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Affect and Political Satire: How Political TV Satire Implicates Internal Political Efficacy and Political Participation

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AFFECT AND POLITICAL SATIRE: HOW POLITICAL TV SATIRE IMPLICATES
INTERNAL POLITICAL EFFICACY AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

by

Reed Ramsey

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AFFECT AND POLITICAL SATIRE: HOW POLITICAL TV SATIRE IMPLICATES
INTERNAL POLITICAL EFFICACY AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

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DEDICATION

I would like to first dedicate this thesis to my Grandpa Don. During my childhood I remember spending a significant amount of time with him. He was a huge *South Park* fan and would get in trouble (by my mother) for watching it with my brothers and I. He was instrumental in developing my sense of humor even if he didn't know it himself. These periods of time shaped how I see the world and especially my sarcastic side. To this day, I still watch *South Park* and revisit those episodes that I used to share with him, and I know in some way, shape, or form he is still here with us in the background with that famous boisterous laugh of his.

Secondly, I would like to dedicate this also to my Grandma Betty Lou. I remember spending much time with her and watching Jon Stewart on *The Daily Show*. She was very opinionated about politics and always shared her thoughts with me and was a staunch supporter of the Clinton administration. The George W. Bush years at her house were filled with shouting at the television and talking about his blunders as a president. She shaped my understanding of politics and got me interested in both domestic and foreign policy. Thank you both for being so instrumental in my growth as a person. I love you both very much.

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I would like to thank a litany of people, but for the sake of time I would like to acknowledge those people who were instrumental in the completion of my thesis.

Starting all the way back to when I made a cross-country move from Kansas to California.

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Affect and Political Satire: How Political TV Satire Implicates Internal Political Efficacy
and Political Participation

Abstract

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2018

Research has shown that political satire programs offer both important information about contemporary politics and offer very humorous, entertaining content. This study seeks to understand how these satire programs bolster both internal political efficacy and political participation. 400 college students at two Northern California universities participated in this research. The study found that affinity for political humor can predict levels of internal political efficacy. Exposure to liberal satire was negatively correlated with affinity for political humor and political participation, and exposure to conservative satire was significantly correlated with internal political efficacy. Internal political efficacy was also positively correlated with political participation. Lastly, there was significant difference between Democrats and Republicans in terms of their exposure to political TV satire.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Moy, Xenos, and Hess (2005) argue that a civically engaged electorate is critical to maintain the public sphere, but history shows us that the public falls short in this engagement (p. 111). The Rise of "soft news" such as *The Daily Show* (TDS), *The Colbert Report* (TCR), and *Last Week Tonight* (LWT) has led to more young audiences tuning in, which some scholars have argued have real world ramifications in terms of political knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors (Lee, 2012). As more political satire programs rise, so does their audience base. Today, there are many more satire programs compared to the early 2000s. Those times were dominated by TDS and TCR, but today you have people like John Oliver (*Last Week Tonight*), Seth Myers, Samantha Bee, Bill Maher, Jeff Jeffreys, Greg Gutfeld, and a slew of other television personalities who have their own political satire show. Given our current political climate, satire has taken a front seat to understanding the blunders of the Trump administration. This past election showed that young adults are still not going to the polls as much as they should, and exposure to political satire may explain why in certain instances. This research seeks to develop a broader understanding of the effects of humorous political satire programs and to examine whether they have the capacity to influence change in the material world. Some authors have purported that these programs have devastating impacts on a well-functioning democracy by eliciting negative emotions (Patterson, 2000). This has sparked a fierce debate about whether the effects of funny political satire programs are

good or bad in terms of political participation and political efficacy. One of the main arguments against satire having positive implications for political participation is that passion is not seen as reasonable or rational (Neuman et al., 2000). More recent research has shown that there is positive relationships between the elicitation of negative emotions and the political process in terms of political attention, knowledge and participation (Lee, 2012).

Purpose of the Thesis

The purpose of this thesis is to further this discussion and to use different conceptual models to create a bridge between the literature. In other words, how both positive and negative emotions can influence political attitudes, information, and behaviors. This thesis argues that higher exposure to political TV satire will have positive relationships with both internal political efficacy and political participation. This study seeks to understand the implications of political television satire programs elicitation of certain negative and positive emotions, and whether those emotions affect both internal political efficacy and political participation.

Defining Key Terms

Soft/Hard News

Tom Patterson (2000) argues, “Hard news refers to coverage of breaking events involving top leaders, major issues, or significant disruptions in the routines of daily life, such as an earthquake or airline disaster. Information about these events is presumably important to citizens’ ability to understand and respond to the world of public affairs. News that is not of this type is, by definition, “soft.” (Patterson, 2000, p. 3).” Whereas

soft news is “typically more sensational, more personality-centered, less time-bound, more practical, and more incident-based than other news (Patterson, 2000, p. 4).”

Political Efficacy

There are two types of political efficacy; external and internal. External political efficacy considers an individual's views on government institutions and officials, whereas internal political efficacy seeks to understand individual-level assessments of one's own ability to understand and effectively participate in the political process (Niemi, Craig, & Mattei, 1991, p. 1407-1408).

Political Participation

Verba, Scholzman, & Brady (1995) in their book *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* argue that there is a conceptual model for understanding political participation. They developed a model that encapsulates the process that citizens become active in politics. This conceptual model relies on motivation and the capacity to take part in political life, which in other words means that individuals must have resources that motivate them to participate (Verba et al., 1995, p. 4).

Affinity for Political Humor

Buijzen & Valkenburg (2004) suggested, "Parody is a more complex humor category that requires knowledge of the particular media styles or genres that are being parodied" (p. 162). Other humor related scales fall short in the realm of politics, because they are often too broad. Hmielowski et al., (2011) articulates a few dimensions to the Affinity for Political Humor scale. (1) Highlighting incongruent information, (2) sense of

superiority, (3) stress and anxiety reduction, and (4) the facilitation of interpersonal relationships (Hmielowski et al., 2011, p. 101). Ultimately, this scale seeks to understand how much respondents know about and value political humor.

Significance of the Study

Harriman (2008) argues that "political humor and particularly its core modality of parody is essential for an engaged, sustainable, and democratic public culture (p. 248)." In other words, a strong level of criticism towards our government and its officials is critical for a democratic society. Not only is there a check and balance on each branch of government, but the people who have access to a free and open press can also check the governmental power. The people can do this through voting or by engaging in the political arena. An example of attitudinal changes that happened due to political TV satire was when Tina Fey did her impersonation of Sarah Palin on *Saturday Night Live*. Cacciatore et al. (2014) argues that Fey impersonations helped to transform voter perceptions of Palin, with a significant portion of the electorate attributing false statements made by Fey during a comedy sketch to real comments that they presumed must have been made by Palin during media interviews (Cacciatore et al., 2014, p. 659). Thus, the population was heavily swayed by Barack Obama, which aided his winning of the election in 2008. In a world without satire or a more stringent control of the media these sorts of checks and balances would go away and the government would have much more control over how people perceived them. Thusly, political TV satire is critical to maintaining a well-functioning democratic society. What follows is a review of the extant literature about the effects of political satire programs.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Satire: Juvenalian and Horatian

Satire is defined as the use of humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity or vices, particularly in the context of contemporary politics and other topical issues ("Satire," 2017). Shows like *The Daily Show* and *Last Week Tonight* are examples of contemporary political TV satire. Satire typically has the tendency to attack (Knight, 2004). This is not your traditional attack, but one that is to educate and entertain in addition to persuading the audience to adopt an attitude (Holbert et al., 2011, p. 191). There are two types of satire; Juvenalian and Horatian. Horatian satire seeks to ground its arguments in everyday activities and is often presented to critique the ruling elite and the norms of social behavior (Holbert et al., 2011, p. 192). For example, *The Daily Show* plays off of traditional news media in terms of the appearance of the show. The host sits at a desk and runs various stories. On the other hand, Juvenalian satire is more harsh and referred to as "savage and merciless" (Sander, 1971, p. 254). This type of satire is not meant to heal or to be light hearted, but rather it is meant to wound (Holbert et al., 2011, p. 192). An example of this would be when Stephen Colbert roasted president George W. Bush at the White House Correspondence Dinner in 2006, or a Michael Moore movie (e.g. *Fahrenheit 9/11*) (Zimmerman, 2004; Baym, 2008; Jones, 2010).

Informational effects of Humorous Political Satire Programs

There are a litany of scholars who agree that late-night comedy shows contain a significant amount of information within them, which enable their viewers to better understand the world around them (Cao & Brewer, 2008; Baym 2005; Baum, 2002, 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2006). The reason for this largely has to do with the format of some of these programs. Take for instance *The Daily Show* where the host sits in front of a desk and delivers a newscast like someone on a program like CNN. Baym (2005) describes *TDS* as blurring the lines between real and fake news. He calls this effect “discursive integration,” because it is “a way of speaking about, understanding, and acting within the world defined by the permeability of form and the fluidity of content (Baym, 2005, p. 262).”

