorializing
Vanity Fair (Bradley)	“Samantha Bee Apologizes One Last Time for Ivanka Trump Comment - But with a Catch”	June 7, 2018	Reporting
USA Today (Ryan)	“Samantha Bee on backlash to Ivanka Trump comment: ‘It changed my perspective, for sure’”	August 9, 2018	Reporting

Table 4.1 - Source, headline, and date for 10 articles (listed in order of search results) and three videos gathered through a Google search on February 5, 2020 for “‘Full Frontal with Samantha Bee’ ‘Ivanka Trump’ 2018.”

Overall, the sources either take the approach of providing a more straightforward report on Bee’s comment and the commentary that others have attached to it, a total of six sources, or a more editorial approach where the commentator(s) involved express their opinion on the incident and attendant events, a total of seven sources. While the majority of headlines do not reveal this, 7 of the 10 articles and all 3 videos mentioned Barr directly in their coverage of the *Full Frontal* controversy, putting the two incidents side-by-side for comparison. Those reporting on the incident, such as one of the articles from *The New York Times* (Koblin) and the article from the BBC (“Samantha Bee Insults”), tend to frame Barr’s presence in the story as a matter of timing and mention the two together as they cover Sanders’ and President Trump’s comments, as well as media commentators. John Koblin of the *New York Times* notes, “The different consequences for the two politically minded entertainers — Ms. Barr is an outspoken supporter of the president, while Ms. Bee is a full-throated opponent of the Trump administration — provided conservatives with a fresh opportunity to accuse the media industry of having a liberal bias.” The article further mentions, “Several prominent conservatives said that a lack of disciplinary action

on the part of TBS would reveal a double standard in the media and entertainment industries." This approach frames the comparison of the two events as one brought about by primarily conservative political figures.

Sources editorializing about the comment on *Full Frontal*, such as *Variety* (D'Addario) and *The Cut* (Aggeler) tend to cover similar material as those reporting but protest the idea that Bee and Barr's comments are equal. After noting that the timing of the incidents made them an easy comparison, Daniel D'Addario delineates the differences between the two comments for *Variety*: "Barr had a long history of truly offensive, wrongheaded, and outlandish statements dispensed freewheelingly on social media, while Bee's comment occurred as a consciously chosen bit of provocation within the context of a comedy show in which she harnesses her anger as a tool of advocacy." The *New York Times* article "About Samantha Bee, Ivanka Trump, and That Word," featuring a conversation among journalists about the issue, questions this comparison, as participants point out differences in the comments themselves, methods of delivery, and contexts (Bennett), while the MSNBC piece features an anchor stating that she did not want to "make the comparison" to Barr but needed to due to the White House's statement on Bee "implicitly" bringing the situations into conversation ("Samantha Bee Apologizes"). These sources beneficially question the validity of putting Bee and Barr's comments side-by-side, but it is notable that they still do so. On the other end of the spectrum, the Fox News clip is dedicated to discussion of whether or not liberal and conservative public figures are treated differently. Members of the panel discuss "different rules for Americans based on their politics" and compare Bee to Kathy Griffin, who posed for a photo with a fake severed head appearing to be Donald Trump, and Hillary Clinton, whose emails somehow continue to provide talking points years after the 2016 election; the panel seemingly concludes that liberals are able to get away

with things and consistently skirt justice, framing Bee's comment as part of a much larger problem.

Whether they are simply reporting or editorializing, most of the sources include and thus amplify comments from the White House and public figures who discuss a "double standard," questioning TBS's response to keep *Full Frontal* on the air. While some writers, like D'Addario, are clear in describing how the comments are not comparable, amplifying the comments of those who see this as a double standard raises the question for everyone and invites ad hoc public audiences to make this comparison as well. The phrase "double standard" is prominent in the majority of articles I looked at; nine of the 13 explicitly use the phrase "double standard" or quote a source that does. Two sources from *USA Today* provide a link within the text to another article that put Bee and Barr in opposition in its headline. Specifically, this link reads "**More:** Samantha Bee vs. Roseanne Barr: Trump joins chorus accusing media of double standard." While this is not a part of the article itself, it is a bolded resource inserted into the middle of both articles, difficult for a reader to miss. Multiple sources reference a tweet from former White House Press Secretary Ari Fleischer, decrying a "double-standard in action." Of the remaining four sources that do not explicitly use the phrase "double standard," all but one still implement comparative language to talk about Bee and Barr; for example, a reporter for CNN notes, "Critics are saying, 'If you're going to condemn that, why aren't you condemning this?'" ("Samantha Bee Calls").

Overall, there is only a single article across a corpus of 13 pieces of media that does not include some mention of Barr and only four that do not explicitly use or quote the phrase "double standard." While some articles do inject opinions that the comparison is unwarranted or unfair, the framing still places Bee's controversy in the context of Barr's. The story becomes

more about a "double standard" for liberals and conservatives, furthering the narrative presented by members of the White House and encouraging ideological uptakes as a means to reframe the rhetorical situation. As a result of this framing, commentary and conversations about the comments themselves, who is hurt by them, and how we deal with similar transgressions in everyday contexts (most people do not have a television show to cancel) are largely lost, as is Bee's larger message about immigration policy and the crisis at the US/Mexico border.

Notably, in their coverage of Bee's comment, most of the sources I gathered spend little time considering the original subject of the *Full Frontal* segment in question, the immigration crisis at the US/Mexico border. D'Addario's piece, which is dedicated to critiquing Bee's approach to covering a significant topic like immigration, skims over the focus of the segment quickly, mentioning only that "the host sought to make a point about the U.S. immigration policies under President Donald Trump" and that Ivanka has thus far been seemingly unsuccessful at influencing his policies. Bill Goodykoontz, writing for a subsidiary of *USA Today* called *AZCentral*, notes Bee's "observation that trumped-up outrage on both sides takes away from real debate about policy we so often ignore," quoting her apology about "'distracting from more important issues.'" He then returns to address the obscenity as the central focus of his article, though, ending with a note about Ivanka being "fair game for criticism" as a public official, "but not vulgarity." The article that is most thorough in covering the segment's content is from the *Hollywood Reporter*, and it is the single article that does not mention Barr at all. The media skimming over the tough issue that Bee was attempting to cover while amplifying the idea of a double standard suggests a desire to focus on issues that are more easily debated than larger, more complex issues of human rights violations occurring at the border and the policies allowing it. Even those working to defend Bee are using the majority of their time and space in the media

defending the differences between her comment and Barr's rather than directing the conversation back to the damaging immigration policies that Bee was trying to highlight originally. Particularly with the three televised news segments only playing the short clip of Bee addressing Ivanka, ad hoc public audiences, invested primarily in the larger narrative of a double standard, get little perspective on how the news satire genre approaches news and political topics.

In addition to the media framing Bee's comment and apology in relationship to Barr's and furthering the "double standard" issue, it is also important to understand how the media talked about *Full Frontal* as a genre in these sources that this reflects the audience's contextual knowledge of this genre. Many of the articles present *Full Frontal* in a nondescript way, referring to it as a "broadcast," "show," "TBS show," or "TBS comedy show." This gives a reader little context for understanding what type of show *Full Frontal* might be. Three articles refer to the show as a "late night talk show," a description I would argue mischaracterizes the genre a bit, as Bee's show differs fairly widely from programs like *The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon* or *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*. While *Full Frontal* does typically involve Bee delivering monologues, they are much more focused on particular topics than what one would see on network late night talk shows and are not limited only to the beginning portion of the show. Being on a cable network, Bee is subject to less censorship[12] and more freedom in terms of her content than late night shows airing on the major networks. Any guest interviews seen on the show are incorporated into taped pieces, and *Full Frontal* often relies on taped pieces featuring correspondents, whereas this is more of a rarity on a typical late-night talk show. Late night talk shows occasionally engage in impactful social action; Colbert's *Last Show* published a

[12] While episodes airing on TBS censor expletives in accordance with FCC guidelines about "'grossly offensive' language" ("Obscene, Indecent"), segments uploaded online, such as to the TBS website and YouTube, are uncensored.

children's book, *Whose Boat is This Boat? Comments That Don't Help in the Aftermath of a Hurricane*, based on President Trump's comments while touring North Caroline and South Carolina after Hurricane Florence hit in September 2018 (Italie). Proceeds from the book "raised more than $1.25 million for such charities as Foundation for the Carolinas and World Central Kitchen." Because late-night talk shows generally spend much less time focusing on the details of current events and political policy, their requests for audience action are rarer. As Chapters 2 and 3 illustrated, creating social action through a variety of means, such as calling for viewers to create their own Super PACs or participate in public comment campaigns, is much more common in the news satire genre. In other words, someone thinking of *Full Frontal* as belonging to the late-night talk show genre would have genre expectations that would differ quite widely from what the show actually presents. Overall, I only noted two articles that gave some indication that *Full Frontal* was news satire, using descriptors of "satirical late-night show" (Ryan) and "political commentary show" ("Samantha Bee insults"). These phrases come closest to describing the genre, although "political commentary show" significantly excludes the comedic element, which is an essential part of news satire's generic DNA. This framing, too, sets the stage for ad hoc public audiences to emerge as they are drawn to the partisan issue but become audiences for a show without clear knowledge of its genre or the full scope of the subject being covered.