Baum is one of the other leading researchers in this topic area and has established a very good base for propelling the literature pool forward. In one of his first articles on the subject; *Sex, Lies, and War: How Soft News Brings Foreign Policy to the Inattentive Public*, Baum articulates that people who are disengaged with political information who watch soft news programs receive some information about different foreign events. The results of this study indicated that exposure to these soft news programs was significantly correlated with increased information consumption (Baum, 2002, pp. 102-105).

While there is some agreement regarding the positive influence of political satire programs, namely Baum, there are still researchers who disagree with this. Prior (2003) argues that viewers of soft news are just viewing to be entertained rather than to be informed. He argues that these programs were designed to be funny and were not created

to inform their audiences. Prior (2003) concludes that the demands for soft news are limited compared to traditional (hard) news (p. 167). His argument that people consume soft news purely to be entertained is valid and one that challenges much of the research on this topic. Despite Prior's challenges, he does not fully delve into the informational “by-product” of these shows. He fails to grapple with the fact that despite these audiences wanting to be entertained they still learn at the same time, which can have positive motivating qualities.

Baum (2003) explores this knowledge attribution closer than Prior (2003) by broadening his understanding of information processing Baum was able to find some substantive correlated variables in terms of knowledge attribution. In this article, Baum (2003) challenges Prior (2003) who argues that there is minimal to no knowledge attribution from soft news. Baum (2003) utilized content analysis, understandings of low-information rationality theory, and voting in order to dissect these arguments further. Popkin in his 1994 book *The Reasoning Voter* discusses the ways in which voters rationalize how they vote for certain candidates. He articulates that often voters must utilize information shortcuts or rationalize something that immediately effects them (Popkin, 1994, p. 25). This conceptualization of how people use information to make educated decisions informed Baum's (2003) understanding of soft news. Baum (2003) argues that soft news viewers gain information about political events as an "incidental by-product of seeking entertainment (p. 269)." This means that people can learn a great deal from something they find funny and entertaining, which then has been shown to be a motivating factor to finding more information. Baum (2003) emphasizes that certain soft

news audiences are more likely to use soft news as a "gateway." This means that these same viewers are likely to start pursuing and consuming more traditional news.

In 2005, Baum continued to build his research by looking at more nuanced discussions, but came to similar conclusions. In his book; *Soft News Goes to War*, Baum (2005a) discusses how soft news increased coverage of the Clinton administration's bombing of terrorist strongholds in both Sudan and Afghanistan. This was one of the first times soft news had leading stories that featured a foreign crises and response rather than sticking to public interest pieces (Baum, 2005a, p. 2). He concludes that soft news is responsible for increasing the extant knowledge of the public about foreign policies, and by proxy has the potential to create a more active audience who now have the knowledge to create change at the ballot box (Baum, 2005a, p. 4). Additionally, Baum (2005b) examines the impacts of presidential candidates going onto talk shows either equal to or more than other traditional news shows. The results show that politically unengaged voters who watch these talk shows are more likely to find the opposition party candidate likeable when they appear on these talk shows, relative to those who are more politically aware (Baum, 2005b, p. 333).

In 2006, Baum and Jamison sought to understand how soft news, specifically The Oprah Show, helped inattentive citizens vote consistently. In order to do this, Baum and Jamison (2006) examined how high politically aware individuals who consume soft news either vote consistently or not (p. 948). The results of the data conclude that citizens' ability to vote consistently depends on information they consume. When combining all of these studies conducted by Baum it is clear that there is reason to suspect that these political satire programs are both legitimate sources of information, and give some

entertainment value to those who watch. Baum also makes inroads for future studies to examine the effects of these programs further since there is significant correlations between the consumption of soft news programs and consistent voting patterns (Baum, 2006).

Others researchers have argued that political humor is a critical exercise of our democratic principles as a nation (Becker, 2014). Pointing out inconsistencies and advocating for change are some of the few things that political humor can achieve. This change can also have a significant impact on how individuals see themselves in terms of their knowledge about the government. Furthermore, there are a litany of authors who talk about how political satire programs offer substantive information akin to traditional media sources (Brewer and Marquardt, 2007). This means that these political satire programs are important to study, because they are not merely entertainment programs. They have the capacity to boost audiences understanding of political processes and to give people the tools to better understand the world around them. Young and Tissingner (2006) argue that viewing these late-night satire programs was associated with other types of news exposure, which included local and national levels. Furthermore, this exposure led to even higher levels of learning from these more traditional news outlets (Young & Tissingner, 2006, p. 128). With this education comes a higher level of confidence in their ability to make decisions about politics, which becomes a motivating factor for participation and political efficacy.

Becker in 2011 conducted a survey study that found exposure to cable comedy content like *The Daily Show* was positively related to internal political efficacy. What this means is that whoever was more likely to understand the complex nature of political

satire was more likely to have confidence in their own understandings of the political system and engaging in that system. The results from this study show that a significant relationship between exposure to political TV satire and political efficacy (Becker, 2011, p. 246). Additionally, Becker's (2014b) study explored how prior media exposure and affinity for political humor are tools to reduce anxiety and how this leads to higher levels of internal political efficacy. The results of this study indicated that affinity for political humor can moderate the impact of exposure to political humor on feelings of internal political efficacy (Becker, 2014b, p. 440). To take this one step further, Becker in 2013 conducted a study to determine the implication of exposure to interviews from political comedy shows, and the results show that these political comedy interviews are significantly correlated with anticipated political participation (p. 352).

Lastly, Becker and Bode in 2017 explores this subject with an article about knowledge gain on a specific subject, net neutrality. They hypothesized that *Last Week Tonight* would foster higher levels of education about net neutrality due to its segment about the its issues (Becker & Bode, 2017). The findings of this research found that shows like *Last Week Tonight* are just as effective at disseminating complex information about issues like net neutrality as traditional news (Becker & Bode, 2017). This means that John Oliver does have influence over individual's perceptions about issues, which speaks volumes to the potential effects his program can have on political efficacy and participation.

Other authors have taken this idea of internal political efficacy and made it more nuanced by examining it from the perspective of uses and gratifications theory. Holbert's (2007) study showed how political efficacy can be an important moderator of the

gratifications from exposure to political comedy. In this study, they found that low-efficacy individuals deemed traditional news less gratifying as a source of political information if they were first exposed to comedy content from *The Daily Show* (Holbert, Lambe, Dudo, & Carlton, p. 32, 2007). They found that positive gratification from the political program would boost internal political efficacy. Understanding the informational effects of political satire is critical to understanding its broader implications. When there is a boost in informational efficacy it leads to a shift in attitudes about politics overall.

Attitudinal Effects of Humorous Political Satire Programs

Dahlgren (2001) sums up our contemporary political landscape in his book *The Transformation of Democracy* best by calling it “postmodern politics (p. 312).” This culture is marked by the lack of commitment to traditional institutions such as party affiliation, and civic organizations. Now people more often than not form alliances based around morality, identity, or worldview (Dahlgren, 2001, p. 323). Furthermore, Jones (2010) argues that citizenship is about the assertion of one’s values that have been threatened and must be reestablished in a public way (p. 32). In short, people want a more personalized media that they can relate to, which then will connect them to a larger network of people who have similar feelings. This is why younger populations within the “postmodern politic” would rather watch political satire, because it is a divergence from the mainstream and more often than not is critical of mainstream news. Jones (2010) asserts that based on the extant research, the public has a relationship with politics through their television/computer screens. Jones would agree that this means that people rely on personalities like Trevor Noah and John Oliver to make news more personalized.

The literature would indicate that only if there is relatability will there be knowledge absorbed by the viewers. This understanding of our contemporary media landscape is fundamental when examining the effects of political satire and informs much of the research in the literature.

A wide array of studies have examined the attitudinal effects of late-night comedy programs, ranging from political ideology (Hmielowski et al., 2011), to efficacy and negative emotion (Cao, & Brewer, 2008; Hoffman & Thomson, 2009; Kwak et al., 2004; Becker, 2014; Lee & Kwak, 2014; Brewer & Marquart, 2007) and attitudes (Baum & Jamison, 2006; Baumgartner & Morris, 2006; Moy, Xenos, & Hess, 2006). All of this research has done little to bring a consensus in the field in terms of the effects of political satire. The one thing assured by the research is that there are both positive and negative ramifications to watching political satire programs. More often than not, researchers have utilized cynicism, anxiety, fear, and other negative emotions as predictors for a boost in political efficacy and participation (Lee & Kwak, 2014; Becker, 2014b; Baumgartner & Morris, 2006, 2008; Xenos, Moy, & Becker, 2011).

Baumgartner and Morris in their 2006 study expand upon Baum and Jamison's (2006) research, which concluded presidential candidates have more readily going onto soft news programs in order appear more relatable to their potential voters. More specifically, Baumgartner and Morris (2006) look at how jokes centered around specific candidates influence the public's opinion of that candidate. They also looked at whether or not frequent viewing of TDS increased cynicism towards the political process. The results of this study showed a few different things about political TV satire and its audience. Those who had less knowledge about the presidential candidates (Kerry or

Bush) had a negative opinion about candidates who were on TDS (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006, p. 362). Additionally, there is evidence that this research is consistent with previous research in terms of Baum's argument that soft news does contribute to incidental information acquisition among a lesser knowledgeable public (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006, p. 362). The literature indicates that there is a significant probability that this boost in efficacy can have a positive influence upon political participation. Additionally, Baumgartner and Morris in 2008 did similar research except with *The Colbert Report*. They sought to understand how TCR effects its audience members. One of their main arguments was that humor can have a persuasive effect upon the message. In other words, if the message is humorously framed the audience is more likely to agree with that message. To study this, they argue that Colbert's criticism of liberals will inspire a more conservative perspective from his viewers (Baumgartner & Morris, 2008, p. 627). Baumgartner and Morris (2008) found that Colbert's message is persuasive insofar as it increases viewers affinity for conservative policies (p. 634). All of this research is indicative of both the attitudinal effects and behavioral effects of these programs.

Xenos, Moy, and Becker (2011) sought to understand how shows like *The Daily Show* or *The Colbert Report* created a "cognitive shortcut" by creating an ideological heuristic (p. 47). In order to do this they examined message consistent effects of TDS that are either known or unknown by the viewer (Xenos, Moy, & Becker, 2011). They concluded that this research is consistent with Baum (2003) who found that these shows can bridge other forms of hard news. Furthermore, the results suggested that there is a possible "hybrid" effect in terms of learning and forming opinions at the same time

(Xenos, Moy, & Becker, 2011, p. 59). This means that there is a real possibility that as viewers consistently watch political satire programs that they will be aided in both knowledge acquisition and the creation of unique opinions about politics.

Hmielowski et al. (2011) sought to fill the void within the literature pool by identifying who exactly is tuning into these television programs. Much of the research has not delved into who watches these types of programs and who does not. Hmielowski et al. (2011) wanted to move beyond the traditional notion that only young liberals tune into these programs, which is an underlying assumption throughout the literature. They argue that these satire programs can complement the regular consumption of traditional news. Furthermore, Hmielowski et al. (2011) argued that current humor related measures for political humor were not as nuanced as they should be for this type of research, so they created a holistically new political humor scale. Hmielowski et al. (2011) created the Affinity for Political Humor scale, which more specifically deals with political humor instead of humor in general. Through a survey questionnaire, Hmielowski et al. (2011) concluded that there were four independent variables critical in predicting exposure to political TV satire; age, exposure to liberal cable news, exposure to satirical situation comedies, and affinity for political humor (p. 108). Additionally, this research was consistent with the common assumption that those who view these satire programs are predominantly young and liberal (Hmielowski et al., 2011, pp. 108-109). This study is uniquely important, because of the creation of the Affinity for Political Humor scale. This scale will be instrumental in future research in terms of predicting exposure to political satire, and to use different dimensions such as the anxiety dimension to explore

even more nuanced approaches to predicting both exposure to political satire and political participation.

Political TV satire can also have influence on your political ideology. LaMarre (2009) explores message processing of political satire in *The Colbert Report* and the influence of political ideology on perceptions of Stephen Colbert (LaMarre, 2009). LaMarre deployed an experimental based methodology, which included showing a video clip of satire before the students took the questionnaire. The results of this study indicate that the satire offered by *The Colbert Report* is interpreted by audiences in a manner that best fits their individual political beliefs (LaMarre, 2009). In other words, a conservative is more likely to view *The Colbert Report* as making fun of liberals and liberals are more likely to see *The Colbert Report* making fun of conservatives. This study helps build solid measurements to gauge political ideology and whether that is a significant predictor of watching political TV satire. Additionally, this study gives insight into how other programs like *Last Week Tonight* will be perceived by both liberal and conservative audiences. Overall, the research is mixed when it comes to the attitudinal effects, thus there needs to be a more comprehensive approach to understand the capacity of political satire programs to influence political attitudes, information, and behavior.

Behavioral Effects of Humorous Political Satire Programs

Kaid, Mckinney, and Tedesco (2007) argue that when young voters are exposed to political information it has the potential to boost their information efficacy, which will make it more likely for them to pursue additional information (p. 1098). The results of their study concluded that even though older adults were more knowledgeable about politics the younger populations information efficacy was a significant determinant of

voting (Kaid, Mckinney, & Tedesco, 2007, p. 1105) In the scholarly research about education self-efficacy is a very strong motivating factor to achieve a result. Zimmerman (2000) argues that students with higher levels of self-efficacy are more motivated to exert effort and be persistent in their attempts to achieve a desired result (p. 86). What this means for studying political satire is that when people become more confident in their abilities to understand the political process they start to seek out more information to reduce their anxiety. Seeking to reduce anxieties about politics is the key ingredient for increases in information acquisition and political participation.

Cao and Brewer (2008) examined this concept further and sought to understand how political comedy programs can influence political participation. Their overall hypothesis is that exposure to political comedy shows increase political participation (Cao & Brewer, 2008, p. 92). Although this study did not find statistical significance, it did challenge a common belief that political TV satire fostered no political participation. What Cao and Brewer (2008) found was that negative emotion and cynicism boosted political efficacy and thus could motivate people to become more politically active (p. 97).

Other authors have shown that these satire programs can enhance efficacy and thus political participation. Moy, Xenos, & Hess (2005) argue that these programs can enhance participation for certain parts of the electorate. Instead of more satirically based shows, they look towards infotainment. Infotainment is broader than soft news and typically is more human interest oriented. They sought to understand how shows like *Oprah* can influence political knowledge and participation. The results of survey research indicated that infotainment is not monolithic and very diverse. They found that

Oprah was positively correlated with increased levels of political participation, but that those who viewed late-night comedy (e.g. *The Late Show*) were more significantly correlated than *Oprah* (Moy, Xenos, & Hess, 2005, p. 125). Other authors that took a similar research path were Lee and Kwak (2014) and Hoffman (2015).

Lee and Kwak (2014) looked to how satire can elicit negative emotion and that could be a motivating source to participate in politics. They hypothesized that satire programs would increase negative emotions towards government overall. Through the use of survey research they found that there were some significant correlations. This study is uniquely important, because it demonstrates the elicitation of negative emotions as a potential moderator for political participation. Lee and Kwak (2014) articulate that this study supports the indirect effects model in terms of the negative emotion of anxiety being statistically correlated with political participation (p. 322).

Hoffman's 2015 dissertation about John Oliver's *Last Week Tonight*. The study utilizes a survey methodology mixed with a video to a segment of the respondents. Hoffman (2015) looks at both online forms of political participation and offline forms. Since Oliver approaches his topics less around partisan politics and more about facts, he separates himself from much of the satire programs that are on air today. Additionally, Hoffman (2015) investigates this topic differently by redefining some key terms within the literature, namely political participation. Instead of just leaving at "political participation" within the fourth hypothesis she describes it as "self-reported civic participation," which becomes more focused overall (Hoffman, 2015, p. 23). They describes things such as clicktivism and other online forms of participation that are not always represented within the literature pool. Although this study did not find significant

correlations in terms of political efficacy and participation it did find significance for learning of political information (Hoffman, 2015, p. 36).

Affective Intelligence as a Theoretical model

The common underlying theme among most of the research on the effects of political satire programs is emotion. This study will not steer away from that conceptualization and will utilize a model based around negative emotions. Positive emotions (goals that are fulfilled) reinforce existing behaviors (disposition system or habituated choice) (Neuman, 2000, p. 128). Whereas, negative emotions happen when an individual encounters unfamiliar, or threatening situations, which likely disrupt patterns of behaviors and prompt novel responses (deliberative choice or surveillance system) (Neuman, 2000, p. 128). There needs to be a focus on the nuances of these emotions and how they elicit certain responses in terms of political TV satire. This model has been demonstrated through various political science theories, but this research will primarily be concerned with affective intelligence theory. Neuman et al. (2000) argues that emotions can have a positive relationship with political participation. Rather than creating a dichotomy between a rational voter and an emotional voter, Neuman et al. 2000 marries the two concepts thus creating the Affective Intelligence theory. Early conceptualizations of voter behavior often looked to different paradigms such as the normal vote, rational choice approach, or the psychological approach, but these paradigms do not account for the conditionality of emotion. For example, the effect of anxiety is largely conditional, which makes it much more dynamic (Neuman et al., 2000, p. 126). This anxious feeling is situational to a certain election or policy decisions and is not perpetual. During this state of anxiety a voter may make a different political decision

to quell this emotion. This is the core of Affective Intelligence theory, because it states that these emotions elicit different political decisions from voters. Neuman et al. (2000) states that "the theory holds that rationality is appropriate only in some situations. More fundamentally, the theory holds that people have alternative decision strategies because different environments require them (p. 126)." This is the best working definition of the theory of Affective Intelligence, because it details that while prior conceptions of voter rationale may be right they are often insufficient. Affective Intelligence accounts for other voter strategies such as positive or negative emotions.