Similarly, descriptors for Bee do not offer much instruction as to what kind of figure she is: across the 10 articles in my set, Bee is described as a "comedian," "TV personality," "liberal comedian," "entertainer," "comic and commentator," "edgy late night comic," and "late night talk show host and satirist." As Bee herself does in her on-air apology, most descriptors seek to define her as a comedian, with only three making reference to her ties to political commentary.

Again, this framing does not in all cases capture that Bee is a politically-focused comedian and satirist or that her focus is often centered on serious topics. This, too, can obscure the idea that her insult of Ivanka came in a wider context of political commentary about immigration and the criticism of other members of the Trump administration.

Collectively, this analysis shows that Bee's comment about Ivanka was consistently compared to Barr's tweet and show cancellation, and that the genre of *Full Frontal* and what kind of role Bee plays as its host are not clearly stated in a large portion of the media. As ad hoc public audiences arise through their consumption of these sources, their thinking is framed by these sources, and the analysis that follows helps reveal how ad hoc public audiences emerge around controversies such as these and form opinions shaped by other spreadable media sources.

Ad Hoc Public Audiences

As defined in the introduction of this chapter, ad hoc public audiences emerge around an issue, just as ad hoc publics do, and they become audiences for attendant spreadable media genres surrounding the issue. They are typically not composed of the regular consumers of a particular genre or text, and thus learn of it through the context and information they are provided through things like news coverage and commentary, which shapes their understanding of the genre or text itself; in the case study presented in this chapter, the ad hoc public audience has no prior knowledge of or relation to news satire or *Full Frontal*, but they spontaneously emerge around the controversial issue presented in the media: double standards for the free speech of liberals and conservatives and how those issues themselves are covered by the press. Because it is through this dispersed media that ad hoc public audiences enter the conversation, this framing is influential in shaping conversations about the issue of Bee's comment, apology, and what is appropriate in the context of her show. We can see some evidence of this ad hoc

public audience in a survey conducted of 1500 Americans by *The Economist* and YouGov in June 2018. When asked how often they watched *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee*, 4% responded "regularly" and 11% responded "sometimes," while 66% responded "never" ("*The Economist*"). Meanwhile, when asked how much they had heard about Bee's comment regarding Ivanka, 32% indicated they had "heard a lot" and 33% indicated that they thought her show "should be cancelled." Taken together, these numbers suggest that a significant portion of those who heard a lot about the incident and those who wanted Bee's show cancelled as a result of her comment likely never saw her show beyond short clips in the media. These are the members of the ad hoc public audience.

In this case, I argue that two primary factors influenced the media's framing and thus influenced the ad hoc public audience: one, the kairotic moment, in which the incident with Barr's tweet and show cancellation brought about a larger issue of double standards for liberal and conservative public figures, especially as the White House wished to direct attention away from the crisis at the border and any of Trump's own personal transgressions, and two, televised news satire genre's hybrid roots as a blend of news and comedy create blurry genre expectations for unfamiliar audiences, making Bee's role as the host of a news satire show uncertain.

First, the kairotic moment plays an essential role in the framing for this event, and thus the issue that the ad hoc public would emerge around, particularly in terms of the priming for how Bee's comment would be handled. *Kairos* describes an opportune moment for speech; in writing about *kairos* and times of crisis, Allan Aubrey Boesak argues that kairotic awareness "gives us the possibility to discern the signs of the times, to recognize a situation as a crisis that could be, or is in fact, devastating for the community. In many ways, the crisis is precipitated, created by the greed and indifference of the powerful. The crisis is to their benefit: they profit

from it, hence they refuse to recognize it as a crisis" (141). The timeframe of the events covered in this chapter were particularly rocky for the Trump administration, as a press release issued from the US Department of Health and Human Services on May 28, 2018 attempted to address reports that upwards of 1500 migrant children were lost at the border; the release states that "1,475 unaccompanied alien children" could not be reached after being given over to "sponsors that [Health and Human Services] vetted and deemed appropriate" ("Statement by HHS"). This crisis received a great deal of media attention, and, as discussed throughout this chapter, it became a key topic in the week's episode of *Full Frontal*. Barr's racist tweet the next day caused controversy and resulted in the cancellation of her television show; besides being a topic where media commentators could argue over the appropriateness of this consequence, Barr's situation was also amplified by Donald Trump on Twitter, which led to its inclusion in a White House press briefing. Instead of commenting on Barr's tweet itself or its racist nature, Press Secretary Sanders focuses on the perceived "double standard" applied to liberal and conservative public figures, and Donald Trump Jr. also uses this language in a tweet. As these comments are picked up by the media, this primes the larger conversation to be one of comparison in order to prove or disprove this charge of a "double standard." Bee, a decidedly left-leaning satirist, delivers her remark about Ivanka less than 24 hours after the controversy with Barr arises and becomes a perfect candidate for comparison, despite the different contexts. By the morning of May 31, multiple media outlets have published content comparing Barr's tweet to Bee's comment, fueling the debate about "double standards" as TBS remained quiet about disciplinary action. It is taken up by Sanders in a press briefing and Trump on Twitter, taking advantage of the kairotic moment to shift at least some focus away from the immigration crisis and toward another polarizing figure: Bee.

Conveniently, the "double standard" framing takes advantage of the kairotic moment to redirect awareness away from crisis and from Trump's own problematic history. First, it importantly shifts some attention away from policies of detaining and separating immigrant families, the key issue that Bee was focused on, and an issue that was escalating quickly; Catherine E. Schoischet of CNN wrote, "When people look back at the US immigration debate, they might point to May 2018 as a turning point - a month when policies became reality, when words once whispered in private became words shouted in public, when life for immigrant families crossing the border became visibly worse." Trump called MS-13 members "animals," the administration ended deportation protections for nearly 90,000 Hondurans living in the US since the 1990s, a border patrol agent shot and killed a 20-year-old undocumented immigrant, and immigration officials lost track of nearly 1500 children, all in May 2018 (Schoischet). Comparing the treatment of Barr and Bee offered a distraction that, at the very least, took up space on the pages of news outlets and airtime on networks. Second, the "double standard" works in two ways. There is the idea that liberals get away with inappropriate behavior and statements while conservatives are unable to do the same. This framing turns away from many instances of consequence-free bad behavior from conservatives; perhaps the most parallel example is Trump himself using explicit and sexist language and insulting others, often on public platforms such as Twitter and onstage at his campaign rallies. In addition to the famous Access Hollywood tape where Trump explicitly describes groping a woman without her consent ("Transcript"), he has also called Senator Ted Cruz a "pussy" and remarked that African nations were "shithole countries," among innumerable other comments (Baker). Trump has faced little consequence for such comments and has actually received praise for his strong language, as some say it is "'part of his appeal'" and "'helps create the impression that he is saying what he

thinks'" (Baker). While Trump is admired by some for presenting strong emotions through explicit language, others, notably women like Bee, are put down for it: in addition to his comments about Bee, Trump noted that Michigan Representative Rashida Tlaib had "dishonored herself" when she said that "she and her fellow House Democrats were going to 'impeach the motherfucker.'" Trump later pressured the Israeli government to not allow Rep. Tlaib into the country, "an extraordinary break from precedent and an aggressive attempt to influence a foreign ally and hurt a political opponent" (Relman). It is important to remember here that Trump's response to Barr's situation was not that her punishment should have been reversed and her show renewed; he made the situation about himself and others apologizing to him. The double standard, then, works in a second way: men using offensive language to express strong emotions is powerful and appealing, while women doing the same is disgraceful and worthy of punishment[13]. Helpfully for Trump, the "double standard" framing that Sanders and Trump project onto Bee's comment again turns the attention away from Trump's many transgressions and toward women with negative things to say about him. As Bruns and Burgess argue, the emergence of an issue is the crucial condition for an ad hoc public to form; discussion and debate about the shared issue is key (2). The same is true, I argue, for ad hoc public audiences. In this case, the "double standard" controversy is the common topic that the ad hoc public audience forms around. As they engage this topic, they also must encounter the news satire genre through *Full Frontal*.