Hypotheses

Baumgartner and Morris (2006) sought to determine if exposure to *The Daily Show* (TDS) is positively related to internal political efficacy through harsh attacks of political candidates featured on the show during the Bush versus Gore election cycle. The results of an experimental survey design showed that these sentiments were positively correlated, but with a caveat that these shows spread cynicism and negative emotions among young voters (Baumgartner and Morris, 2006, p. 362). Furthermore, Holbert, Lambe, Dudo, and Carlton, (2007) found that low-efficacy individuals deemed traditional news less gratifying as a source of political information if they were first exposed to comedy content from TDS. These soft news sources like TDS bolster internal efficacy, which stirs curiosity about politics and about current events regarding political participation. This curiosity can become a strong motivator for actual political participation and that political information efficacy is an important precursor for democratic engagement among young voters (Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2007). In the scholarly research about education self-efficacy is a very strong motivating factor to

achieve a result. Zimmerman (2000) argues that students with higher levels of self-efficacy are more motivated to exert effort and be persistent in their attempts to achieve a desired result. What this means for studying political satire is that when people become more confident in their abilities to understand the political process they start to seek out more information to reduce their anxiety. Exposure to these satire programs has a significant potential to bolster internal political efficacy and political participation, which leads to the hypothesis;

Hypothesis 1: Exposure to political satire programs bolsters internal political efficacy.

Hypothesis 2: Exposure to political satire programs bolsters political participation.

When referring to "political satire programs" within this hypothesis it means soft news satire programs like *The Daily Show* with Trevor Noah, John Oliver's *Last Week Tonight*, Samantha Bee's *Full Frontal*, Bill Maher's *Real Time*, and conservative satire shows such as *The Greg Gutfeld show*. Though this is not an exhaustive list these are the primary shows that will be used in the exposure to political satire scale.

Hmielowski et al., (2011) created the Affinity for Political humor scale to explore four different dimensions of an individual's affinity for political humor, which are the desire to make sense of incongruent information, an interest in promoting a sense of superiority, the reliance on humor to reduce anxiety or stress, and finally the value of humor for social cohesion (p. 101). The Affinity for Political Humor scale is much more complex than a single unit of measurement and can be broken down into subsets that would enable a better way of conducting hypothesis testing. Becker 2014 utilizes the Affinity for Political Humor scale in her study to seek how negative emotions interact

with high levels of affinity for this type of humor. Her results indicated that prior satire exposure, and an affinity for political humor as a means for anxiety reduction were significant predictors of political efficacy (Becker, 2014, p. 440). Therefore the hypothesis;

Hypothesis 3: High levels of Affinity for Political Humor will bolster internal political efficacy.

Hypothesis 4: High levels of Affinity for Political Humor will bolster political participation

Summary

This body of literature is continually evolving as there are more satire programs on air. There are several cases within this research that suggests political satire programs have a positive effect on both internal political efficacy and potential political participation. At the same time, there is also much literature about the negative ramifications of political satire programs in terms of negative emotions hampering political participation. This thesis seeks to provide more empirical research to the “satire is positive camp.” This understanding revolves around the notion that satire influences certain informational, attitudinal, and behavioral effects, which are positive for the democratic process.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The design of this study revolves around a survey questionnaire. Surveys are very useful for conducting research, because they allow for a breadth of data that can be utilized to show statistical significance. This research can be conducted with the understanding that surveys are about finding preferences, patterns, behaviors, attitudes etc. Babbie (1990) argues; “the survey format promotes this general scientific aim in two ways. First, with large number of cases studied in a given survey, findings can be replicable among many different subsets of the survey sample (p. 42).” For example, you may want to know if young college students use social media more than young adults who are not in school. This simple premise can lead to a snowball effect in terms of different statistical testing you can do with survey research. You can compare male and females, different races, socio-economic status, or level of education to create a more nuanced understanding of the data collected. With this snowball effect researchers are able to prepare a vast number of studies in a timely manner based off of a fairly large dataset. Additionally, surveys with a greater representation of a certain population enable researchers to generalize those results.

Sample

Participants for this study included 400 individuals who are 18-30 year old college students who enrolled in general education courses at two Northern California universities. They were recruited through both regular class and lectures. The population

was chosen because of the diverse departments who are represented within general education courses, which can have a better representation of the population. All 400 respondents were distributed via paper-version questionnaires, which were subsequently gathered upon completion.

Procedure

A self-administered survey questionnaire was distributed to a private Northern California college university and a public community college. The university convenience sample there was conducted within public speaking, interpersonal communication, mass media studies, and argumentation and debate. Each of these classes are general education courses, which enable a broader representation of the population. Students at these universities are required to take so many general education courses, which means each of these classes will have an array of students from different educational backgrounds. Institutional review board approved this research and granted permission prior to research. All participants within the survey collection were 18 years old and voluntary.

Measurements

The questionnaire will contain 9 sections to measure participants, personality, emotions towards federal government, news media exposure, political ideology, internal political efficacy, political participation, affinity for political humor, potential encounters with political satire, and demographic information. The independent variables for this study are exposure to political TV satire and affinity for political humor. The dependent variables are; personality, emotions towards federal government, news media

consumption, political ideology, internal political efficacy, political participation, and demographic information.

The *personality* section comes from Lang et al., in 2011. This scale utilizes the Big Five personality dimensions transformed into a short 15 statement scale, which will determine different personality traits of the respondents. The dimensions include; openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (Lang et al., 2011). These questions range from statements like; “I am talkative” to “I worry a lot.” All of these dimensions will be important when evaluating the different personalities of the respondents and to see if these personalities have any sort of correlative relationships with participation or efficacy. This research found that the personality scale had a .78 Cronbach’s Alpha.

Section 2, the *emotions towards federal government* scale is adapted from McCroskey and Teven (1999) and comprises of 18 different items with the intention of measuring how people feel about the federal government. Participants are asked to rate their feelings about the government on a semantic differential scale that includes items such as intelligent to unintelligent. Participants can circle a number between 1 being very intelligent through 7 being very unintelligent to determine each description used in each item. This scale will be able to measure a level of external political efficacy for a more holistic understanding of respondents political efficacy. This study found that the emotions towards federal government scale had a Cronbach’s Alpha of .80.

Section 3 contains a measure created by myself to determine *news media exposure*. This scale has 10 different items within it that are measured via Likert scale

from 1 being very likely to 5 being very unlikely. An Example of a statement in this section includes "I get most of my news from sources like *CNN*." This measurement will also give important information about respondents news efficacy insofar as they watch TV news or not. This study found that the media exposure scale had a Cronbach's Alpha of .73

Section 4 is intended to measure *political ideology* using questions from Pew's research on the subject (Suh, 2014). These items are put on a Likert scale from 1 being strongly disagree to 5 being strongly agree. Examples of these items include; "Government is almost always wasteful and inefficient" and "Government regulation of business is necessary to protect the public interests." This scale seeks to understand which respondents are liberal and which are conservative. This study found the political ideology scale to have a Cronbach's Alpha of .25

Section 5 is intended to measure *internal political efficacy* using questions from Niemi, Craig, and Mattei (1991). They found the internal political efficacy scale to have a Cronbach's Alpha of .76. This scale contains 7 different items that will be measured via Likert scale 1 being strongly agree and 6 being strongly disagree. An example of one of these items is "I think that I am better informed about politics and government than most people (Niemi et al., 1991, p. 1408)." The purpose of this scale is to determine how people feel about their place in the government and their overall confidence and competence towards public officials and policy. The findings in this study found the internal political efficacy scale to have a Cronbach Alpha of .71.

Section 6 is intended to measure *political participation*. This scale determines how the respondent has been politically engaged. This measure was adapted from Cao and Brewer's 2008 survey questions. Each of these items are put on a 3 point scale from having done the activity within the past year, not in the past year, or not at all. An example of an item from this scale includes: "have you ever voted in an election of a public official (Cao & Brewer, 2008, p. 93)?" The findings in this study found that the political participation scale had a Cronbach Alpha of .89

Section 7 is intended to measure *affinity for political humor*. This scale utilizes the scale developed by Hmielowski, Holbert, and Lee (2011) to determine respondent's knowledge about political humor, so that researchers could get a better picture of how people perceive political humor programs. These statements ask the reader to determine their relationships towards political humor and exactly why they are enjoying watching these programs. A statement from this measure includes: "I appreciate political humor because it can reveal the weaknesses of our political leaders and institutions." This scale determines not only the level of affinity for political humor respondents have, but also can be used to measure anxiety reduction via political humor. This study found that Affinity for Political Humor scale had a Cronbach's Alpha of .93.

Section 8 is intended to measure *potential encounters with political satire programs* via a scale that were created by myself. Through deploying vignettes of varying scenarios this scale places, the respondent in a situation that they can rate on a Likert scale from 0 being very strongly disagree to 6 being very strongly agree. An example of an item from this scale includes: "You are scrolling through Facebook and you see a short one-minute video of *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah*, which features a

story called that talks about Trump's rocky presidential transition and scandalous ties to Russia. You are excited to see the new clip and anticipate it to be funny and informative." This scale seeks to understand how respondents feel about these satire programs, which will be broken down into conservative satire and liberal satire. This study found that exposure to liberal satire had a Cronbach's Alpha of .66 and exposure to conservative satire was .72. The exposure to liberal satire scale was adjusted for the reliability testing by omitting the Bill Maher question. Likewise, the conservative satire scale was adjusted to exclude the Alex Jones question. Both of these questions were omitted to bolster internal consistency, because they were both negative questions.

Section 9 is the demographic variables such as gender, age, ethnicity, year in school, level of education, social media usage and preference, and political affiliation. These items are important for segmenting the population. In terms of political ideology, this will aid in understanding the differences of exposure to satire from people who identify as liberal or conservative.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter explains the findings from the statistical analysis of the data. Based on these results, some important and useful information can be gathered in terms of understanding the population.

Demographic Information

The average age of the sample was 25.6 (SD= 3.6). All of the participants were between the age of 18 and 30. The sample was made up of 45% male, and 46% female. Furthermore, all of the participants use some kind of social media. 46% use Facebook next 16% who use MySpace, 12% use Instagram, 4.4% use Twitter, 6% use Flickr, 7% use Pinterest, and .5% use Reddit. Furthermore, Table 2a shows that the majority of respondents claimed a political affiliation to which they label themselves, whereas 23% claimed to be completely non-partisan. 6% claimed to be very conservative, 18% claimed to be republican, 29% claimed to be democrat, 20% claimed to be very liberal, and 2% claimed to be “other” political affiliation. The average of the political affiliation question was at 3.44 percent (SD=1.23). The majority of the respondents were Juniors in college (43%) followed by; Graduate students (16%), Sophomore (14%), Senior (13%), and Freshman (7%). The average year in school is 3.2 (SD=1.11). Most of the respondents reported being Caucasian/Non-Hispanic (53%) followed by; Asian American (14%), Hispanic (12%), African American (8%), Native American (0.5%), and other (5%). The average for ethnicity was 3.2 (SD=1.25). The majority of respondents

claimed that they do not get most of their news information from either newspaper (26%), television outlets (22%) or radio (34%), however the respondents did report getting the majority of their news information from online sources (24%). The majority of respondents did not get news information from *CNN* (23%), *Fox* (36%), *MSNBC* (32%), or *Reuters* (31%).

Independent Variables and Dependent Variables

The lowest mean score among the independent variables was affinity for political humor ($M=2.39$), and the highest one was exposure to liberal satire ($M=3.37$), followed by exposure to conservative satire ($M=2.54$). The mean gives us a representation of the entire data set. This means that for affinity for political humor, exposure to liberal satire, and exposure to conservative satire the average response revolved around the “neutral” answer. Standard deviations were .96 (affinity for political humor), 1.6 (exposure to liberal satire), and 1.78 (exposure to conservative satire). The standard deviations showed the largest individual difference was between affinity for political humor and exposure to conservative satire. Standard deviation shows us the level of dispersion of the mean. Affinity for political humor was the closest to the mean insofar as it had the lowest standard deviation. Exposure to liberal satire had the next lowest, and exposure to conservative satire had the highest level of dispersion.

The means for the dependent variables were (internal political efficacy) 1.89, (political participation) 2.02, (liberal ideology) 1.66, and (conservative ideology) 2.21. Standard deviations for internal political efficacy, political participation, liberal ideology, and conservative ideology were .82, .60, and .70 respectively. Table 3a will also reflect

these standard deviations below. The highest standard deviation was internal political efficacy, followed by liberal ideology, then conservative ideology.

Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis explored the relationships between the variables in the hypotheses proposed. As Table 1 shows, some correlations are significant while others are not. In order to operationalize the independent variable “exposure to political satire” was broken down into two parts; liberal and conservative satire. We can accept the assumption made within H1 insofar as exposure to conservative satire yielded a significant correlation with internal political efficacy ($r=.12$, $p<.05$), and liberal satire yielded a significant negative correlation with internal political efficacy ($r=-.15$, $p<.01$). However, we can reject the assumption made within H2 insofar as exposure to liberal satire ($r=-.19$, $p<.01$), and exposure to conservative satire ($r=-.11$, $p<.05$) yielded negative relationships with political participation. We can accept the assumption for hypothesis 3 (H3) that affinity for political humor has a significant positive relationship with internal political efficacy ($r=.29$, $p<.01$). Finally, we can reject the assumption made within H4, because affinity for political humor had no significant relationship with political participation.

Table 1. Correlations, Means, Standard Deviations, and Reliabilities for Exposure to Political TV Satire, Affinity for Political Humor, Internal Political Efficacy, and Political Participation

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

| | Variables | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | M | SD |
|---|---------------------------------|-------|-------|------------|-----------|------------|------|------|
| 1 | Exposure to Liberal Satire | (.66) | -.03 | -.15 ** | -.09 | -.19 ** | 3.37 | 1.60 |
| 2 | Exposure to Conservative Satire | | (.72) | .03 | .12 * | -.11 * | 2.54 | 1.78 |
| 3 | Affinity for Political Humor | | | (.93) | .29 ** | .04 | 2.39 | .96 |
| 4 | Internal Political Efficacy | | | | (.71) | .23 ** | 1.89 | .82 |
| 5 | Political Participation | | | | | (.89) | 2.02 | .60 |

Multiple Regression Analysis

A Multiple Regression Analysis was conducted in order to investigate the best predictors for both internal political efficacy and political participation. Multiple regression analysis is helpful, because it can determine if the proposed model is effective at predicting the level of variance between any given independent variable and the dependent variable. The beta weights can also give insight into the predictive capacity of these models.

Table 2. Internal Political Efficacy Multiple Regression Analysis Summary for Exposure to Liberal Satire, Exposure to Conservative Satire, and Affinity for Political Humor

| Predictor Variables | B | SE | β | t | p |
|---------------------------------|------|-----|---------|-------|-----|
| Exposure to Liberal Satire | -.03 | .03 | -.05 | -1.04 | .30 |
| Exposure to Conservative Satire | .05 | .02 | .11 | 2.25 | .03 |
| Affinity for Political Humor | .24 | .04 | .28 | 5.84 | .00 |

The first multiple regression analysis was ran to investigate the predictors of internal political efficacy (Table 2). The combination of variables to predict internal political efficacy was statistically significant, $F(3, 396)=14.61$, $p<0.05$. Table 5 shows that both affinity for political humor and exposure to conservative satire programs significantly predicts internal political efficacy when all 3 variables are included. The adjusted r squared value was .093. This indicated 9.3% variance in internal political efficacy was explained by the model. According to Cohen (1988) this has a low effect in explaining the variance. The regression analysis also found that affinity for political humor ($\beta= .28$, $p < 0.05$) and exposure to conservative satire ($\beta= .11$, $p < 0.05$) had strong predicting power for internal political efficacy.

Similarly, Table 3 shows the best predictors of political participation. It shows that the combination of variables was statistically significant explaining the variance

($F(3, 396)=6.63, p<.0.05$). Table 3 also suggests that exposure to liberal satire and exposure to conservative satire can both negatively explain the variance of political participation when all four variables are included. This means that for every one unit of exposure to satire there is a negative effect in terms of political participation. The adjusted r squared value was .041. this indicates 4.1% of the variance in political participation was explained by the model, which according to Cohen (1988) this is a low effect. The regression analysis also found that exposure to liberal satire ($\beta= -.19$, $p < 0.05$) and exposure to conservative satire ($\beta= -.11$, $p < 0.05$) had strong negative predicting power for internal political efficacy. These results indicate that the fundamental assumptions made within the hypotheses were not completely true insofar as exposure to satire can have a negative effect on internal political efficacy and political participation.