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[13] Robin Lakoff's 1975 work *Language and Woman's Place* is a seminal work on gendered language; in the book Lakoff explains that "women experience linguistic discrimination in two ways: in the way they are taught to use language, and in the way general language use treats them" (39). Women's language, she argues, serves to undermine their authority and reinforce a subordinate role to men. This type of gendered language policing is also part of what Deborah Cameron calls "verbal hygiene" in her book of the same name; verbal hygiene is the practice of policing language use, particularly out of "an urge to improve or 'clean up' language" (1), and it often extends beyond language into other semiotic markers of identity like body language, clothing, and appearance, especially for women.

Of course, it is important to note that it is likely that Bee's comment still would have been covered by the media had Barr's tweet and cancellation not happened; a Google News search for *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee* conducted on February 5, 2020 returned recent news stories from *Media Matters for America*, *The Washington Post*, *The Daily Beast*, *The Guardian*, *Forbes*, and *Billboard*, among others, simply covering the content of the show. However, it is clear that the comparison to Barr and the larger framing of a double standard colored the conversation about Bee's comment and fueled its coverage in the media considerably. An ad hoc public audience, then, is likely already viewing Bee unfavorably since they are forming around an issue where Bee is cast unfavorably rather than having shared participation in actually viewing her show.

Second, it is essential to consider how genre expectations might have also influenced ad hoc public audience reactions to the genre of televised news satire. A study conducted by Rolf A. Zwann found that "expectations about the genre of a text influence how readers process and mentally represent texts" (930). In other words, when audiences encounter an unfamiliar text, knowledge of its genre helps establish how to interact with and understand that text. Televised news satire is a genre that blends comedy and news genres[14], has evolved greatly since its beginning, and continues to develop into its own, third genre as new iterations emerge; these factors combined can produce blurry genre expectations, particularly for people not familiar with current iterations of the genre. The content is at once serious and humorous, critical and entertaining, and the combination of comedic performance and political speech can obscure how to establish for an iteration of the genre what is normal, what is deviant, and how to handle

[14] In addition to the news satire genre evolving, its component genres of comedy and news have as well, particularly thinking about how news has changed with the rise of 24-hour news networks and the proliferation of digital content. It makes sense that these changes would also complicate how we think about related hybridized genres and those with hybrid roots like news satire.

deviations, particularly for an outside audience with limited familiarity with the program's conventions. Is Bee a comedian simply making a joke, a political commentator stepping outside civil discourse, or something in between? For regular viewers of the show who are familiar with Bee's style and regular use of profanity on her show, Bee's insult at Ivanka likely was impactful and striking, but not particularly surprising; on November 5, 2016, *Full Frontal*'s official YouTube account posted a nearly 2 minute supercut of Bee's insults describing Donald Trump, including "muddled asshole yearning to scream free," "leering dildo," and a "thrice-married foul-mouthed tit judge" (Full Frontal, "Full Frontal's Official"). Bee is generally unafraid to be explicit in her insults of public officials, even (perhaps especially) the president. However, the frame analysis offers the idea that ad hoc public audiences receive little information from media coverage about what kind of show *Full Frontal* is or, as a result, what kind of figure Bee is, whether that is a comedian, a commentator, or some blend of the two. The consistent framing of the issue as a "double standard" in comparison to Barr's tweet and show cancellation also puts Bee's comment into a different, atypical rhetorical situation lacking its original context. With these unclear expectations, it is understandable that Bee using such forceful language on television about a public figure would seem extreme to an ad hoc public audience. Because the ad hoc public audience does not participate in the introduced genre, may not share its values or goals, and may not have a clear understanding of its function, it would be difficult to understand how such a comment would serve Bee's purposes beyond simply being hateful. While they may have had a variety of reasons for thinking so, it's likely that these factors shaped the opinions of the third of the *Economist*/YouGov survey respondents who felt *Full Frontal* should be cancelled.

Overall, the media coverage I gathered does not provide ad hoc public audiences with the

context of the topic of the segment or the fact that many other public figures complicit in US immigration policy are also invoked directly by Bee[15]. The articles and videos offer little description of the show itself; for example, one CNN article about her apology simply refers to Bee as a "late night host" on a "TBS show" (Gonzales). The comment's wide media coverage and attention from White House officials, including a statement from Press Secretary Sanders, emphasize the importance and severity of Bee's transgression. Add to this the media framing, which made comparisons to Barr's racist tweet and loss of her show, and the issue surrounding Bee transforms to not only the use of an offensive word, but a prime example of the "double standard" already being discussed in the media, in which liberals suffer no consequences for their language while conservatives must pay more severely and explicit language from men is powerful and authentic while similar comments from women should be treated as a shameful, and punishable, transgression. With all of these sensitive issues in play, it is easy to see how an ad hoc public would form around this issue, creating an ad hoc public audience for *Full Frontal*. Introducing an outside audience to Bee's show through the comparison to Barr and the double standard framing places the two incidents next to each other as equal and obscures important context. Bee becomes a kind of scapegoat for what is perceived as a much larger problem. While it is important to note that audiences in general are not passive, do not take up entire concepts wholesale from the media they consume, and likely do not understand news stories through the lens of single sources, my frame analysis of a small corpus of articles from popular sources shows common threads of comparison to Barr, discussion of a "double standard," and a general lack of context for Bee's comments, and these seem to constitute a dominant portrayal of events.

[15] Because TBS has removed this segment of *Full Frontal* from all online platforms, I am unable to say definitively if Bee also insulted other members of the administration mentioned with profanity. According to the *Hollywood Reporter* recap, Bee does insult Jeff Sessions by saying he "'sound[s] like a serial killer that Jodie Foster has to team up with another serial killer to catch,'" referencing *Silence of the Lambs* (qtd. in Schaffstall).

Ad hoc public audiences are not permanent audiences. Their presence is fleeting and generally dissipates once their emotions settle and fade or their needs and demands are met. Like ad hoc publics, discussed in Chapter 3 as groups whose impromptu emergence addresses pressing issues needed, ad hoc public audiences serve as temporary audiences for the media they encounter through their attention to an issue. This engagement can be positive or negative but is influenced by the limited or incomplete knowledge they seek on an issue that spreadable media offers. As such, the ad hoc public audience's understanding of the text is likely fragmented, and their attention paid to it is fleeting. In this case, I was unable to find detractors rallying around a particular hashtag or organizing in other ways; while there was a petition started to cancel the show on Change.org as a result of Bee's comment, it has only received 722 comments as of March 17, 2020 (Harriman). A clearer example of organized action from an ad hoc public audience comes from the group One Million Moms, a division of the American Family Association that serves as a kind of media watchdog for "immoral" content in the media ("About Us"). While they target specific programs and ads typically, their overall cause is combating what they deem to be inappropriate content in the mass media. One Million Moms (OMM) started a petition nearly two months before *Full Frontal* even began airing in protest of its "unacceptable" name and the presumption of "vile content and language" ("TBS Assumes"). This petition received 6,125 signatures, an interesting example of an ad hoc public audience emerging for *Full Frontal* before it even aired. The OMM petition received attention from Bee herself on Twitter, who joked, "As a mother, I ask you to sign the @1milmoms petition banning my show 'Full Frontal' from premiering Feb 8 on TBS" (@FullFrontalSamB). Bee's sarcastic response indicates that she did not feel threatened by this petition or the attention the ad hoc public audience of OMM was giving it; there is enough "reprehensible" television on the air,

their key issue, for the group to move on to another piece of media fairly quickly.