Table 3. Political Participation Multiple Regression Analysis Summary for Exposure to Liberal Satire, Exposure to Conservative Satire, and Affinity for Political Humor

| Predictor Variables | B | SE | β | t | p |
|---------------------------------|------|-----|---------|-------|-----|
| Exposure to Liberal Satire | -.07 | .02 | -.19 | -3.76 | .00 |
| Exposure to Conservative Satire | -.04 | .02 | -.11 | -2.31 | .02 |
| Affinity for Political Humor | .01 | .03 | .02 | .43 | .67 |

Independent Samples T-Tests

An independent samples t-test was conducted in order to determine if there were any difference between male and females in terms of the variables used. The results will be shown within Table 4.

The first t-test was conducted on the first dependent variable, internal political efficacy. This variable showed that women ($M=1.96$, $SD=.81$) showed partial difference with men ($M=1.81$, $SD=.81$) when comparing over the dependent variable of internal political efficacy $t=-1.76$, $p=0.08$. Women reported having higher levels of internal political efficacy.

The second t-test was ran on the second dependent variable, political participation. This variable showed that women ($M=2.08$, $SD=.59$) showed moderate difference with men ($M=1.97$, $SD=.59$) when comparing the dependent variable, political participation $t=-1.90$, $p=0.06$. Women reported having higher levels of political participation.

The third t-test the first independent variable, affinity for political humor was used. This variable showed that women ($M=2.29$, $SD=.93$) showed significant difference with men ($M=2.49$, $SD=.97$) in terms of comparing them over the independent variable of affinity for political humor $t=2.15$, $p=.03$. Men reported a higher affinity for political humor than women.

The fourth t-test was conducted on the second independent variable, exposure to liberal satire to investigate difference between the groups. This variable showed that men ($M=3.61$, $SD=.1.59$) showed a significant difference with women ($M=3.15$, $SD=.1.56$)

when you compare them with the independent variable of exposure to liberal satire $t=2.91$, $p=0.004$. Men reported having higher rates of exposure to liberal satire programs.

The fifth and final t-test was ran to on the second independent variable, exposure to conservative satire. This variable had a significant different between men ($M=2.77$, $SD=1.84$) and women ($M=2.33$, $SD=1.71$) when comparing them against the independent variable of exposure to conservative satire. $t=2.51$, $p=.01$. Men reported having a higher rate of exposure to conservative satire programs.

Table 4. Independent Samples T-Test on Affinity for Political Humor, Exposure to Liberal Satire, Exposure to Conservative Satire, Internal Political Efficacy, and Political Participation

| Dependent Variables | Male | Female | T Value | P Value |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------|---------|
| Internal Political Efficacy | M=1.81 SD=.81 | M=1.96 SD=.81 | -1.76 | .08 |
| Political Participation | M=1.97 SD=.59 | M=2.08 SD=.59 | -1.89 | .06 |
| Independent Variables | Male | Female | T Value | P Value |
| Affinity for Political Humor | M=2.49 SD=.97 | M=2.29 SD=.93 | 2.15 | .03 |
| Exposure to Liberal Satire | M=3.61 SD=1.59 | M=3.15 SD=1.56 | 2.91 | .004 |
| Exposure to Conservative Satire | M=2.77 SD=1.84 | M=2.33 SD=1.71 | 2.51 | .01 |

One Way ANOVA

The first ANOVA test ran used the dependent variable internal political efficacy. A main effect of internal political efficacy was significant, $F(5, 394) = 4.44, p < .01$. The results indicate that Hispanics' ($M=2.32, SD=.76$) had the highest levels of internal political efficacy next to African Americans ($M=2.05, SD=.64$), then Asian American ($M=1.89, SD=.83$), Other ($M=1.80, SD=.89$), Caucasian ($M=1.77, SD=.80$), and Native American ($M=1.67, SD=2.36$).

The second ANOVA test ran investigated the dependent variable political participation. A main effect of political participation was found to be significant, $F(5,394) = 6.22, p < .01$. The results indicate that Hispanics' ($M=2.38, SD=.51$) have the highest levels of political participation followed by Caucasians ($M=2.02, SD=.55$), African Americans ($M=1.90, SD=.67$), Other ($M=1.85, SD=.58$), Asian Americans ($M=1.85, SD=.68$), and Native Americans ($M=1.45, SD=.49$).

The third ANOVA test investigated the independent variable affinity for political humor. The main effect of affinity for political humor was found to be significant $F(5, 394) = 4.19, p < .01$. The results indicate that African Americans ($M=2.69, SD=.84$) had the highest level of affinity for political humor next to Other ($M=2.49, SD=1.26$), then Native Americans ($M=2.50, SD=2.12$), Asian Americans ($M=2.47, SD=1.05$), Caucasian ($M=2.44, SD=.89$), and finally Hispanic ($M=1.86, SD=.87$).

The fourth ANOVA test investigated the independent variable exposure to liberal satire. The main effect of exposure to liberal satire was found to be significant $F(5, 394) = 4.50, p < .01$. Native Americans ($M=5.50, SD=.71$) reported having the highest exposure to liberal satire followed by Asian American ($M=3.97, SD=1.54$), African

American (M=3.94, SD=1.36), Other (M=3.55, SD=1.32), Caucasian (M=3.16, SD=1.59), and finally Hispanic (M=3.05, SD=1.65).

The fifth ANOVA test investigated the independent variable exposure to conservative satire. The main effect of exposure to conservative satire was found to be significant $F(5, 394) = 4.82, p < .01$. Native Americans (M=5.25, SD=1.06) also had the highest rate of exposure to conservative satire programs followed by Asian Americans (M=3.20, SD=1.80), African Americans (M=3.13, SD=1.62), Other (M=2.48, SD=1.82), Hispanic (M=2.40, SD=1.47), Caucasian (M=2.29, SD=1.80) .

The sixth ANOVA test investigated both of the independent variables, exposure to conservative satire and exposure to liberal satire in terms of political affiliation. For exposure to liberal satire there were statistically significant differences between Democrats and Republicans $F(5, 394)=7.01, p=.002$). Those who identify as nonpartisan also showed a significant difference with Democrats $F(5, 394)=7.01, p=.000$). For exposure to conservative satire there was also a statistically significant difference between Democrats and Republicans $F(5, 394)=7.01, p=.000$). Those who identify as nonpartisan also had significant difference with Republicans $F(5, 394)=7.01, p=.000$) and Democrats $F(5, 394)=7.01, p=.02$).

Chapter 5: Discussion

Implications of the Study

The results of this research provide a nuanced perspective on how political TV satire affects information consumption, attitudes, and behaviors. This study departed from the majority of the literature pool by defining exposure to political satire programs as two parts; liberal and conservative. Prior research focused on how liberal satire programs like *The Daily Show* affects people who consume it. Within this study exposure to liberal satire actually had a significant negative effect on affinity for political humor, and political participation. In other words, people who consume these liberal satire programs such as *The Daily Show* or *The Greg Gutfeld Show* have lower rates of affinity for political humor and are less likely to be/become politically active. Likewise, exposure to conservative satire programs yielded interesting results, which showed that as people consumed conservative satire programs they also have a higher level of affinity for political humor. However, those same audiences with a high affinity for political humor also had a significant negative relationship with political participation. Meaning that these audiences had high levels of political humor efficacy, but they were less likely to participate in the political process. The explanation for this is an intervening variable, cynicism. The negative emotion of cynicism can have debilitating effect on potential political participation (Cao, & Brewer, 2008). As audiences were exposed to political TV satire they had lower levels of political participation. Two correlations showed consistency with the literature pool were affinity for political humors effect on internal political efficacy and internal political efficacy effect on political participation.

The results also indicated that those with high levels of affinity for political humor had a significant positive relationship with high levels of internal political efficacy. This finding is consistent with the extant literature that purports the fundamental premise that satire has positive effects on internal political efficacy (Lee & Kwak, 2014; Lee, 2012; Cao & Brewer, 2008; Baumgartner & Morris 2007; Hoffman, 2012). In other words, affinity for political humor has a superiority dimension within it that would indicate that people have a need to feel superior in terms of their knowledge. This explains why those with high levels of affinity for political humor also had higher levels of internal political efficacy due to the attitudes they form from consuming political satire.

These findings contribute to our overall understanding of the effects of political satire programs. This subject area, like most in mass media studies, is continuously evolving. The findings here do not necessarily support the notion that satire is completely negative for democracy insofar as it has positive effects on bolstering people's confidence in themselves about the political process. However, it does seem that the consumption of these programs can have both positive and negative effects simultaneously. This speaks volumes to our current political climate today. Political issues have become so hyper partisan that traditional liberals do not feel connected to programs like *The Daily Show* as they used to be during the early 2000s. There are two explanations for the mixed results in this study, which are that we live in a postmodern politic, and the results of Pew's 2017 political partisanship study

Dahlgren (2001) argued that we currently live within a postmodern politic, which means our culture lacks commitment to traditional institutions such as party affiliation

and civic organizations. People are more often than not forming alliances based around morality, identity, or worldview (Dahlgren, 2001, p. 323). Now people have a constantly shifting attitude about the world, but in our contemporary world there is much discussion around identity politics characterizing people. Additionally, people have become very skeptical of all things news after the election of Trump. Trump has been vocally opposed to mainstream news, which he calls fake. In addition to calling mainstream news fake, Trump has been mired in controversy, which has led to a further divide between republicans and democrats. Furthermore, Jones (2010) indicates that citizenship is an assertion of one's own values when those values have been threatened (p. 32). This would explain why the first two hypotheses were so different in terms of statistical results. Both *The Daily Show* and *Real Time* have been mired in their own kinds of controversy over political correctness. Specifically, Trevor Noah and Bill Maher are more often than not seen as not being very far left. This would explain the disconnection between the exposure to liberal satire variable insofar as liberals feel that their values have been threatened by these two, which results in less of their consumption. In the case of this study it also explains why there was negative correlative relationship between exposure to liberal satire and political participation. There was a broad disconnect between respondents and these two shows in particular, which is consistent with Dahlgren (2001) insofar as postmodern politics mean less reliance on political affiliation and social institutions (p. 323). This scale had a positive correlation with internal political efficacy and a negative correlation with political participation. The positive relationship with internal political efficacy is consistent with the extant literature making this assumption (Lee & Kwak, 2014; Lee, 2012; Cao & Brewer, 2008; Baumgartner & Morris 2007;

Hoffman, 2012). However, the negative relationship with political participation is consistent with Cao and Brewers 2008 study. This negative relationship can also be explained through the elicitation of negative emotions, which can also damper political participation.

The Pew Research Center updates it's partisan divide study every few years and the latest one was released on October 5, 2017. They argued that "the gap between the political values of Democrats and Republicans is now larger than at any point in the Pew Research Center surveys dating back to 1994 (Smith, 2017, p. 7). In other words, 95% of republicans are more conservative than the median democrat in 2017 and 97% of democrats are more liberal than the median republican in 2017, which spares little space for overlap (Smith, 2017, p. 13). This gives further explanation as to why exposure to liberal satire did not yield the expected results, but actually caused the inverse. Furthermore, the sixth ANOVA test conducted in this study indicates that these divides can be traced to consumption of political satire as well. The fundamental difference between Republicans and Democrats was that Democrats were more likely to consume liberal satire and the Republicans are more likely to consume conservative satire.

This research creates further evidence that the Affinity for Political Humor scale is important and necessary when conducting research on the effects of political satire programs. These findings add to the literature insofar as it shows that affinity for political humor can have a strong positive correlative relationship with internal political efficacy. This is important, because it shows that by using the affinity for political humor scale you are positioned to have a strong level of internal reliability, which yields strong

correlative/predictive power. The implications of this research are vast and contribute very important empirical data to this subject area, which will need continuous research.

The goal of Baum's contention with Young (2003) was to extend this notion that political TV satire was not a primary source of news information for its audiences, but rather a supplemental "by product" that would inspire further exploration of news information. This research is also consistent with Baum's early assessment of political TV satire. It is important that we update and continuously explore these concepts in order to determine whether or not these satire programs are good for our democratic process overall. These updates should be done during different election cycles such as the midterms or the primary in order to nuance the comparisons between the two.

Limitations of the Study

There are a few limitations to this research. The newly adopted and utilized vignette scale (exposure to satire) was not as extensive as it should have been for this type of research. In future research the vignette should include more scenarios than six and include a more diverse array of political satire programming. One of the common occurrences within the study was that those who identified as very liberal and Democrat were not very receptive to *The Daily Show* or *Real Time*. This would be an indication that these programs have not become partisan enough for some viewers. In other words, the responses that were gathered indicate that liberals are watching programs that are further left than these programs. This comes back to the understanding that the diffusion of uncontrolled information has led to an increased polarization of these political subjects. Additionally, this study was not conducted during an election cycle. Some research about satire has revolved around presidential election such as Bush versus Gore

in 2000, Bush versus Kerry in 2004, and Obama versus McCain in 2008. Much of the arguments made within this research make claims about how political satire can influence how people perceive certain candidates, but this is more difficult when there is not a national level election happening. Despite these limitations, the results of this study did find some significant correlations both positive and negative, which had a more nuanced understanding of political satire and its potential effects.

Suggestions for Future Research

For future research there should be a high consideration for the utilization of the vignette scale. There are many important results that can be yielded by this scale and it has large potential for future research. The vignette can fulfill the same application of an experimental study where you display a clip and then have the respondents take the survey. Understanding political satire within both methodologies is very important. For survey design the vignette offers information on satire literacy, satire efficacy, and overall knowledge about current events. This scale can be made into a nuanced multifaceted scale that measures all of these things respectively. Additionally, affinity for political humor can be used as both independent variable and a dependent variable within different research questions or hypotheses. This research utilizes affinity for political humor as both in terms of having correlative power with potential exposure to satire and itself can have strong correlative power in terms of internal political efficacy. Future research should also not pigeonhole themselves to one form of satire whether that be Juvenalian, Horatian, liberal, or conservative. I believe that there is a significant lack of research about the effects of conservative satire programs, which today can yield just as much power as the liberal ones. With a diverse representation of satire the respondents

can have a more holistic opinion insofar as to not alienate conservative satire program consumers. This holistic research is the next step and evolution to understanding the effects of political satire programs.

Conclusions

This study sought to broaden the understanding of the effects of political TV satire in terms of how it implicates both internal political efficacy and political participation.

After running statistical analysis there were a few significant correlations between exposure to political satire and internal political efficacy and political participation.

There were also significant relationships between affinity for political humor and internal political efficacy. Ultimately, the third hypothesis yielded results consistent with the argument postulated insofar as affinity for political humor did in fact have a strong positive correlative relationship with internal political efficacy. Exposure to liberal satire programs had a negative relationship on both affinity for political humor and political participation. Exposure to conservative satire programs was positively correlated with affinity for political humor and negatively correlated to political participation, which can be explained by levels of cynicism that satire can evoke. Finally, internal political efficacy was strongly positively correlated with political participation. These results ride the line between satire having a good effect on democracy and it having a bad effect on democracy. It shows that it is good insofar as it can bolster internal political efficacy, but negative because it can hinder political participation. As the persuasive capacity of these programs expand so does their potential effects whether that be negative or positive.

There needs to be continuously updated empirical research about the effects of political TV satire and how it is impacting our democratic process. These conclusions will give

pertinent information about young demographics, conservative satire consumers, and liberal satire consumers, so that we can understand why certain populations remain politically active and others become apathetic. Finally, it is also important to challenge the monolithic understanding of political satire and the traditional notion that the only populations who tune in for these programs are young and liberal. This study shows that there is equal demand for conservative satire programs. A more holistic understanding of both liberal satire and conservative satire is necessary, because these messages will only become more powerful over time.

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APPENDIX: COMMUNICATION SURVEY

Part 1 of 9 – Thank you for participating in the survey!

The scale below is tasked with determining respondent personality type. *Presume you have a completely free choice.* Please, mark where you feel you fall on the scale from 0 being strongly agree to 4 being strongly disagree

0 – Strongly agree.

1 – Agree.

2 – Neutral.

3 – Disagree.

4 --Strongly disagree.

Please, clearly circle only the one number that best represents how you view yourself.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Worries a lot. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. Gets nervous easily. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. Remains calm in tense situations. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. Is talkative | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. Is outgoing, sociable. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6. Is reserved. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7. Is original, comes up with new ideas. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8. Values artistic, aesthetic experiences. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9. Has an active imagination. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 10. Is sometimes rude to others. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 11. Has a forgiving nature | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 12. Is considerate and kind to almost everyone. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 13. Does a thorough job. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 14. Tends to be lazy | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 15. Does things efficiently. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Part 2 of 9 – Thank you for participating in the survey!

Instructions: On the scales below, indicate your feelings about your federal government. Numbers 1 and 7 indicate a very strong feeling. Numbers 2 and 6 indicate a strong feeling. Numbers 3 and 5 indicate a fairly weak feeling. Number 4 indicates you are undecided.

Intelligent 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Unintelligent

Untrained 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Trained

Cares about me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Doesn't care about me

Honest 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Dishonest

Has my interests at heart 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Doesn't have my interests at heart.