Though the act of Bee's apologies for her comment about Ivanka were mainly directed at the outside audiences expressing anger about her words and demanding apology or that her show be cancelled, the central thought and sentiment of Bee's on-air apology was still for her core audience, who would be the main group of viewers seeing it in the context of her full show. In it, she again expresses regret for the words she chose to use and apologizes specifically to women she might have hurt through its use. As the apology cold open would almost certainly be the clip picked up by media to talk about her apology (and lack of show cancellation), it is interesting that Bee jokes about the incident at points during the rest of the episode, employing a panel of male "mandatory censors" and joking that even if she couldn't use the c-word anymore, she could still think it ("June 6, 2018"). Through these touches, it seems clear that Bee understands how the ad hoc public audience engages with her show: not watching it directly but consuming it through the lens the media coverage of a somewhat fleeting controversial issue – in this case, that she apologized for her insult on air. Importantly, though, Bee also uses her apology and the episode to return to the topic of immigration and migrant children, working to redirect the framing back to the original focus that the controversy obscured and redirect her focus back to the primary users of the news satire genre, her core audience.

Conclusion

For months and years after this incident, Bee is repeatedly asked in interviews about the fallout from her remarks about Ivanka. Her comments have stayed relatively consistent over time, mostly expressing regret that the word she chose to use drew attention away from the issues she discussed in the episode. In August 2018, in an interview with *The Wrap*, Bee states, "I wish that people had been able to see the content that led up to it, actually. I was speaking very

passionately about an idea I felt very deeply about that was getting no coverage. My main regret was diverting attention from the topic I was discussing. Not that we could have caused everyone to turn their eyes to the story" (Pond). As in her apology on the show, Bee then turns to mainstream news outlets, suggesting that they also played a part in amplifying the comment and stoking divisiveness rather than focusing on the underlying issue: "Of course, news outlets had the option to turn away from the story of a word that I said and turn their focus to the migrant children." In December 2018, Bee voices her feelings that the controversy ultimately did not change her goals for the show, even as it made her think a bit differently about its place in the world: "I understand a few more things now. It actually made me feel really introspective. But I don't think it changed the show. It hasn't. It really hasn't" (Zeitchik). A few months later, in May 2019, Bee is a guest on the *Last Laugh* podcast, published by *The Daily Beast*. Bee notes that the aftermath of her remark made her think about her show differently:

> It took that long of doing the show for me to go, 'Oh wait, we actually have a voice and have a place in this world.' So I'm a little bit more mindful of that. . . . So I had a better awareness of our viewership and where we stand. It made me be a little more thoughtful moving forward. But it's still literally the exact same show, I just don't call the president's daughter the 'c-word' anymore. (Wilstein)

While Bee says she has a "better awareness of [her] viewership," she also states that the show has not changed; thus, nearly a year after the controversy, Bee is thinking more about the potential power that she wields and less about satisfying the outside audience with tamer content. This also reflects Bee's understanding that she is giving her core audience the kind of content that they want. The viewers who tune in each week continue to support her work, and a large part of the audience who called for apology and cancellation, the ad hoc public audience, are likely

no longer engaging with *Full Frontal*. This stance is reinforced later in the year, when Bee appears on *The Today Show* in December 2019. NBC News anchor Craig Melvin asks, "Last year, you caught some flak, a fair amount of flak for those comments about Ivanka Trump. What did you learn from that?" ("Samantha Bee"). Bee replies, in a somewhat joking tone, "I didn't learn much. I mean, let's not get crazy. I still have a show to do, I still have a comedy show to do. Yeah, no, I didn't learn all that much from that. You know what, I learned I can really take it. I learned that I can walk through fire and emerge on the other side alive."

Bee's show has changed little since the May 2018 controversy by her own admission; her words, "I had a better awareness of our viewership and where we stand . . . But it's still literally the exact same show" (Wilstein), led me to argue that this stance is because she seems to understand that many of the loudest voices decrying her comment were a relatively fleeting ad hoc public audience, not the people who seek out *Full Frontal* week after week. Though ad hoc public audiences are a short-lived phenomenon, it is possible that this concept can help us understand more about how public outcry can pop up in response to issues, positive or negative, and further particular narrative frames shaped by dispersed spreadable media. When this is based on limited or distorted knowledge of a genre, what kind of impact does that have on the issue? Conversely, if a creator feels the presence of an ad hoc public audience but does not feel the need to respond to or change because of them since they are more or less temporary, as Bee seemingly did not, what does this mean for how we create and sustain enthusiasm for making change? This question seems especially relevant when considering calls to action and activism that occur primarily online; though Chapter 3 illustrated a successful call to post public comments to the FCC about net neutrality and hashtag use that supported that call to action, the instability of spreadable media, ad hoc publics, and ad hoc public audiences potentially make such activism

tenuous and susceptible to reappropriation in ways that are not consistent with the original intent. This case study cannot yet answer these questions, but it does offer some useful complications for how multiple audiences might be introduced to genres through spreadable media that shapes their understanding and thus, their response.

Chapter 5 – Who is the Audience Anyway?: Implications, Limitations, and Further Questions

Before beginning this dissertation, I worked on several research projects where I attempted to connect televised news satire and audience effect, primarily thinking about the effect the genre might have *on* the audience. Having researched the genre, I knew that there were many more fascinating connections to be made between the two and knowing that the genre had changed significantly over its life on television, I was curious about how the audience might have influenced that change. Over the course of designing the trajectory of this project and actually doing the research and writing, my plans changed quite a lot as a realized how difficult it is to study audience behavior and truly see how an audience influences a genre that is created, written, and produced in ways that are largely unobservable to the outside public. While it is not entirely "occluded," as John Swales has written (46), because the final product is aired publicly, much of the intent that shapes the genre is hidden: who are the audiences that the hosts, producers, and writers of news satire shows intend on reaching, and how does engagement from those audiences, and others, affect how these shows create content? With these questions in mind, I explored the role of audience engagement and participation and how these factors have shaped the news satire genre and our understanding of audience and social action, hypothesizing that audiences' expectations and responses to news satire programs plays an important role in the genre's rhetorical shaping and success. Through this study, I have successfully been able to explore this relationship from different angles and have been able to contribute valuable knowledge to rhetoric and composition about news satire generally, as well as hybrid genres (and beyond), spreadable genre systems, digital interactions between texts and audiences, and ad hoc publics. Importantly, I developed the concept of ad hoc public audiences, which helps to

understand the relationship between public and audience, even as it reveals the consistent messiness between the two roles. This work and these developments have all been in service of understanding a bit more about how audiences engage with the news satire genre. In this chapter, I reflect on these concepts, making further connections and observations before I consider news satire and representation, think through the limitations of my project, and suggest where we might go from here.

Genre

Though this project is focused on the audience – their engagement, their effect, and their activism – genre was key in formulating an approach to my research questions. I traced the history of the genre in Chapter 1, analyzed it to understand its conventions and how it is able to create social action in Chapter 2, examined an example of that social action and the genre's use of spreadable genre systems more closely in Chapter 3, and considered how multiple audiences engage with the genre in Chapter 4. Overall, this has allowed for an understanding of how the genre has developed beyond a simple hybrid of news and comedy to become its own, third genre, one which is more audience-centered and politically influential.