Untrustworthy 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Trustworthy

Inexpert 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Expert

Self-centered 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Not self-centered

Concerned with me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Not concerned with me

Honorable 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Dishonorable

Informed 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Uninformed

Moral 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Immoral

Incompetent 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Competent

Unethical 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Ethical

Insensitive 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Sensitive

Bright 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Stupid

Phony 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Genuine

Not understanding 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Understanding

Part 3 of 9 – Thank you for participating in the survey!

The scale below is tasked with determining respondent exposure to traditional news. *Presume you have a completely free choice.* Please mark your level of your hard news exposure (0-4) as explained below:

- 0 – Very likely
- 1 – Likely
- 2 – Not at all.
- 3 – Not likely
- 4 – Very unlikely

Please, clearly circle only the one number that best represents how you view yourself.

| | | | | | |
|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1. I use newspapers articles to stay informed about politics | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. I watch local television outlets for political information | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. I watch national TV news outlets for political information | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. I get most of my political news from talk radio shows | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. I get most of my news from independent people online | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6. I get most of my news from online sources. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7. I get most of my news from <i>CNN</i> | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8. I get most of my news from <i>Fox</i> | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9. I get most of my news from <i>MSNBC</i> . | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 10. I get most of my news from <i>Reuters</i> | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Part 4 of 9 – You are 40% complete with the survey!

Below are items that relate to the respondents' political ideology. Work quickly and record your first reaction to each item. ***There are no right or wrong answers.*** Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each item using the following five-point scale:

- 0 – Strongly agree.
- 1 – Agree.
- 2 – Neutral.
- 3 – Disagree.
- 4 --Strongly disagree.

- ____ 1. Government is almost always wasteful and inefficient.
- ____ 2. Government regulation of business is necessary to protect the public interests.
- ____ 3. Poor people today have it easy because they can get government benefits without doing anything in return.
- ____ 4. The government should do more to help needy Americans.
- ____ 5. Immigrants today are a burden on our country because they take our jobs, housing, and healthcare.
- ____ 6. Good diplomacy is the best way to ensure peace in the world.
- ____ 7. Most corporations make a fair and reasonable amount of profit.
- ____ 8. Stricter environmental laws and regulations are worth the cost.
- ____ 9. Homosexuality should be discouraged by society.

Part 5 of 9 – Thank you for participating in the survey!

Below is to measure how confident people feel about engaging in politics (internal political efficacy). **Presume you have a completely free choice.** Please mark your preferred level of communication (0-4) as explained below:

- 0 – Strongly agree.
- 1 – Agree.
- 2 – Neutral.
- 3 – Disagree.
- 4 --Strongly disagree.

- ___ 1. I consider myself to be well qualified to participate in politics .
- ___ 2. I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country
- ___ 3. I feel that I could do as good a job in public office as most other people.
- ___ 4. I think that I am better informed about politics and government than most people.
- ___ 5. Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.
- ___ 6. People like me don't have any say about what the government does.
- ___ 7. I don't think public officials care much what people like me think.

Part 6 of 9 – Thank you for participating in the survey!

Below are statements that seek to understand respondents political participation. *Presume you have a completely free choice.* Please mark your preferred level of communication (1-3) as explained below:

- 1 – Yes, within the last year.
- 2 – Yes, not within the last year.
- 3 – Never.

- ___ 1. Have you ever contacted a public official?
- ___ 2. Have you ever voted in an election of a public official?
- ___ 3. Have you ever attended a campaign event?
- ___ 4. Have you ever joined an organization in support of a cause?
- ___ 5. Have you ever contributed money to a candidate running for public office?
- ___ 6. Have you ever held an online discussion about politics?
- ___ 7. Have you submitted messages to a public official online?
- ___ 8. Have you ever voiced your political opinions on social media?
- ___ 9. Have you ever started an online political event through social media?
- ___ 10. Have you had discussions with friends about politics either in person or through social media?

Part 7 of 9 – You are 60% complete with the survey!

Below are items that relate to the respondents' affinity for political humor. Work quickly and record your first reaction to each item. ***There are no right or wrong answers.*** Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each item using the following five-point scale:

- 0 – Strongly agree.
- 1 – Agree.
- 2 – Neutral.
- 3 – Disagree.
- 4 --Strongly disagree.

___ 1. I appreciate political humor because it can reveal the weaknesses of our political leaders and institutions

___ 2. I appreciate political humor because it can make me feel more knowledgeable about politics.

___ 3. I appreciate political humor because it can aid me in reinforcing my political beliefs.

___ 4. I appreciate political humor when it makes me aware that our political system is dysfunctional.

___ 5. I appreciate political humor because it can help me express my political opinions.

___ 6. I appreciate political humor because it can reduce the anxiety I feel towards politics.

___ 7. I appreciate political humor when it helps me make better sense of why our political system is dysfunctional.

___ 8. I appreciate political humor because it can help me better cope with awkward situations.

___ 9. I appreciate political humor because it can help me effectively criticize politics and politicians.

___ 10. I appreciate political humor because it allows me to be friendly with people who hold political views that are different from my own.

___ 11. I appreciate political humor because it allows me to form stronger bonds with people who hold similar political views as my own.

Part 8 of 9 – You are 80% done with the survey!

Below are a series of online intercultural encounters. ***There are no right or wrong answers.*** Please record your first impression by indicating the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statements that follow these stories. Thank you for your time in completing the survey!

1. You are scrolling through Facebook and you see a short one minute video of *The Daily Show* with Trevor Noah, which features a story called that talks about Trump’s scandalous ties to Russia. You are excited to see the new clip and anticipate it to be funny and informative

Please, select a choice that would reflect what you would do in this scenario.

Very Strongly Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Very Strongly Agree
0 1 2 3 4 5 6

2. You are watching *Real Time* with Bill Maher. He and a panel of mostly liberal commentators are saying jokes about the republican government shutdown. You disagree and change the channel.

Please, select a choice that would reflect what you would do in this scenario.

Very Strongly Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Very Strongly Agree
0 1 2 3 4 5 6

3. You hear from one of your friends that *Last Week Tonight* with John Oliver on *HBO* is very funny, so you decide to go check it out. The story is about North Korea's nuclear capabilities striking New York and how it is unrealistic. You agree and continue to watch.

Please, select a choice that would reflect what you would do in this scenario.

Very Strongly Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Very Strongly Agree
0 1 2 3 4 5 6

4. You are on Facebook and see a clip from Alex Jones *Info Wars*. This clip has to do with ANTIFA’s violent actions against people who identify as conservative or “alt right.” Jones proceeds to make claims likening ANTIFA to the Taliban. You find this statement incorrect and stop watching the clip.

Please, select a choice that would reflect what you would do in this scenario.

Very Strongly Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Very Strongly Agree
0 1 2 3 4 5 6

5. One of your friends tweets a link to Rush Limbaugh’s most recent video post cast. In this clip, Limbaugh starts to make claims that the truth is the most funny thing in terms of Trump’s success economically by adding more jobs overall. You find this statement interesting and continue to watch the entire pod cast.

Please, select a choice that would reflect what you would do in this scenario.

Very Strongly Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Very Strongly Agree
0 1 2 3 4 5 6

6. You are watching *Fox* news late in the evening. The Greg Gutfeld Show comes on and opens with a story about Trump's intentions to meet with Kim Jung Un in North Korea. The host plays various clips from other news sources and proceeds to make jokes about the liberal media contradicting themselves in terms of Trump's policies being effected to denuclearize North Korea. You find this very interesting and continue watching until the end.

Please, select a choice that would reflect what you would do in this scenario.

Very Strongly Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Very Strongly Agree
0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Final Section – Please fill out the following information and you are complete with this survey!

Below is a series of questions regarding demographic information. ***The following information is critical to our study; please answer the questions as fully as possible.***

1. I am a (*check only one*): 1. Male _____ 2. Female _____ 3. I don't recognize as either _____

2. My year in school (Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior): _____

3. My completed education (Diploma/GED, Associates, Bachelors, Masters, Doctoral): _____

4. What is your age? _____ (Years)

5. I would describe myself as (*check only one*):

_____ African American

_____ Hispanic

_____ Caucasian/Non-Hispanic

_____ Native American

_____ Asian American

_____ Other

6. I use the following types of social media (check all that apply):

Facebook _____

MySpace _____

Instagram _____

Twitter _____

Flickr _____

Pinterest _____

Google Plus _____

Snapchat _____

Other (Please specify): _____

7. Which of the above forms of social media do you use the most? _____

8. How you tend to politically label yourself:

___ Very Conservative

___ Republican

___ Nonpartisan

___ Democrat

___ Very Liberal

___ Other (please identify): _____