News satire's roots as a genre hybrid reveals itself through both purpose, to inform and entertain, and medium, with the look and feel of a news show but with humorous takes on stories, with delivery sometimes resembling the rhythms of stand-up comedy. Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Karlyn Kohrs Campbell discuss how rhetorical hybrids consist of blends of forensic, epideictic, and deliberative genres that overlap and combine in practice (146). While they argue that these fusions primarily occur in response to a specific rhetorical situation, they note that some hybrids may respond to recurrent situations (154). News satire responds to the constant recurrence of news and audiences that desire to process that news through alternative

means. Viewing news satire as a hybrid that grew beyond that definition, becoming a new genre and new possibilities for different kinds of viewer uptake, helps illuminate how the genre has developed to respond to that recurrent situation and what affordances and constraints it may have.

Understanding the televised news satire genre as a hybrid developing into its own, third genre has offered me an understanding how it has the flexibility to accomplish actions that would be difficult or impossible through its component genres alone. As illustrated in Chapters 2 and 3, news satire developed out of component genres news and comedy but has evolved beyond a simple combination of the two and is now able to create meaningful social action such as hosting a political rally, launching a public comment campaign, or raising money for a particular cause; expectations of journalistic integrity and ethics bar traditional news from requesting such action from viewers, and comedy is not typically oriented toward informing viewers on serious topics or asking them to take action[16]. This process has also changed over time, with earlier calls to action from *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* being more infrequent but larger tasks (i.e. attending a rally or creating one's own Super PAC), and current calls to action more often taking digital forms, with actions one can complete from the couch where they have watched the show (i.e. using a hashtag, submitting public comment, or making a donation). As the genre has evolved, current iterations like *Last Week Tonight* discussed in Chapter 3 and *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee* in Chapter 4, have been able to make their calls to action through genre systems

[16] It's true that comedy and philanthropy have been joined successfully before - Comic Relief is a nonprofit that raises money to help alleviate poverty ("FAQs"); Night of Too Many Stars, an annual telethon raising money for autism research, heavily features comedians and stand up performances ("Night of Too Many"); and most recently, "Comedy Gives Back Laugh Aid" raised money "for an emergency relief fund that benefits working comedians who are financially impacted by the spread of COVID-19" (Melton). These examples, though, offer comedy and entertainment that is generally unrelated to the cause itself. They feature popular performers to draw in viewers and provide a platform to promote the cause and encourage people to donate. In that way, social action does not seem to be a function of the comedy itself, but of the attendant appeals that are attached to it.

that include spreadable genres, such as those found on various social media platforms. These adjustments and their successful uptake, as shown in Chapter 3's illustration of the two calls to action from *Last Week Tonight* on net neutrality, reflect an understanding of an audience's desire to act more often but in more accessible ways. For "knowledgeable audiences," as Jamieson and Campbell note (154), there is now an expectation for news satire to engage the audience in some way, whether that occurs directly through the program, as Oliver's calls to submit comments to the FCC did, through one of the spreadable genres in its genre system, such as how #FlyTrollsFly came from a @LastWeekTonight tweet, or from the audience itself, as #GoFCCYourself did. These genre expectations extend beyond function of informing and entertaining to include engaging people in political action.

It was important to me to also consider the potential drawbacks of genre hybridity in Chapter 4. I began the chapter wanting to examine how audiences who do not typically engage with the news satire genre are introduced to it, specifically to *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee*, through a controversial issue and what effect that audience, too, might have on the genre as they engage with it. This proved to be a challenging question to answer within the time and space I had, but thinking about the genre one with hybrid roots, again, helped, as it led me to consider how uptake might be affected by blurry genre expectations from viewers largely unfamiliar with the genre. News satire's focus on politics and current events can, for example, lead an unfamiliar audience to expect a program focused on news that values journalistic ethics rather than comedy. Vijay K. Bhatia has pointed out that writers and speakers interdiscursively "appropriate or exploit established conventions or discoursal resources associated with other genres and social practices" as a means to create hybrid genres (28). Bhatia primarily discusses this as it pertains to private, personal discourse being used in public genres, such as public forums, blogs, and social

media (31). This type of blending affects uptake, as audience expectations are subverted in some way. As discussed in Chapter 4, Samantha Bee's insult to Ivanka Trump was largely taken up in comparison to a racist tweet from Roseanne Barr that led to the cancellation of her show, *Roseanne*. Media coverage overall considered Bee's show not getting cancelled in the context of comments from Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders and tweets from President Donald Trump that suggested the treatment of Bee and Barr showed a "double standard," putting them on equal footing for direct comparison. Television coverage of Bee's comment simply played the short clip of it, described it as a "late night show" or "comedy show," and gave little other context. Viewers unfamiliar with the news satire genre are given a framing where Bee appears to simply be a vulgar comedian insulting the president's daughter, as there is little attention to the issue Bee was covering in that segment on the show, immigration policy and families being separated at the US/Mexico border. For a viewer with little familiarity of news satire, uptake of the genre, and *Full Frontal* specifically here, is complicated by unclear expectations of the genre's purpose and goals, consisting of a complex blend of news and comedy. So, while hybrid genres offer substantial flexibility in terms of what an iteration of the genre might look, feel, and sound like, audience uptake also may take unexpected forms if the audience is not "knowledgeable" about its conventions and functions (Jamieson and Campbell 154).

Overall, my dissertation contributes knowledge about how hybrid genres can develop beyond their component genres to and benefit from the flexibility of blending multiple genre features to achieve different uptakes and engage multiple audiences. As I discuss later in this chapter, understanding this can open opportunities for further study in how hybrid genres might evolve and what further audience activism and engagement might be possible as a result.

Ad Hoc Publics, Ad Hoc Public Audiences, and Social Action

One of the most significant contributions to the field of rhetoric and composition in this project is that of ad hoc public audiences. I developed this term in Chapter 4 from Axel Bruns and Jean Burgess' concept of ad hoc publics, which they define as groups that emerge when necessary or needed for discussion and debate in response to particular issues to discuss and debate those issues (1). Ad hoc public audience is a significant concept because it is able to acknowledge the overlapping, colliding roles of audience and public, which can sometimes occur simultaneously. As I describe in Chapter 4, an ad hoc public might emerge in response to a particular issue, and in their participation in that issue, become an ad hoc public audience for another text. This term has been through a few iterations as I have developed this project, beginning as an "unintended audience" that Samantha Bee would not expect to be watching her show. The difficulty to prove intent led me to seek another term. Like the emergent public that appeared to respond to net neutrality, *Full Frontal* suddenly had many more eyes on it than before due to public commentary from the White House and media attention. Thus, the idea of an "ad hoc audience" seemed to fit these phenomena but differentiating ad hoc audience and ad hoc public seemed to reinforce the idea that the former was passive and the latter active, a dichotomy I worked to avoid in Chapter 1. The "ad hoc public audience" helps acknowledge the multiple roles that can be taken on as someone engages with an issue; they encounter new sources and become an audience member for them as they engage with the issue as a member of a public, two roles that tend to be blurry and difficult to disentangle. While the concept of ad hoc public audience does not clarify or separate these roles, it importantly reflects how they can collide in the midst of engaging with even a single issue.

The situation in Chapter 4, with ad hoc public audiences receiving an incomplete and misleading understanding of the news satire genre through media coverage of Bee's insult, suggests a particularly negative view of what might happen when such groups emerge. This blending of audience and public roles is not always negative, however. For example, the show *One Day at a Time*, a revival of Norman Lear's 1970s sitcom of the same name but featuring a multi-generational Cuban-American family, was cancelled after 3 seasons on Netflix (Otterson). Media coverage and public outcry were swift, as fans lamented losing a diverse show that dealt with tough topics thoughtfully. #RenewODAAT and #SaveODAAT became spaces for fans to rally (Villafane). These hashtags, along with media coverage, likely brought in ad hoc public audiences who learned of the show through the issue of Latinx representation on television. The grassroots campaign to save the show was ultimately successful, as it was picked up by PopTV ("One Day"). Further research would be needed to know exactly how an ad hoc public audience might contribute to an example such as this one, or the many others that emerge from news satire calls to action, but these concepts seem to offer fruitful ways to further understand how fan campaigns work in the digital age, or simply how people are exposed to new issues and translate that knowledge into action.

Audience and Representation in Televised News Satire

This dissertation offers a history of news satire on television, which I could not find compiled in detail anywhere else, and an exploration of the genre's features and uptakes from *The Daily Show* to currently airing iterations like *Last Week Tonight* and *Full Frontal*. While this provides a good look at how the genre has changed and how it functions, I have not yet considered larger issues of representation in the genre or how its topics and audience engagement efforts have become more inclusive of a variety of identities, viewpoints, and topics.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 have focused on 3 shows hosted by white men and one hosted by a white woman. It is important to acknowledge that the televised news satire genre has been largely male and white throughout its history, both in hosts and writing staff, and this fact does influence the audience who would be most likely to engage with the genre, find it connects with issues that affect them, or feel that it reflect their lived experience. It has only been over the past decade or so that there has been more representation and visibility not only for hosts and correspondents in news satire, but for writing staff and the types of topics that are covered on these programs. As the goal of this project was to focus on audience engagement, how viewers took up the show and potentially shaped the genre through their actions, I did not focus as much on the demographics of this audience or how those demographics might be changing. I think it is important, though, to note here that the genre is evolving in the sense that hosts, writers, and topics are becoming more diverse, and this can only be a good thing for continuing to innovate the genre and expand the topics it covers as well as its audience.

Currently airing, one can watch Trevor Noah, a mixed race South African man, hosting *The Daily Show* and Hasan Minhaj, an Indian American man, hosting *Patriot Act* on Netflix. Briefly, *The Nightly Show* was hosted by an African American man, Larry Wilmore, and Michelle Wolf added another female voice with *The Break* on Netflix. *Problem Areas* on HBO was helmed by African American comedian Wyatt Cenac. As mentioned in Chapter 4, *Full Frontal* utilized a partially blind hiring process to help ensure the diversity of its writing staff; half of the show's initial writing staff was female and 30% was nonwhite (Nededog). Notably, the hosts of all of these programs served as correspondents on *The Daily Show*. I think it is important to acknowledge not only that *The Daily Show* changed the genre fundamentally, but that it also played a role in nurturing the careers of women and people of color. In addition to

Colbert, Oliver, and Bee, the individuals mentioned above, Noah, Minhaj, Wilmore, Wolf, and Cenac, all served as *Daily Show* correspondents and went on to host their own shows. This reflects a positive shift in representation, which leads to a greater breadth of issues covered and appeal to a greater range of people. Of course, representation could always improve (as it can across many genres); in particular, a woman of color hosting a news satire program would be a welcome development.

Of course, it is important to consider that "diversity" and "inclusion" tend to be fraught terms. Sara Ahmed quotes Nirmal Puwar in her assertion that "diversity has come 'overwhelmingly to mean the inclusion of people who look different'" and that this idea in itself "keep[s] whiteness in place" by defining diversity in terms of difference; diversity is something "added," reinforcing the idea that whiteness is the norm or standard (Ahmed 33). "Diversity" can also be touted as a feature of an organization (or in this case, a genre) on the surface without the actual structural changes that include people, their lived experiences, and their ways of knowing. As news satire has long been a dominantly white genre, its transformation does not come simply in the introduction of staff members of color. However, I posit that the genre's flexibility in format, content, and approach, revealed in the overview of news satire history in Chapter 1, provides the space for people to bring a wide range of approaches to it.

I argue that we see the beginnings of these varied approaches to news satire through the focus more on global issues and those affecting people of multiple classes and backgrounds; as a few examples, Minhaj examined the NRA's efforts to influence policy around the world ("NRA's Global Impact") and fast fashion's impact on our environment ("The Ugly Truth") in *Patriot Act* while Cenac explored issues like undocumented workers in food and agriculture industry ("Food Problems"), the exclusion of women in medical research ("Research

Problems"), and how climate change is affecting immigration patterns ("Immigration Problems") in *Problem Areas*. *Last Week Tonight* has featured long segments about private equity firms exploiting the mobile home industry, which houses many lower-income Americans ("Mobile Homes"), and made its segment on multilevel marketing available on YouTube in Spanish in an effort to reach a segment of the population most affected by its manipulative practices ("Mercadeo Multinivel"). Weekly formats, as opposed to *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*'s four-day weeks, and online streaming options like *Patriot Act* help facilitate deeper dives into particular topics, going beyond the headlines of the day to tackle issues not receiving enough attention. These changes reflect efforts to broaden the genre's reach in terms of creators, topics covered, and ultimately, audience.

It makes sense, too, that news satire might be a difficult genre for marginalized groups to engage with. Now more than ever, it may seem that the ability to joke about the news and politics comes from a place of privilege. Indeed, it is almost always marginalized groups who are targeted by unfair policies and systemic injustices and are forced to bear the weight of these things in our society. Travel bans, tightening of public services, and threats to civil rights are not funny or easy to joke about. Though using comedy to approach such topics can be fraught and exploited for discriminatory means, jokes can sometimes make difficult issues easier to stomach in order to understand and talk about them. Importantly, I also argue that it makes them comprehensible enough to take some sort of action on, be it potentially small and digital in means. The challenge, then, lies in taking those small actions and sustaining them and/or leveraging them into wider action. I would argue we see a great example of this in *Full Frontal*'s mobile app, *This Is Not a Game: The Game*, which used a political trivia game and prizes up to $5,000 to encourage informed voting in the 2018 midterm elections (Stephen). The show

partnered with The Democracy Labs, a Silicon Valley start-up, to also make the app a tool for users to report instances of voter suppression they had witnessed or experienced. By election day, there were more than 800 instances of voter suppression reported and verified. The Democracy Labs worked to report these transgressions to local authorities in addition to keeping a national log of where and when these instances occurred. The app, then, attempts to encourage users to be informed, to actually go vote, and to be vigilant that processes are running as they should in their polling places. *This is Not a Game* goes beyond being a game or even encouraging people to instigate change through voting; it offers a platform to report voter rights violations, which disproportionately affect marginalized people, and having that kind of data recorded and accessible may help support the implementation of policies that can make voting more equitable in the future.

News satire's role in considering our current events and political realities makes it a genre that will continue to have content for as long as people want to consume it. Its past as a genre hybrid – and development beyond into its own genre – makes it flexible and adaptable to change. Currently airing news satire programs have a solid handle on utilizing social media platforms to connect with viewers, so the genre maintains several ways to engage multiple audiences and introduce itself to new ones. News satire continues to innovate new means, like the *This is Not a Game* app, to try and make a positive impact on political participation, knowledge, and important issues. These elements of the genre - its hybridity, use of spreadable media genres, and ability to engage audiences and create social action - are what led me to focus on it for this dissertation, and part of what makes it enduringly fascinating to me.

Limitations

While I have dedicated the majority of this dissertation to illustrating the ways that news satire engages audiences in observable social action, making an impact on our world, it is important to also consider the limitations of the genre. Much of the viewer action I discuss in this dissertation, particularly in Chapters 3 and 4, involves digital uptakes; thus, it is necessary to address the idea of "slacktivism" or "armchair activism," terms that label "activism for the lazy generation," or "feel-good online activism that has zero political or social impact" (Morozov), where participants need only click or type a short tweet to feel as though they participated. In other words, "slacktivists" dedicate little time to the cause and have no real "skin in the game" because they have risked or given up nothing in support of the cause. Malcolm Gladwell argues that "Facebook activism" in particular "succeeds not by motivating people to make a real sacrifice but by motivating them to do the things that people do when they are not motivated enough to make a real sacrifice," pointing to the contrast between sharing posts and the lunch counter sit-ins of the 1960s. Gladwell worries that social media offers a "form of organizing which favors the weak-tie connections that give us access to information over the strong-tie connections that help us persevere in the face of danger." As people increasingly rely on "slacktivist" actions (like the digital engagement typically promoted by current iterations of the news satire genre), Gladwell argues, they might be driven away entirely from more active means of political participation, such as protests, sit-ins, and marches.

Slacktivism as a whole includes the idea of "hashtag activism," the use of hashtags like #Kony2012, #JusticeForTrayvon, or #BringBackOurGirls to draw attention to particular issues on social media (Dadas 17), similar to #FlyTrollsFly and #GoFCCYourself promoting awareness of the campaign to save net neutrality in Chapter 3. Though data from 2012 shows that "83

percent of all Twitter users [are] within five steps of interconnection" (Rainie and Wellman 55), making it a faster means for circulating information than face-to-face networks (Dadas 20), hashtag activism is, like slacktivism more broadly, sometimes met with skepticism that anything actually happens after a user tags a tweet. James Dennis illustrates the failure to transform "awareness into observable political change" through the #Kony2012 hashtag; while the hashtag, introduced in a video produced by American non-governmental organization Invisible Children, brought high visibility to the atrocities committed by Ugandan rebel Joseph Kony, Dennis points out that "the campaign caused damage to public knowledge due to an emotionally provocative, but crucially misinformed, campaign message" as well as its role in furthering a Western, white savior stereotype (3). People shared the video and hashtag to *seem* informed and politically engaged, but little was done outside of this, a textbook example of slacktivism. In Chapter 3, I discuss how many tweets using #FlyTrollsFly and #GoFCCYourself were "rallying" in their rhetorical purpose: they linked the FCC website, the *Last Week Tonight* segment containing the call to action and tried to urge others to voice their support for net neutrality. This coupling of the hashtag with another action, submitting comments to the FCC, goes a step further than the Kony example, engaging viewers in directly contacting the FCC in regard to an issue they have direct control over. In this case, though the comments were overwhelming, this action did not preserve net neutrality. As I noted in the chapter, the FCC reported the comments as a "cyberattack" (Wallace) (which a government investigation found to be false, attributing it to mostly real traffic resulting from *Last Week Tonight*'s call to action), allowing them to initially discount a large number of them. The Pew Research Center reported that "7 popular comments," such as copy and paste sample messages from websites like battleforthenet.com, accounted for 38% of submissions, and that only 6% of the total were unique (Hitlin, Olmstead, and Toor),

offering another avenue to discount comments as the work of spambots. Ultimately, the campaign to submit comments to the FCC was overwhelming in number but did not affect the outcome of the vote, as net neutrality rules were repealed in 2017 and upheld by a federal appeals court in 2019 (McCabe).

As research continues to be published on this subject, however, many scholars continue to lean toward the idea that hashtag activism and other "slacktivist" tactics cannot be dismissed outright as ineffectual. Henrik Serup Christensen argues that "online and off–line participation are not necessarily mutually exclusive forms of citizen engagement" and that "most evidence in recent years suggests that being active online promotes off–line participation as well." He concludes that those activities dismissed as slacktivist can be a means to raise awareness and mobilize citizens on various issues, arguing against the idea that other forms of activism will no longer be taken up in a world of slacktivist options. Liza Potts illustrates in her book, *Social Media and Disaster Response*, how people involved in Hurricane Katrina, the 2005 London bombings, and the 2008 Mumbai attacks used social media as a means to share and validate information and organize networks of people, involved and uninvolved in the crises, something Potts contends would have been far more difficult without social media networks and hashtags. In her article, "Beyond Rights as Recognition: Black Twitter and Posthuman Coalitional Possibilities," Pritha Prasad illustrates how tweets using #AliveWhileBlack and #IfTheyGunnedMeDown discussing acts of violence and discrimination against Black bodies "allow for the mobilization of an entirely different kind of protesting body through the metaphysical commentary of bodily exposure contained, quite literally, within a body of tweets each archived under networked hashtags" (64). As these tweets are shared, "remix[ed], retweet[ed], and reappropriat[ed]," users mobilize a unique protest that would not be possible

through more traditional means (65). Further, in a 2019 study of social media participation in Britain through nonprofit activist group 38 Degrees[17], Dennis writes that critiques of online activities often make the mistake of drawing a straight line between online actions and political effect, "ignor[ing] the complex array of factors that result in any political outcome" (55). If we shift our thinking to consider digital participation as part of a larger process, we can better understand how things like hashtags can contribute to an overall movement. Dennis' study found that "Facebook and Twitter create new opportunities for cognitive engagement, discursive participation, and political mobilization" (186). Through a blend of "online and offline tactics," which he did not find disadvantaged one another's success, the organization "provid[ed] participatory shortcuts for wider audiences." As these studies and my third chapter illustrate, digital activism usually does not occur in a vacuum and can serve as a powerful means for connecting individuals and promoting causes. Even the sillier hashtags, such as *Last Week Tonight* using #YAAASSpleen as a joke during a segment breaking down Medicare for All ("Medicare for All"), saw users picking up the hashtag on tweets sharing the segment, and many tagged Democratic presidential primary candidates who had not yet adopted the policy, encouraging them to make it part of their platform. In this way, news satire's role in forming ad hoc publics around social issues can increase audience participation, perhaps extending to other types of activism.

Again, as with the hashtags and comment campaigns *Last Week Tonight* began for net neutrality, not all social action is able to accomplish its goals. An example of an innovative attempt at engaging audiences comes from *Full Frontal*'s *Totally Unrigged Primary* app, the show's next attempt at creating an app geared toward an activist cause after *This is Not a Game:*

[17] Dennis notes that 38 Degrees is similar to United States organization MoveOn (95).

The Game. Players could "join their favorite 2020 Democratic candidate's team and complete fun and/or dumb daily challenges to earn their candidate points" ("Full Frontal'$"). Players could also donate money into "Sam Bee's Political Swear Jar," with the money going to the winning candidate. The game ran until the week before the 2020 Iowa Caucus, and, as the winner, Andrew Yang's campaign received a $50,000 donation ("We Gave Andrew Yang"). Unfortunately, Yang dropped out of the race less than two weeks later and days after receiving the donation. Bee took to her show to suggest he donate the money to Georgia Representative Stacey Abram's organization, Fair Fight, which works to promote fair elections and prevent voter suppression. As Yang did not continue in the primary, the app likely did not have as large of an effect on the primary race as the creators might have wanted. Much like hashtag campaigns, efforts like the *Totally Unrigged Primary* app are entering an unstable system, where it is uncertain how users might react and engage or how political winds may blow, creating unexpected outcomes.

While it is important to acknowledge the limitations of digital activism that news satire can produce, wholesale discounting them not only dismisses the real, tangible work that can accompany it, and also fails to acknowledge the people for whom digital platforms make their activism possible. People are not always in the financial position to donate money, have the time off work to attend a protest, or be in a mental or emotional state to participate in phone banking, knocking on doors, or other activism outside of their homes. Sometimes sharing on social media, signing petitions, putting signs in one's yard, or sending postcards are the actions that are manageable, and those are also worthy of the acknowledgment that they add to collective efforts for change.

While I see the news satire as a genre that is powerful in its ability to rally social action, I also recognize that its transformative power is limited. It will not solve all our political problems,

inform all of our citizens, or get them all to vote. While the genre often offers ways to engage with political issues that are accessible and potentially impactful, many viewers will never take them up. Their use of social media to engage more people is a wonderful use of that technology, but the beauty of social media's accessibility can also be its downfall - all platforms remain problematic in how they allow for the spreading of harmful misinformation and struggle with controlling abuse, hate speech, and other disturbing content. Televised news satire as a genre is also limited in the sense that much of its power comes from its position on television, and those networks are owned by media conglomerates that generally hold interests in many different industries. For example, *Last Week Tonight* on HBO and *Full Frontal* on TBS air on networks owned by Warner Media, which is owned by AT&T, a merger that took place in 2018 ("AT&T Completes Acquisition"). It would make sense that a show under the umbrella of a particular company might not feel free to cover topics that would potentially damage or undermine their parent company's bottom line. As a telecommunications company, AT&T stands to benefit from the repeal of net neutrality; had the company owned HBO at the time, *Last Week Tonight* could have been discouraged or barred from discussing the issue and encouraging viewers to voice their support for preserving the policy, though this is hypothetical. There are some clear instances of push back; *Last Week Tonight* did a segment criticizing the merger before it took place, acknowledging that AT&T would soon own HBO, and has since called out AT&T for slow service and for their financial support of Iowa Representative Steve King, "scoffing that 'of course AT&T didn't catch on to King's white nationalism, picking up on clear signals isn't exactly their forte" (Framke). Oliver seems to delight in calling AT&T "Business Daddy," seemingly daring them to address his show directly. Still, news satire's role in a capitalist system is one to be cognizant of as we consider its choices of what to cover and what calls to action to

deploy, particularly as it continues to work to engage audiences in social action on important issues.

Areas for Further Research

As I worked on this project, particularly through writing the history of news satire, I was struck by how changes in the genre often seemed directly connected to changes happening in the news itself. Beyond fundamental differences in television and standards for content, it makes sense that because news in the 1960s and 1970s looked much different from the news of the 1990s and 2000s, that *That Was the Week That Was* would select, approach, and joke about topics differently than *The Daily Show*. With the rise and popularity of 24-hour news networks and digital platforms that make sharing stories elevated by a relentless news cycle simple, a new challenge for news satire has been to sift through a huge number of stories and consider how topics are being handled by different networks. News satire shows must also contend with the political polarity of different news networks, the proliferation of fake news, and the high spreadability of such news through online platforms. It seems that this complicated media environment has given us formats like *Last Week Tonight*'s (as well as *Patriot Act* with Hasan Minhaj on Netflix and *Wyatt Cenac's Problem Areas* on HBO), which spends the majority of its airtime sorting through the complexities of a single topic. Comedy as a genre has, of course, also evolved over the past few decades, with standards about what is "acceptable" in terms of topics and language relaxing and cable and premium channels allowing for greater freedom of content. A show like *Last Week Tonight*, for example, has a great deal of freedom to cover topics and use whatever language they like since they air on HBO, a paid premium cable channel where FCC rules do not apply. While thinking of news satire as a hybrid genre helped me think through some of its conventions and why they might have evolved over time in the way that they did, to

produce the more activist genre that we see in Chapters 3 and 4, I think an illuminating project could come out of studying the news programs and comedy programs to define their genre features and audiences roles in order to understand what aspects translate to news satire and how changing features of comedy and news have or have not been reflected in news satire. More generally, this could help us better understand how hybrid genres and audience participation changes as their component genres also evolve.

The concept of ad hoc public audiences can also be useful for studying more generally the "cultural divide," or how heated issues, like the one in Chapter 4, receive broad attention through spreadable genres that encourage engagement through sharing and commenting and thus, public debate often suffers from misinformation or a lack of context. An example might be the "cancellation" of some public figures, or the process that occurs when people decide to disengage from any material involving a figure (such as unsubscribing from a YouTuber or unfollowing an Instagram account) or otherwise band together to "end" someone's career by educating others on their problematic behavior or comments ("What it Means"). This often spreads through the use of hashtags, such as the popular #_____IsOverParty[18], where users "celebrate" the cancellation of a person or group. A member of an ad hoc public audience might encounter this hashtag and become an audience member for various media related to the person or group in question while also participating in the discussion and evaluation of the transgression that motivated the hashtag in the first place. The concept of ad hoc public audience offers one potential frame for understanding and analyzing how controversies, "cancelling," and other

[18] As an example, in December 2019, Billie Eilish stated in an interview with Variety that she did not like Lady Gaga's "meat dress" that she memorably wore to the Grammys in 2011 (Ball). Gaga fans started the hashtag #BillieEilishIsOverParty, which trended on Twitter and generated considerable debate among users, also sparking conversations about using such hashtags as a form of bullying.

heated issues of debate travel to much larger, dispersed groups via spreadable media, such as learning about the issue through its framing on Twitter's Trending page.

This work also offers an entry into understanding how to motivate certain kinds of uptake through the use of spreadable digital genres; Chapters 2 and 3 show how the genre conventions of news satire combine to create programs that inform viewers in productive ways about current events, appeal to viewer emotions, and successfully make a range of calls to action on the topics they cover through genre systems composed of spreadable digital genres. The ways in which news satire utilizes these genres has continued to evolve even since I began this project, however. *Full Frontal*'s *This is Not a Game* and *Totally Unrigged Primary* apps mentioned in this chapter use gamification in new and innovative attempts to inform viewers and encourage their participation in political processes important to the functioning of American democracy. *Full Frontal* aired a segment covering the development of *This is Not a Game*, showing Bee's involvement with gamification and "civic tech" experts to figure out how to focus the app and make it most effective for their aim of increasing participation in the midterm election ("September 12, 2018"). The show's transparency about its goal - wanting to increase voter turnout - and its strategies for getting there - rewarding people with money for participating in nonpartisan, comedic political trivia aimed at informing them about issues and candidates - reflect how the genre's audience-centered conventions have evolved along with its strategies for engaging viewers. Instead of simply presenting viewers a political trivia app and telling them to download it, audiences are given a look behind the curtain before buying in. While news satire continues to rely on and further develop its unique combination of elements that make its calls for viewer uptake work, there are ongoing opportunities for studying how news satire is utilizing spreadable genres for activist means and how audience roles are continuing to evolve; these two

actions seem to be reciprocal, as successful engagement seems to continue to spur the news satire genre to create new ways for audiences to engage.

As digital genres, particularly social media platforms, become increasingly ingrained in the daily lives of a majority of Americans, it also becomes continuously more important for us to understand how people use these genres, what is made possible through them, and what effect they might be having on the ways that we think and communicate, personally, professionally, politically, and beyond. It is clear that understanding how digital genres work is already a priority of researchers across fields, as there is substantial work published researching blogging, Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms, in particular. I personally found that there was a lack of user-friendly tools that would help me gather the data I needed for Chapter 3. While Twitter offers some tools to search tweets, it is difficult to gather a large number of tweets (I screenshot and transcribed all of mine individually, which was time consuming, even for a fairly small corpus of 100) or even put a number on how many tweets use a certain hashtag or come up in a specific search. Most tools that will do these simple things for researchers cost money. Resources like the Social Media Research Toolkit are helpful, but it ultimately also lists many of the paid services. It is an unfortunate example of the commodification of online information and it makes it more difficult for people simply doing research, so I would like to take this moment to say that we need better, and free, tools for studying social media. Had I access to tools that would make gathering tweets simpler, I might have utilized Twitter more in Chapter 4 (particularly thinking about analyzing responses to Bee's apology) or approached Chapter 3 a bit differently.

As televised news satire is a genre that continues to evolve and innovate, it offers an enduringly rich area for rhetorical study, particularly as the genre continues to create new

opportunities for viewer engagement. What does the activity on *Full Frontal*'s *Totally Unrigged Primary* app tell us about how publics form around primary candidates? What can instances of international censorship, such as with Hasan Minhaj's *Patriot Act* episode critical of a Saudi Arabian regime (Spangler) or *Last Week Tonight*'s segment about Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (Bowden), tell us about the potential far-reaching power of these programs? How will new iterations of the genre continue to approach content, format, and rhetorical appeals differently? With several iterations of the genre still airing and innovating, I can foresee a lot of interesting research questions continuing to emerge for researchers in multiple fields.

Finally, an enduring question I have had while studying this genre: when we point at news satire and say, "this genre is doing important work," does that damage its ability to do that work? What aspects of the genre make people more willing to engage with it than other genres that try to encourage activist uptakes? Stewart, Colbert, Oliver, and Bee have all said in interviews that their main objective is comedy; they are not journalists, and the focus of their shows just happens to be current events and politics. The accuracy with which they deliver information is all in service of the joke. But because the news can be overwhelming and exhausting for many, putting it into the context of comedy makes the experience of receiving it different, perhaps less heavy, tiring, or insurmountable and more accessible, with more defined ways to take action, even in small ways. Through its rhetorical strategies highlighted throughout this dissertation, news satire often frames issues as worth investing in and following; if the hosts offer a small action that can contribute to change on that issue, this combination seems to effectively lead to action. I am not sure that if the genre expectations surrounding news satire became indelibly associated with activism, or "telling people what to do," that this would damage the genre's efficacy. It seems that we are still in the early stages of this generation of the

genre, and with shows exploring strategies like publishing books for charity or building apps to encourage voting, it seems like what is possible is still evolving, particularly as audiences continue to engage with these methods in productive ways. I hope that news satire keeps surprising me as to what it is capable of accomplishing.

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